

Thy Word Is Truth

LESSON ONE – INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL

1) Ezekiel: the Man.

a) His family.

i) He was a priest, the son of Buzi. His father was (probably) of the line of Zadok (1;3; 40:46; 44:15), which had taken the place of the house of Abiathar (1 Kings 2:26-27, 35).

ii) He was married. His wife died at the time of Jerusalem's fall. (24:16-18.)

b) His history and character.

i) He may have had some wealth and was a man of influence because the elders of the exiles met in his home and consulted him. (3:24; 8:1; 14:1; 20:1.)

ii) He was taken captive in 597 BC when the armies of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, captured Jerusalem after a brief siege.

(1) He was exiled to Babylonia by Nebuchadnezzar, along with King Jehoiachin and the upper classes of Jerusalem (10,000 captives went into exile. 2 Ki. 24:14).

(2) These 10,000 were regarded as the “good figs”; Zedekiah, King of Judah, his princes, the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt are “bad figs” (Jeremiah 24; 29).

iii) Nothing is known of his life except what is revealed in his book. Unlike other prophets, there is no Jewish tradition to tell us how or when he died.

iv) In response to some critics accusations that Ezekiel is hard of heart and/or

mentally defective in various ways, it may be observed:

(1) Abnormality of some sort is the rule and not the exception with Old Testament prophets. Beyond that, however, one dare not go. It ill becomes critics, most without any professional training to do so, to diagnose mental illness centuries after Ezekiel lived and wrote.

(2) His sensitivity can be judged from the brief description of his feelings for his wife (24:15-18), by his earnest plea that God will spare His people and not destroy them completely (9:8; 11:13), and by the tenderness of his description of God as the Shepherd of His sheep (34:11-16).

v) One cannot study Ezekiel's prophecy without realizing that he possessed the priest's sense of the holiness of God, the prophet's sense of the message that had been entrusted to him, and the preacher's sense of responsibility for his people.

2) Ezekiel: the Ministry.

a) Ezekiel was 30 years old when God called him to be a prophet (1:1).

i) His home was Tel-abib, the primary location of the exiles, on the river Chebar, generally identified with the Grand Canal southeast of Babylon.

ii) His mission was to be God's spokesman and watchman to the exiles. (chs. 2, 3.)

iii) His ministry lasted from the 5th year of Jehoiachin's exile (592 B.C.) to the 27th year (570 B.C.). (1:2; 29:17.)

b) Ezekiel had a tough message, made the more difficult because he loved his people.

i) Before the fall of Jerusalem in 586, he was primarily a preacher of repentance and judgment (chs. 1-24).

- ii) He delivered constant warning to a people who rebelled against God and who succumbed to a pagan environment. (2:3ff; 3:4-11; 13; 14:1ff; 18:2, 25; 20:1ff.)
- iii) It is difficult to oppose your enemies; it is more difficult to oppose your friends.

3) Ezekiel: the Message.

- a) The book of Ezekiel is to many a difficult book, hard to understand.
 - i) For most it is almost a closed book – their knowledge of it extends little further than its mysterious vision of God's chariot-throne, with its wheels within wheels, and the vision of the valley of dry bones.
 - ii) Otherwise his book is as forbidding in its size as the prophet himself is in the complexity of his make-up.
 - iii) From antiquity ordinary readers have found its language, images, and theology puzzling; scholars have been embarrassed by the contents of the book and by their inability to produce commentary on it.
 - iv) Jerome's (ca. A.D. 340-420) commentaries are filled with apologies for his inability to clarify obscure passages.
 - v) In Jewish tradition the interpretation of Ezekiel has been particularly difficult because they believe that some of the legal material in chaps. 40-48 contradicts the laws of the Torah.
- (1) The Babylonian Talmud reports that this fact caused some rabbis to advocate withdrawing the book from circulation, a fate that was avoided only through the extraordinary efforts of Hananiah son of Hezekiah, who successfully reconciled the contradictions.
- (2) Equally troublesome to the rabbis was the vision of God's glory described in

Ezekiel 1, a passage that they feared might lead to dangerous mystical speculations or even destroy the interpreter who probed too deeply into its mysteries.

(3) According to the Talmud, Hananiah son of Hezekiah was again able to persuade his colleagues not to withdraw Ezekiel, although Jerome reports that some rabbis prohibited the reading of the beginning and end of the book by anyone under the age of thirty.

vi) Despite the difficulties associated with the book and the occasional efforts to withdraw it from circulation, there is no indication that early Jewish or Christian interpreters ever questioned the canonicity or divine inspiration of the book.

vii) While the difficulties of the book cannot be denied, many of them can be minimized by keeping in mind the historical, sociological, and religious settings in which the book was produced and by cultivating sensitivity to the book's structure and peculiar literary style.

b) In its structure, however, if not in its thought and language, the book of Ezekiel has a basic simplicity, and its orderly framework makes it easy to analyze.

i) Structure of Ezekiel.

(1) In the opening vision, Ezekiel sees the majesty of God on the plains of Babylon and receives his call to be a prophet to the house of Israel (1 – 3).

(2) This is followed by a long series of messages, some enacted symbolically but most expressed in spoken form, foretelling and justifying God's intention to punish the holy city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants with destruction and death (4 – 24).

(3) Then, at the half-way mark in the book, when the fall of Jerusalem is represented as having actually taken place (though the news has still not reached

the exiles), attention is diverted to the nations that surround Israel and God's judgment on them is pronounced in a series of oracles (25 – 32).

(4) By this time Ezekiel's audience is prepared for the news of Jerusalem's destruction (33:31).

(5) At this point a new message falls from Ezekiel's lips – with a renewed commission and a promise that God is about to restore His people to their own land under godly leadership by a kind of national resurrection (33 – 37), Ezekiel describes in apocalyptic language the final triumph of the people of God over the invading hordes from the north (38, 39).

(6) The book concludes as it began with an intricate vision, not this time of the Lord's chariot-throne moving over the empty wastes of Babylon, but of the new Jerusalem with its temple court and inner sanctuary where God would dwell among His people for ever (40 – 48).

ii) Another commentator suggests that the book divides itself into four sections:

(1) Jerusalem must fall. Chs. 1-24.

(2) Foreign nations must fall. Chs. 25-32.

(3) A bridge between chs. 1-24 and chs. 34-48. Ch. 33.

(4) Jerusalem (and its people) must be comforted. Chs. 34-48.

iii) Three major structural devices are used to give coherent shape to the book of Ezekiel.

(1) It makes extensive use of dates to mark important events and oracles, and these dates indicate that the book is organized chronologically.

(2) The chronological ordering of material is reinforced by the arrangement of oracles and visions according to content.

(a) Between the first and last sections of the book (Jerusalem perishes and Jerusalem's promises) Ezekiel inserts a pronouncement of doom against foreign nations.

(b) While these devices give the major shape to the book, they are not followed slavishly and are not without exception.

(3) Finally, a measure of structure is achieved in the book by the use of repetitive images and words.

(a) This device is used on many levels, but the most obvious example is the verbatim repetition of part of the prophet's call narrative (3:16-21; 33:1-9), the second occurrence of which marks a crucial shift in the prophet's message.

(b) The various literary devices reinforce each other so that the reader's overall impression is one of unity.

iv) It is not surprising, therefore that most older commentators regarded Ezekiel as being free from the literary fragmentation that was imposed by critics upon Isaiah, Jeremiah, and some of the minor prophets.

v) Given the overall impression of the unity of the book, it is not surprising that since antiquity interpreters have treated the book as the work of a single author.

(1) Even with the rise of modern critical scholarship in the middle of the nineteenth century, the book managed to escape scholarly dissection.

(2) When the challenge finally came, it came not on literary grounds, but on religious grounds related to the concept that prophets must be ecstatic, and, while ecstatic, must be poetic.

(3) Prose such as Ezekiel's could not qualify and must therefore be questioned.

(4) The only comment that I will make on this concept is that those who make it

cannot agree among themselves on the portions that belong to Ezekiel and those that do not.

vi) There are six main reasons for ascribing the book to a single author, the prophet Ezekiel.

(1) The book has a balanced structure as outlined above – a logical arrangement that extends from beginning to end. There are no breaks in its continuity except where it is done deliberately, as in the as of the oracles against the nations (25 – 32).

(2) The message of the book has an inner consistency that fits in with the logical arrangement. The center point is the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, announced in 24:21ff and reported in 33:21. From chapter 1 to 24 Ezekiel's message is destructive and denunciatory: he is a watchman set to warn the people that this is the inevitable consequence of the nation's sins. But from chapter 33 to 48, while he still regards himself as a watchman with a message of individual retribution and responsibility, his tone is encouraging and restorative. Before 587 BC his theme was that the deportation of 597 BC, in which he himself was one of the victims, was certainly not the ends of God's punishment upon His people. Worse was to come and His people must be prepared to face it. But after it had come, and the worst had happened, God would act to rebuild and restore his chastened Israel.

(3) The book has a remarkable uniformity of style and language.

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

(5) With rare exception (See 1:1, 2) the book is written autobiographically.

(6) The picture of Ezekiel's character and personality is consistent through the

entire book. There is the same earnestness, the same eccentricity, the same priestly love of symbolism, the same fastidious concern with detail, the same sense of the majesty and transcendence of God.

c) Religious issues addressed by Ezekiel.

i) The issues arose following the first deportation (of which Ezekiel was a part) when Israel's religious leadership was split between Jerusalem and Babylon.

(1) Both groups naturally attempted to provide theological interpretations of the events that had just occurred, but these interpretations did not always agree.

(2) The result was a growing religious controversy that reached crisis proportions after the final destruction of the city and the Temple.

ii) Several important issues were involved.

(1) Debates over the meaning of the first deportation.

(a) There had been prior warnings that the sins of Judah and its kings would eventually be punished by God. (See, for example, 2 Kings 21:8-9, 14-15; 23:26-27, 32, 37; 24:1-9; Jer. 14:1-15:4; 36.)

(b) Therefore, when the first deportation occurred, there was general agreement, even among the exiles, that the prophecies of judgment had come true.

(c) However, there was disagreement about the completeness of the judgment – did God's exile of Jehoiachin and his officials represent a final word of divine judgment, or were the people who remained in Jerusalem still in danger of additional punishment if they did not change their ways?

(2) Debates about the length of the Exile and the possibility of return to the land.

(a) This debate arose after the first deportation and intensified after the second one.

(b) Some interpreted Jeremiah and 2nd Kings to teach that the deportations represented God's complete and final rejection of Israel (see 2 Kings 21:10-15; 24:3; Jer. 14:1-15:14; 17:1-4).

(c) However, Jeremiah's ultimate word on the subject was to prophesy a return after a long but limited exile.

(d) Other prophets, however, disagreed and soon after the first deportation began to speak of a rapid return of the exiles and a restoration of normal worship in the Temple. (Jer. 27-32.)

(3) Debates about the status of the exiles in Babylon after the first deportation.

(a) Did the fact that they had been removed from God's chosen city mean that they had been rejected and were no longer part of the true Israel?

(b) This issue was obviously of great concern to the exiles, who were anxious to clarify their religious status (Ezek. 11:14-21).

(c) Furthermore, the theological status of those in exile had a direct bearing upon their religious life in Babylon.

(i) Did the fact that the exiles were separated from the land of Israel mean that they could no longer worship God?

(ii) If they could worship, then what form should that worship take?

(4) Debates among prophets reflecting differing points of view.

(a) These debates are seen most clearly in the book of Jeremiah where Jeremiah is often portrayed in conflict with other prophets.

(b) While Jeremiah warned of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians,, others were confidently predicting that the city would be spared

(Jer. 6:14-15; 14:13-14; 23:13-40).

(c) While Jeremiah was speaking of a long exile, the prophet Hananiah was telling Jerusalemites that the Exile was almost over (Jer. 27-28).

(d) While Jeremiah was advocating surrender to the Babylonians, exiled Judean prophets in Babylon were counseling revolt (Jer. 29:15-32).

(e) While it is easy in hindsight to determine which prophets spoke truthfully and those who did not, those who lived in the time of the prophets did not have that benefit.

(i) The hearers seemed to become suspicious of all of the prophets, and even Jeremiah and Ezekiel had to defend their prophetic authority.

(ii) The words of Ezekiel were particularly open to question because he prophesied in Babylon, and many Israelites doubted that true prophecy could exist outside of the land of Israel.

(5) Debates about the relationship of God to Jerusalem.

(a) This debate was provoked by the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem.

(b) A fundamental tenet of Judaism was the belief that God had elected David and his descendants to be the eternal rulers of Israel (2 Sam. 7), and the city of Jerusalem as the divine dwelling place forever.

(c) Once Solomon built the Temple God took up residence there and was enthroned above the Cherubim in the Holy of Holies.

(d) Because of God's eternal presence in the Temple, both the city and the Temple were inviolable.

(e) When the city fell, serious questions were raised.

(i) Did the destruction of the city and the Temple mean that God had broken the divine promise and rejected Jerusalem and David's line?

(ii) Even worse, had God lacked the power to defend the city against the Babylonians?

iii) Despite the complexity of the book of Ezekiel, his message is relatively simple and can be easily summarized.

(1) The city of Jerusalem and the people of Judah would inevitably be punished because of their sins, which were both religious and social.

(2) Not only was the current generation sinful and deserving of punishment, but the entire history of Israel had been a history of disobedience and rebellion against God (ch. 20).

(3) Repentance might still save individuals who lead a righteous life (ch. 18), but the righteous few, if they existed at all, could not save the rest of the nation.

(4) This message applied both to the deportees of 597 BC and to the people who remained in the land.

(5) Yet in spite of this unequivocal message of doom, Ezekiel also prophesied that after the city had been destroyed and the people punished, God would bring the exiles back to the land, and the Temple would be restored according to a divine plan (chs. 40-48).

(6) God will bring the people back in order not to profane the divine name (36:16-32).

iv) In the face of conflicting prophetic words Ezekiel lays claim to absolute prophetic authority.

(1) His word is in fact the direct word of God, which is delivered to his audience without human interference or interpretation.

(2) His prophecies are therefore a safe guide for surviving the Exile.

(3) When the exiles heard an oracle from Ezekiel, they truly knew that a prophet was among them (33:33).

d) In addressing these issues, Ezekiel presents five recurrent themes (others could be discussed [\[1\]](#) but these highlights around which his message is built).

i) The otherness of God.

(1) Perhaps because of his priestly upbringing, the aspect of God's nature that Ezekiel felt most deeply was His holiness.

(2) The root meaning of holiness is "to be separate," and thus to be cut off from ordinary relationships and use for the sake of serving a peculiar function, one belonging to God, the Holy One.

(3) The God of Israel did not possess holiness; He was holiness. Everything connected with Him derived holiness from Him; a holy place where He was worshipped, holy priests who acted as His ministers, holy garments that they wore, and holy equipment that they used. His name was holy and His people were holy. The place where He made His dwelling was His holy mountain.

(4) The vision of Jehovah riding upon His chariot-throne typified this sense of otherness and majesty. This was the setting for his commission to prophesy and from it he carried with him through his entire ministry a sense of awe and holy fear. The false prophet can chatter glibly about God because he has never met Him. The man of God comes out from His presence indelibly marked with the glory of his Lord.

(5) It must have been of great comfort to Ezekiel and the exiles to know that this God who dwelt on Mount Zion could appear in Babylon amidst all the sordidness of heathenism and idolatry. This must have been an assurance that God cared for them even in the punishment of their exile.

ii) The sinfulness of Israel.

(1) Ezekiel was faced with conflicting reactions to the nation's recent disasters.

(a) Some felt that the punishment due to them for their disobedience had been exhausted by the events of 597 BC and there remained nothing to do but wait for repatriation.

(b) Others took the fatalistic line and regarded themselves as the unfortunate heirs to their forefathers' sins for which an unjust God was now punishing them.

(c) Most felt a measure of security in that, as they were Jehovah's own people, He could never punish them too drastically without losing face in the eyes of the heathen.

(d) A few felt that Jehovah had lost face and had been shown to be impotent before the gods of Babylon.

(2) The prophet's treatment of these views demonstrates his ability and willingness to meet his hearers on their own ground and to answer the objections that they raised. But for the most part his aim is to convince the people of their utter unworthiness of any consideration from God, in order to shame them into true repentance.

(3) He does this in two ways – general and specific.

(a) In the first instance he uses allegory to describe historically the story of Israel's persistent unfaithfulness to the gracious covenant of God.

(i) Three passages deal with this (16:1-63; 20:1-31; and 23:1-49), each of which schematizes the past in a slightly different way.

1. 16:1-63, the parable of the foundling, begins with Israel (or Jerusalem), as an unlovely outcast child ("weltering in your blood"), but as she grew to

maidenhood and reached the age of love the Lord entered into a covenant with her, purified and beautified her, and lavished queenly riches and honors upon her. In return, Israel, trusting in her beauty, played the harlot with foreigners and despised her divine benefactor.

2. 20:1-31 sees Israel's history as a cycle of disobedient acts each followed by a gracious decision of God not to punish but to withhold His hand. It is remarkable for the repeated phrase, “

I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they dwelt” (20:9, 14, 22). God's action in revealing Himself to Israel, making a covenant with them, and even chastening them, was initially for their benefit (“that they might know that I am the Lord” (20:12, 20, 26), but ultimately His dealings with Israel looked beyond the nation's own interests to the concern that God's name should be known and respected the whole world over. This was a doctrine that put Israel's election pride firmly in its place.

3. 23:1-49 contains the allegory of the two sisters that discounts even the possibility of Israel's original innocence. Oholah and Oholibah played the harlot in Egypt in their youth. They could hardly be described as fallen women because they had never been anywhere but in the gutter. Their own characteristic was an insatiable appetite for fornication, and their punishment would be correspondingly complete.

(b) More specifically, Ezekiel cites in ch. 8 the wrongdoings that he knew to be going on in the temple – idolatry, animal worship, nature worship, and sun worship.

(i) Israel's sins constituted abundant justification for God's decision to punish the people of Jerusalem with a slaughter reminiscent of the Passover plague (9:5ff) and to rain destruction upon the city as in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah (10:2).

(ii) Both here and in the three surveys of the past, the sins of Israel have in the

main been religious sins. – they have been idolatrous, made alliances and played the harlot with foreign powers, and have failed to fulfill their covenant responsibilities (5:6ff).

(iii) In a word, they have profaned God's holy name (20:9; 36:20-23), and since, for Ezekiel God was holiness, this was the most heinous sin. The social sins that Amos had condemned two centuries before received scarcely a mention.

iii) The fact of judgment.

(1) This was not a new message for Old Testament prophets.

(2) Messages of judgment had been the regular proclamation of prophets sent by God to Israel and Judah.

(3) If Ezekiel's message is different, it is that he proclaimed not a threatened judgment, but an imminent judgment.

(4) God's message to and through Ezekiel was "I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it" (17:24; 22:14; 24:14; 36:36; 37:14).

(5) Judgment could no longer be shrugged off with the excuse that though the prophets had threatened it, nothing had happened so far (12:22), or that it all referred to the distant future (12:27).

(6) God's word now was that "The word which I speak will be performed" (12:28).

iv) Individual responsibility.

(a) The possibility of the salvation of a remnant is frequently held out, even in the predictions of destruction (*e.g.*, 5:3, 10; 6:8; 9:4), and Ezekiel's intention in acting as a watchman is that the wicked man may turn and save his life (3:18).

(i) This is more explicitly stated in 18:1-29, where in a context of temptation to

fatalism (18:2ff) Ezekiel is at pains to say that God treats every man as an individual.

(ii) What happens to him is not dependent purely on heredity (his father's sins), nor yet on environment (the nation's sins), but is conditioned by personal choice.

(iii) The choice that matters is commitment to God.

(b) Basic to the analysis of the whole issue is that the Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (18:23, 32); He wants him to turn and live.

(i) Destruction was coming, but men could repent and be saved.

(ii) Ezekiel the watchman was also Ezekiel the evangelist.

v) The promise of restoration.

(a) Although repentance was for the individual, salvation is to be enjoyed by him as a member of a restored community.

(i) The new Israel is to be brought to life miraculously by the working of God's Spirit, who alone can make dry bones live (37:5).

(ii) It will be a community without the old divisions of Israel and Judah to tear it apart (37:17).

(iii) It will enjoy blessings of an everlasting covenant, and the covenant watchword, "they shall be my people and I will be their God," will be written into its constitution (11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23, 27).

(iv) At its head will be "my servant David," the Messiah King (37:24ff).

(v) He will rule justly and conscientiously, caring for the weak and crippled among the flock (34:23).

(vi) The land will prosper and flourish, and from out of the sanctuary in the new Jerusalem will flow the symbolical river of life to water the waste places of the earth (47:1-12).

(b) All this, however is but the external aspect of the restoration that God promises to His righteous remnant; internally, He holds out the offer of a new heart and a new spirit for the individual, so that he may be made clean from the defilement of his sins and the uncleanness of the exile and may be motivated from within to live after God's commandments (36:24-28).

(c) In those words Ezekiel gives added definition to Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34).

(d) The message is clear: man's greatest stumbling block is in himself and nothing can resolve this problem except the gracious action of God in renewal and spiritual regeneration.

OUTLINE OF EZEKIEL

I . Ezekiel's vision and commission : chapters 1-3

II. Jerusalem must fall : chapters 4-24

1 . The three-fold sign (chapter 4)

A. The city on the tile

B. The 430 days

C. The unclean food

2. The haircut and its significance (chapter 5)

3 . Idolatry denounced and punishment promised (chapters 6-7)

4. The necessity and nature of the destruction of Jerusalem and its people (chapters 8-11)

5. Two signs and a warning (chapter 12)

A. The exodus

B. The trembling drinker

C. The swift judgment

6. False prophets denounced (chapter 13)

A. The men

B. The women

7. Inner idolatry (chapter 14)

8. The righteous nature of God's judgment (chapter 14)

9. The parable of the useless vine (chapter 15)

10. A resume of shameful history (chapter 16)

A. Undeserved kindness

B. Inexcusable infidelity

C. Gracious reconciliation

11 . The parable of the eagles (chapter 17)

A. The Babylonian eagle

B. The Egyptian eagle

C. The tender twig

12. Sour grapes-God and the individual (chapter 18)

13 . The parables of the lions and rods (chapter 19)

A. The lions

B. The rods

14. An indictment on a shameful record (chapter 20)

15. The impartial sword of God (chapter 21)

16. Jerusalem the Corrupt (chapter 22)

17. The parable of Oholah and Oholibah (chapter 23)

18. The sign of the caldron (chapter 24)

19. The sign of Ezekiel's refusal to mourn (chapter 24)

III. Foreign nations must fall: chapters 25-32

1. Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia: chapter 25

2. Tyre : chapters 26-28

3. Sidon : chapter 28

4. Egypt: chapters 29-32

IV. The Watchman and the smitten city: chapter 33

1 . The watchman defended

2. The watchman's function

3. The fall of Jerusalem

4. The word of Ishmael and his followers

5. The revised estimate of the prophet

V. Jerusalem must be Comforted : chapters 34-38

1 . The government of the future

2. The land of the future

3 . The nation of the future

4. The security of the future

5 . The temple and worship of the future

[1] One commentator lists five major themes in the book of Ezekiel:

1. God's holiness – it will not permit him to dwell in a temple that had become the center of iniquity. (see 8:6.)
2. God's transcendent power – he is most often spoken of as “Jehovah,” but very often as “Lord Jehovah.”
3. God's concern for the individual – demonstrated in such passages as 9:4-6, 8; ch. 18; 20:38; 22:30.
4. God's sovereignty – some 70 times we will hear “they shall know that I am Jehovah.” The proof of his sovereignty is shown both in mercy and in judgment (see, for example, 20:33, 38; 34:29-30).
5. God's almightiness as opposed to man's humanness – seen in the often-repeated expression “son of man” as it is used of the prophet (some 90 occurrences).

Thy Word Is Truth

Lesson 2

Historical Background of Ezekiel

1. Hezekiah

A. King Hezekiah died in 687 BC. Between his death and the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon in 587 BC there was precisely one century. “Seldom has a nation experienced so many dramatically sudden reversals of fortune in so relatively short a time.”

B. What had happened prior to 687 BC was that Shalmaneser (shal"-muh-nee'zer) IV, king of Assyria, had invaded Israel in 722 BC when King Hoshea had refused to pay him tribute. The ten Northern tribes were taken into captivity by Assyria.

C. The Southern kingdom was spared through the influence of righteous men like Isaiah.

D. In fact, Judah experienced a spiritual revival under King Hezekiah, who was influenced both by what had happened to Israel and by the preaching of Isaiah.

E. All was not well, however. A strong party in Jerusalem advocated an alliance with Egypt against Assyria.

F. Isaiah rejected this plan just as he had rejected Ahaz's plan to make an alliance with Assyria. Isaiah's advice was to trust in the Lord.

G. Meanwhile, the Assyrians had a mutiny and Shalmaneser was gone. In his place came Sargon, translated “legitimate king” --- which of course means he was just the opposite!

H. When Sargon defeated Egypt at the Battle of Raphia, Isaiah’s advice to Judah was shown to have been correct.

I. When Hezekiah died in 686, those who sought closer ties with Assyria and its gods came into power.

2. Manasseh

A. Manasseh was Hezekiah’s son and became king in 686 when Hezekiah died.

B. For nearly 60 years he and his son Amon turned the people toward idolatry and wickedness.

C. The people repudiated the law of God and forgot that it even existed.

D. Children were sacrificed to Moloch.

1. (2 Kings 21:16) “Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another.”

2. Indeed, Manasseh sacrificed his own son to Moloch in the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem.

3. (2 Kings 21:6) Also he made his son pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger.

- E.** Hezekiah had resisted the Assyrians. Manasseh abandoned that resistance and declared himself a loyal vassal of Assyria.
- F.** 2 Chronicles 33:10-13 tells us that at one point the Assyrians took Manasseh captive to Babylon with hooks and bronze fetters.
- G.** Manasseh prayed to God, was released, and returned a changed man.
- H.** He tried to get rid of the idols, but the damage had already been done.
 - 1.** As one commentator noted, Manasseh was able to get rid of the idols everywhere except in the heart of his own son, Amon.

3. Amon

- A.** Amon was Manasseh's son and Hezekiah's grandson.
- B.** His two year reign brought back of all Manasseh's early policies.
- C.** Amon ignored his father's repentance and brought back all of the idols and all of the evil.
- D.** Amon was assassinated by palace conspirators for reasons unknown, leaving the throne to 8 year old Josiah.

4. Josiah

- A.** Josiah was the son of Amon and the King of Judah from 640 to 609 BC.
- B.** He was 8 when his father was killed and he became king in his place.
- C.** Ezekiel grew up during the reforms of Josiah.
- D.** A copy of the Law was discovered by Hilkiah during Josiah's renovations of the temple.
- E.** Josiah read it and was determined to obey it fully.
- F.** He even dug up the bones of the idolatrous priests and burned them on their altars.
- G.** The people however were corrupt and did not genuinely repent.
 - 1. (Jeremiah 3:10) "And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense," says the Lord.
- H.** The Mosaic Law that they had just rediscovered said that the people would be taken captive and dispersed if they disobeyed the covenant.
 - 1. Read, for example, Leviticus 26.

5. Assyria

- A.** Assyria was the dominant power in the Near East for 250 years.

- B.** While Josiah reigned, however, Assyria was too busy with its own problems to pay any attention to him.
- C.** A new power struggle was beginning around this time.
- D.** When the Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal (ah''shoor-bah'nee-pal), died in 626 BC, the empire erupted into chaos.
- E.** The Neo-Babylonian empire under Nabopolassar came into existence that same year.
- F.** Jeremiah began his ministry a year earlier.

6. Scythians

- A.** The Scythians traveled in hordes, leaving desolation in their wake.
- B.** They appeared in the Near East in the 7th century from a region north of the Black Sea.

7. Medes and Persians

- A.** The Medes migrated from what is now southern Russia about 1000 BC.
- B.** They settled in the Iranian plateau.
- C.** The Persians also came from that area, but settled further south.

8. Egypt

- A.** Pharaoh Necho reigned from 609 to 594 BC.

B. Long a great power, Egypt was now in decline.

9. Babylon

A. Nabopolasser was king from 626 to 605 BC.

B. (His son, Nebuchadnezzar, reigned from 605 until 562 BC.)

C. Nabopolasser defeated Assyria in battle in 612 BC. It was at this time that Nineveh (the Assyrian capital) fell to a coalition of nations including the Medes and the Babylonians.

1. Read Nahum 3:1ff (“Woe to the bloody city!”).

2. Two centuries later a Greek army passing that way had to ask what that large mound of earth was. It was all that was left of Ninevah.

D. The remnant of the Assyrian army retreated to Haran.

10. The Battle of Megiddo

A. Necho of Egypt marched to the aid of Assyria in 609 BC.

1. Why? Egypt did not like the Assyrians, but it liked the growing Babylonian power even less.

B. Josiah tried to stop Necho at Megiddo and was killed in battle.

C. Necho continued on to Haran to help the Assyrians, but the delay caused by Josiah proved fatal to Necho’s plans.

D. Babylon defeated them both at the Battle of Megiddo.

1. From the most ancient times to the time of Napoleon, Megiddo was one of the great battle-grounds of the world.
2. God chose this same famous battlefield to depict the complete judgment and utter destruction of Rome in the book of Revelation, where it is called Armageddon --- the Mount or City of Megiddo.

11. Jehoahaz

- A. Jehoahaz was Josiah's second son and became King of Judah in 609 BC.
- B. The party in Judah that wanted political independence was able to pass by Jehoiakim and instead put his younger brother Jehoahaz on the throne.
- C. After Necho was defeated by Babylon, he returned to Egypt and began to consolidate his power in Palestine and Syria.
- D. He invited Jehoahaz to his headquarters at Riblah, deposed him, and carried him off to Egypt, where he died after having been king for only three months.
- E. In his place, Necho placed Jehoiakim as a vassal king in Judah.

12. Jehoiakim

- A. Jehoiakim was Josiah's eldest son and was King of Judah from 609 BC until 597 BC.
- B. He was known to be pro-Egyptian, which was why Necho

put him in charge.

C. The people of Judah knew what they were doing when they passed over Jehoiakim and put his younger brother on the throne.

D. The temple treasures had been removed and heavy tribute was being paid to Egypt, yet Jehoiakim built for himself a luxurious royal house with forced labor to make himself appear a successful ruler.

1. Read Jeremiah 22:13-19. (Verse 15) “Shall you reign because you enclose yourself in cedar?”

E. Jehoiakim was the king who cut and burned up the prophecies of Jeremiah.

1. Read Jeremiah 36.

F. Also, he was the King mentioned in the opening verse of Daniel.

13. Jeremiah's Warnings

A. The lifetime of Jeremiah spanned the time from Josiah to the Babylonian exile.

B. While Isaiah assured his generation that Assyria would not enter Jerusalem, Jeremiah warned that destruction from Babylon was imminent.

C. Jeremiah warned the people to submit to the Babylonians and not to follow the enticements of Egypt -- but they did not listen.

D. The writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel converge at many points, yet neither verbally acknowledges the work of the other.

14. The Battle at Carchemish

A. In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar lead the armies of his father Nabopolassar and attacked the combined Assyrian and Egyptian forces at Carchemish on the Euphrates river.

1. Read Jeremiah 46.

B. This was one of the most important battles in history. Babylon won overwhelmingly. Assyria passed away forever. Egypt later aspired to power by never again rose to international significance.

15. The First Deportation

A. Babylon continued southward after their conquest at Carchemish and invaded Judah.

B. They deported a group of young nobles, including Daniel and his friends.

16. Jehoiakim's Revolt

A. Jehoiakim is still the King, but instead of being a vassal to Egypt, he is now a reluctant vassal of Babylon.

B. After three years of unwilling submission to Babylon, he revolted against Babylon in favor of Egypt. In doing so, he ignored the warnings of Jeremiah.

C. Nebuchadnezzar retaliated against Judah in December 598

BC.

D. Jehoiakim died during the month that Babylon attacked, apparently assassinated.

E. Jeremiah tells us that he received the burial of an ass. (Jeremiah 22:19)

17. Jehoiachin

A. Jehoiachin was 18 when his father died and he became king.

B. He surrendered the city of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar 3 months after he became king.

18. The Second Deportation

A. After the surrender in 597 BC, Jehoiachin, his mother, his wives, his officials, and the leading men were deported.

B. Ezekiel was also deported at this time.

C. Ezekiel's first message was in 592 BC, 5 years after the second deportation.

19. Zedekiah

A. Zedekiah was Josiah's youngest son (Jehoiachin's uncle).

B. Nebuchadnezzar established him as a regent vassal over Judah, a position he held from 597 until 586 BC.

C. Though in exile, Jehoiachin appears to have remained the

recognized king of Judah.

1. This is shown by administrative documents that have been found in the excavations at Babylonia.
2. Also, Ezekiel provided dates based on the years of Jehoiachin's captivity.
3. Jehoiachin was well treated in Babylon. Clay tablets record the quantity of oil that was delivered monthly to "Ja'ukinu, king of the land of Jaudi."
4. At one point, he had a position that was "above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon."
(2 Kings 25:28)

D. Zedekiah, on the other hand, was a miserable and pitiable figure.

1. He had Jeremiah imprisoned, yet secretly sent for him and asked him for advice. (Jeremiah 37:16ff)

E. It was during Zedekiah's regency that Ezekiel from Babylon denounced the moral depravity of Judah and said that the glory of God would leave the temple.

20. The Second Revolt

A. False prophets told Zedekiah that Nebuchadnezzar's power would soon be broken. They also said that the exiles would soon triumphantly return.

1. Read Jeremiah 28:1-4 (Hananiah).

- B.** Also, the Pharaohs that ruled after Necho in Egypt appeared to have renewed strength.
- C.** All of this prompted Zedekiah to listen to the pro-Egyptian party and seek aid from the new Egyptian king Hophra in 589. The final rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar had begun.
- D.** The patience of Nebuchadnezzar was exhausted. Babylon responded immediately and marched toward Jerusalem.
- E.** Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem in 588 BC.
- F.** Descriptions of the siege speak of pestilence, famine, and cannibalism.
- G.** After 18 months and despite some Egyptian help, the city was razed to the ground.

21. The Destruction of the City

- A.** Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC.
- B.** Zedekiah was captured trying to flee.
- C.** He was blinded after witnessing the execution of his sons.
- D.** He was then led off to Babylon, where he died.

22. The Third Deportation

- A.** Many of the Jews were murdered by the Babylonians.
- B.** Others were deported to Babylonia.

C. Judah had fallen.

23. **Judah after the Third Deportation**

A. The Edomites watched with approval as the city was destroyed.

1. Read Obadiah for God's reaction to the Edomites.

2. Habakkuk also prophesied at this time, describing the Babylonians as the rod of God's wrath.

B. Jeremiah was treated well by Nebuchadnezzar and offered complete freedom. He instead chose to stay in Judah with the governor, Gedaliah, that Nebuchadnezzar had appointed.

C. Ishmael, a royal relative, staged a revolt and killed Gedaliah.

D. Many of the remaining Jews wanted to flee to Egypt.

E. Jeremiah told them that Babylon would not give them anymore trouble, but that Egypt would soon fall.

F. They rejected his prophecy, and they forced him and Baruch to accompany them to Egypt.

G. Jeremiah delivers his final prophecy at Taphanes in Egypt.

H. In 586, the word comes to Ezekiel that the city is smitten.

I. From a state of undue optimism (dealt with by the first third of Ezekiel), the Jews switch to feelings of despair (dealt with by the last third of the book).

J. Read Psalm 137.

1. (Verse 1) “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion.”

Thy Word Is Truth

Lesson Three – Ezekiel Chapters 1 – 3

- 1) An introduction containing dating for the beginning of Ezekiel's ministry. 1:1-3.
 - a) The book begins with a typical introductory formula – “and it came to pass.”
 - i) The formula is typical of narrative, but introduces only the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Esther, and Jonah.
 - ii) It focuses attention on the date and circumstances surrounding Ezekiel's call.
 - b) The meaning of the 30th year is unclear.
 - i) It may refer to the time elapsed since the beginning of the exile, but this does not fit in well with the chronology in the remainder of the book.
 - ii) The rabbinic interpretation was that it referred to the time elapsed since the last observance of the Year of Jubilee, which was observed after seven sabbatical years (Lev. 25:8-17).
 - iii) It may refer to the 30th year since the discovery of the law by Hilkiah the priest. (622 BC.)
 - iv) It may refer to Ezekiel's age at the time of his call.
- (1) Some reject this because it is not the normal manner of dating prophetic writing; well known

historical events are more common. See, Isa. 1:1; 6:1. But see, Gen. 7:6, 11.

(2) The 30th year would be significant to a man with priestly connections. Numbers 4:3, 23, 30, 39. It is also the year that Christ entered upon his public ministry. Luke 3:23.

(3) The year was also the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin.

(a) This was a crucial time in the history of Judah.

(b) Inhabitants in both Jerusalem and Babylon taught that the captivity was only short-term, and they plotted against Babylon to restore independence to Israel.

(c) Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah warned that the exile would be much longer and that Jerusalem would be destroyed, not restored.

c) Ezekiel was a captive by the River Chebar.

i) No man is a captive unless he chooses to be.

ii) The Cheber was a man-made canal used for irrigation.

(1) It brought water from the Euphrates for irrigation.

(2) Excavations at Babylon have revealed evidence of Jewish settlements along such a canal.

d) There Ezekiel saw the heavens opened and saw visions of God.

i) While this was a special vision, one of the marks of God's people is that they are able to see the invisible. Heb. 11:27; 2 Cor. 4:18.

ii) Ezekiel was able to lift his eyes above the miseries of exile and

see visions of God.

e) It was at this time and in this place that God called Ezekiel.

i) The word of the Lord came (Heb. justifies “indeed came”).

(1) The emphatic marks a point of absolute beginning.

(2) Ezekiel the priest became Ezekiel the prophet of God.

(3) Those who declare today that God has spoken to them do not have Ezekiel’s credentials.

ii) The hand of the Lord was upon him.

(1) This expression occurs seven times in Ezekiel (3:14, 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1) and suggests a state of divine possession in which the prophet received his supernatural revelation – he was a man seized by God.

(2) It may also denote the divine compulsion of the call of God upon Ezekiel.

2) A vision of the glory of God providing the necessary context for Ezekiel’s call. 1:4-28.

a) Related comments.

i) Israel became a theocracy at Mt. Sinai. Ex. 19:1-8.

ii) It became a theocratic state in the days of Samuel. 1 Sam. 8:4-22.

iii) During its history an exclusive nationalism developed that viewed

God as absolutely tied to Israel.

(1) Jonah rejected the idea of preaching to foreigners, and fled Israel to get away from God. Jonah 1:3.

(2) Ezekiel and the exiles had been removed from Israel, leading them to conclude that in some sense they had been removed from the Lord's presence.

iv) So where was God?

(1) If he was in Israel, how could he allow foreign armies to occupy the land?

(2) If the occupation was allowed to stand, it would mean that the gods of Babylon were greater than the God of Israel.

(3) Thus, the exiles could not believe that the exile would be long.

(4) Ezekiel declared Jehovah to be God of the whole world, that he cared for his people, and that he was with them even in exile.

(5) Ezekiel declared Jehovah to be free to use whomever he chose, including pagan kings (cf. Isa. 45:1; Hab. 1:5-11), to accomplish his purposes.

b) Five elements of the vision of the glory of God.

i) The Windstorm. 1:4.

(1) When Ezekiel saw God, the revelation came in a great thunderstorm. (cf. Job 38:1; 40:6; Ps. 29:3-5; 1 Kgs 19:11-13.)

(2) The display of nature captured Ezekiel’s attention as the burning bush captured Moses’ attention. (Ex. 3:1-5.)

(a) In the wilderness God led the Hebrews by a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud. (Ex. 13:17-22.)

(b) When God came down on Sinai, he came in lightning, smoke, and fire. (Ex. 19:16-18.)

(c) God is characterized as a consuming fire. (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:28-29.)

(d) Fire not only represented the presence of God, but it also was a symbol of the refining and purifying elements of judgment (*e.g.*, Mal. 3:1-6).

(3) The captives had lost their sense of the awe and majesty of Jehovah, so Jehovah presented himself to the prophet in power, majesty, and holiness so that Ezekiel could sense God’s character as he communicated his message to the captives.

(a) The storm was immense – not only large, but intense.

(b) It came from the north.

(i) God is the God of the north.

(ii) It was from the north that the invasion and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army would come. (cf. Jer. 1:14.)

ii) The four living creatures. 1:5-14.

(1) The four living creatures emerged from the storm as Ezekiel watched. (They return in 10:5 and 10:20 where they are called “cherubim.”)

(a) The cherubim were appointed to guard the holiness of God.

(b) Their mission was to prevent anything unholy from coming into the presence of God.

(c) They were indicators of the presence of God in the storm.

(i) Most familiar with them as guardians of Eden to prevent the reentry of sinful humanity. (Gen. 3:22-24.)

(ii) Their likeness was embroidered on the curtain of the tabernacle to guard the holy of holies against unauthorized entry. (Ex. 26:31.)

(iii) Within the holy of holies, their likeness stood atop the ark of the covenant, and they affirmed God's presence there. (Ex. 25:18-22.)

(2) This passage lists ten characteristics of the cherubim.

(a) They had the form or appearance of a man. (1:5.)

(i) They were not human. (1:6-7.)

(ii) Their human qualities reminded that humans are the crown of God's creative work (Gen. 1:26-28) and the central focus of his creation (Gen. 2:8-25).

(b) They had four faces, one on each side (1:8), that are described in detail (1:10).

(i) Each face represented the highest form of life in a general category – lion, undomesticated animals; ox, domesticated animals; eagle, winged creatures; human, the crown of God's creation that exercised dominion over the rest of God's creation (Gen. 1:28).

(ii) These creatures show God as the Lord of all of his creation.

(c) They had straight legs (1:7) with feet like a calf.

(i) “Straight” apparently means unjointed; the feet were rounded for easy turning (?).

(ii) This characteristic may suggest stability in the performance of God’s will.

(d) They had hands like a human under their wings (1:8).

(i) Each of the four wings touched those of the creature next to it.

(ii) The wings of the creatures in the holy of holies also touched (1:11; cf. Kgs. 6:27).

(iii) Each was related closely to his neighbor and united as one in performing assigned tasks.

(e) They went straight when they moved (1:9, 12).

(i) Since there was a face in any direction, they went straight in whichever direction they moved.

(ii) This suggests a sense of purpose, commitment, and availability for assignments.

(f) They had four wings each (1:11; cf. 1:8).

(i) Two were extended up to support the throne and/or in praise to God (these two touched the wings of each neighboring creature (cf.

1:8, 23)).

(ii) The other two were used to cover the body, a sign of humility and modesty.

(iii) Isa. 6:2 and Rev. 4:1-11 describe the creatures with six wings.

1. The additional two wings were used to shield the face of the creatures from the face of God.

2. One commentator suggested that Ezekiel's creatures did not need the additional wings since they were under the platform (1:22) and looked straight ahead (1:9), thus being unable to see the face of God.

(g) They followed the "spirit" in their movement. (1:12, 20.)

(i) This refers to the divine spirit of the one who sat on the throne above them and who directed and enabled their movements.

(ii) The cherubim were divinely appointed and empowered to do the will and work of God.

(h) They appeared like burnished bronze (1:7) and coals of fire or torches (1:13).

(i) This characteristic, mentioned again in 10:7, was associated with a theophany.

(ii) The brightness of their appearance suggests their close relation and proximity to Jehovah.

(iii) The skin of Moses' face was radiant with light after having been in the presence of God. (Ex. 34:29-35.)

(i) They moved as quickly as a flash of lightning (1:14), Suggesting instantaneous action that resulted in immediate implementation of God's will.

(j) Their wings made an awesome sound (1:23-25) like rushing waters.

(i) To Ezekiel this was like the voice of God.

(ii) This further confirms that this was a theophany.

iii) The wheels. 1:15-21.

(1) Associated with each cherubim there were wheels described more in terms of function than of construction.

(2) They were described as the lowest part of the chariot-throne and sat on the ground beneath the cherubim (1:15).

(3) Their appearance was like chrysolite (perhaps topaz or other semi-precious stone).

(4) Each wheel was actually two in one, with one apparently set inside the other at right angles, permitting movement in any direction.

(5) The wheels had outer rims had an outer edge that was inset with eyes (1:18).

(6) The wheels gave mobility to the chariot-throne of God.

(a) When the cherubim moved, the wheels moved, activated by the spirit.

(b) 1:21 is a recap of 1:19-20 and forms a conclusion to the section, emphasizing the unity and coordination between the cherubim, the wheels, the spirit, and the throne-chariot.

(7) The mobility of the wheels represents God's omnipresence; the eyes represent his omniscience; the elevated position represent his omnipotence.

iv) The platform. 1:22-27.

(1) The “expanse” (1:22) is the same word used in Gen. 1:6 to describe the creation of the heavens.

(2) Here it refers to some kind of platform above the cherubim; it's appearance was like ice and it supported God's throne.

(3) Under the platform, the wings of the cherubim produced a sound like that of a rushing river like the voice of God (1:24).

(4) Parallel to that sound, the voice of God came from above the firmament. (See Rev. 1:15.)

(5) Positioned on the platform was a throne that appeared like sapphire.

(a) The vision was similar to that of Moses and the 70 elders. (Ex. 24:10.)

(b) The throne is mentioned again in Ezek. 10:1.

(6) Upon the throne was a figure like that of a man whose appearance was like fire described in other theophanies. (See Ex. 3:2-15; 24:17; Rev. 4:1-5.)

(7) This vision portrays two important concepts about God that his people seemed to have neglected, if not forgotten.

(a) He is a God of splendor and great power.

(b) His is not bound to the land of Israel.

(8) God came to Ezekiel and thus to his people in their exile and reminded them of his holiness and power as the Lord of creation.

(a) They were not overlooked; they were not forgotten.

(b) As terrifying as the vision was, it had a redemptive function – God uses and permits crises to draw people to him.

V) The prophet's response. 1:28.

(1) When people are consumed by insurmountable problems and buffeted by the storms of life, they usually do not need another perspective on their problems, they need a new perspective on God as Lord of life and larger than all difficulties.

(a) Humanity in peril needs a sense of the majesty of God.

(b) There needs to be an awareness that God is greater than adversity, that he is with his people in the midst of their problems.

(c) This was the need of both Ezekiel and his hearers – they needed a new vision of and commitment to the holiness and majesty of God.

(d) This need was met in the first revelation of God in the call of Ezekiel to be a prophet to the exiles.

(2) The cherubim, as protectors of God's holiness, were a reminder that humankind was sinful.

(a) People often want to blame God for the storms of life and forget that human sin brought chaos into the world.

(b) The only hope for humanity is to recognize God in the midst of the storms as the one who can restore the calm. (See Luke 8:22-25.)

(3) Ezekiel fell on his face when he saw the vision of God. (See Isa. 6:1-9.)

(a) Ezekiel may have wondered who could speak for God to such a people in such a place.

(b) The answer came in his call.

(4) The opening vision of Ezekiel affirmed three significant truths about God that are summarized in 1:28.

(a) It reaffirmed the nature of God as holy, powerful, and majestic.

(b) It reaffirmed in the rainbow God's promise-making and promise-keeping character. (Gen. 9:16.)

(c) It reaffirmed that nothing, including geographic location, separated one from God (cf. Rom. 8:38-39.)

(5) Through this vision Ezekiel received a message of hope.

- (a) God was still at work among the exiles.
 - (b) This meant that he knew about them and was concerned about their plight.
 - (c) People need a vision of hope, but such hope is always dependent on a willing response and a humble, repentant attitude.
- 3) The call itself, with specific directives. 2:1-3:15.
- a) The prophet's mission. 2:1-7.
 - i) God uses the designation “son of man” 93 times to address Ezekiel, and never calls him by his name.
- (1) The expression “son of” could mean “having the characteristics of,” as in “son of a night” (Jonah 4:10) and “son of peace” (Luke 10:6).
 - (2) “Son of man,” then, can mean “member of humanity.”
 - (3) But characteristic of humanity, and perhaps the focus in its use in Ezekiel, is frailty and mortality, in contrast to the eternality and awesome majesty of God (cf. 31:14).
- (a) While used in Num. 23:19 as an equivalent to “man,” the focus is on human unreliability.
 - (b) In Job 25:6 it is associated with “maggot” and “worm.”
 - (c) It describes man's apparent insignificance in Ps. 8:4.

(4) But in Ps. 80:17 the reference is to the Davidic dynasty as God's appointed agent on the throne of Israel; it would be through him that God would renew his favor toward his people.

(5) In addition to a reminder of his dependence upon God, it may also have reminded him of his responsibility as God's watchman and messenger of redemption.

(6) The same phrase was used of the messianic figure in Dan. 7:13 who appeared before the Ancient of Days and of Daniel himself in Dan. 8:17.

(7) It was often used in the N.T. about Jesus himself (see Matt. 8:20; 9:6; 11:19; Mark 2:28).

(8) Thus, one may conclude that when "son of man" is used of an individual who is spoken of as Jehovah's agent, it points to humankind created royal, restored to a regal position, and called to serve as Jehovah's human representative on behalf of human beings.

ii) Ezekiel's response to the vision was to fall prostrate in an act of worship and reverence (v. 28).

(1) God commanded him to stand to receive his call and commission (compare Dan. 10:11), indicating his acceptance of Ezekiel and his intention to call him to service.

(2) The Spirit entered Ezekiel enabling him to speak God's message with authority, confidence and courage.

iii) Ezekiel was sent to the Israelites, including those captive in

Babylon and those in the homeland, and to the rebellious nations (2:3-5).

(1) God also described the character of those to whom Ezekiel was sent.

(a) Rebellious.

(b) Transgressors.

(c) Impudent or obstinate.

(d) Stubborn or stiff hearted.

(2) Ezekiel was encouraged at the beginning of his mission not to fear opposition. 2:6-7.

(a) His hearers were described as briers, thorns, and scorpions.

(b) He was not responsible for their lack of receptivity; success was measured by his faithfulness to his charge.

b) The prophet's motivation. 2:8 – 3:3.

i) How could one be motivated for a ministry that would be rejected, for a mission that was bound to fail?

ii) Ezekiel was instructed to indicate his obedience by eating what God offered to him.

(1) When it was unrolled, Ezekiel saw that it was written on both sides.

- (a) May indicate the fullness of coming judgment.
 - (b) May suggest that there was no room for Ezekiel to add personal opinion; his message was to be God's alone.
- (2) Three words were used to describe the contents of the scroll – lament, mourning, and woe.
- (a) Lament – funeral song written in specific meter and sung in time of bereavement.
 - (b) Mourning – words and moans uttered by bereaved family or professional mourners upon death of loved one.
 - (c) Woe – exclamation of distress over great loss of any kind.
- (3) Ezekiel was to assimilate the message and proclaim its contents.
- (4) He would proclaim good news as well, but he did not need to be warned about that.
- (a) The part of the mission that he might like to avoid was the proclamation of bad news.
 - (b) Faithfulness demands that God's whole message be delivered. (See Acts 20:27.)
- iii) Ezekiel was commanded four times to eat the scroll, and then to go and preach God's message.
- (1) The message originated with God; it was not discovered by logic or deduction but through divine revelation.

(2) When eaten, it was sweet to the taste. (3:2-3.)

c) The prophet's divine preparation. 3:4-11.

i) Israel was the primary recipient of Ezekiel's message.

(1) Even the message that Ezekiel was to deliver to the “nations” centered on the relationship of those countries to Israel and especially atrocities committed against Israel.

(2) Ezekiel was sent to the people of Judah who spoke his language but whose decadence had surpassed that of the foreign nations (v. 6; 5:6-12; 16:47-52).

ii) Rejection of Ezekiel's mission and message was not so much a rejection of Ezekiel as a renunciation of God – the people refused to listen to Ezekiel because he spoke God's message. (3:7.)

(1) This was similar to the rejection of Samuel's leadership. (1 Sam. 8:4-7.)

(2) Ezekiel's hearers are here described as being of a “hard forehead” and a “stiff heart.”

(a) The hardness of Pharaoh's heart is given many times as the reason for his disobedience. (Ex. chs 7 – 10.)

(b) The use of that term to describe Israel was a serious indictment. (cf. 2 Chron. 36:13; Prov. 28:14.)

iii) Opposition was pictured as coming from people with hardened faces. (3:8-9).

(1) This implied a hardened will set against the word and will of God.

(2) God responded by promising the prophet that he would harden the

forehead of Ezekiel so that it was like flint.

(3) Ezekiel was assured of divine protection in his mission.

iv) Ezekiel was instructed to listen with his ears and receive with his heart all that God said. (3:10-11.)

(1) This implies a continuous relationship in which Ezekiel was to keep on listening as God kept on speaking.

(2) Listening was not confined to the call, but was to characterize Ezekiel all through his ministry.

d) The conclusion of the call. 3:12-15.

i) Ezekiel was lifted by the Spirit (v. 12).

ii) As he was lifted he heard the sound of the creatures' wings and the movement of the wheels, suggesting the movement of the chariot throne and the end of the vision. (v. 13.)

iii) The Spirit took Ezekiel to his place among the captives by the River Chebar at Tel Abib. (v. 15.)

(1) The name means city of ears.

(2) Its location is uncertain, but it is modern Tel Aviv.

iv) Ezekiel was in great distress (v. 14), and he sat among the people seven days (v. 15).

4) Ezekiel's appointment as a "watchman," affirming his personal responsibility. 3:16-21.

a) Seven day periods were common in Israel.

- i) Mourning for the dead continued seven days. (Gen. 50:10; Num. 19:11.)
 - ii) Seven days was the time of consecration for a priest. (Lev. 8:1-33.)
- b) When seven days had lapsed, God appeared and began giving Ezekiel the message that he was to deliver.
- i) Ezekiel had been told that he was to deliver divine words (2:4, 7; 3:4, 11), but he had not been given those words.
 - ii) Here, “the word of the Lord came” to Ezekiel.
- (1) This is the first use of that phrase.
 - (2) Used in some 41 verses, it was to characterize Ezekiel’s ministry.
 - (3) It is found elsewhere in the OT only in Jeremiah (9 times) and Zechariah (2 times).
- c) Ezekiel was told that he was sent as a watchman to Israel (v. 17).
- i) Although the concept is mentioned elsewhere (Isa. 21:6; 52:8; 62:6; Jer. 6:17; Hab. 2:1), only here are the duties of a watchman defined.
- (1) The safety of the entire population rested with the watchman.
 - (2) If a watchman failed in his duty, he would be held personally responsible for any loss.
- ii) Ezekiel was God’s watchman appointed to warn Judah and Jerusalem of impending destruction.

(1) He was to warn the wicked of their sin and of impending judgment (v. 18).

(2) The responsibility of the wicked was then upon them; it would be upon the prophet if he refused or failed to warn (vv. 19-21).

5) The reaction of the prophet. 3:22-27.

a) The hand of the Lord was on the prophet, suggesting receipt of a vision experience (v. 22).

i) This was a logical extension of his commission as a watchman.

ii) He went to the plain to receive further instruction. (Compare with Paul's sojourn in the desert. Gal. 1:16-17.)

iii) When Ezekiel moved to the plain, he once more encountered the glory of the Lord's presence, and, as before, he fell on his face. (v. 23.)

b) Ezekiel was given three restrictions.

i) He was to shut himself in a house. (v. 24.)

ii) He was to be bound with ropes to insure his seclusion. V. 25.)

iii) He was to be unable to speak. (cf. Job 29:10; Ps. 137:6.)

(1) He was to be silent except when the Lord enabled him to speak.

(2) Further instructions in ch. 24:25-27 may indicate that the silence would last until the fall of Jerusalem (about six years).

(3) The silence actually ended when “He that was escaped came” (33:22).

c) The call closed with what was a favorite saying of Jesus, “He that heareth let him hear; and he that forebeareth, let him forbear.” (See Matt. 13:10-17.)

d) As the nation faced days of judgment, their needs could not be met by offering a new perspective on their problems; what they needed was a new perspective on God.

i) The call of Ezekiel provided that new perspective by reinforcing the holiness and majesty of God.

ii) Ezekiel was able to share that viewpoint with the certainty of judgment.

Ezekiel - Lesson 4

1. Introduction to Chapters 4 & 5

A. With Chapter 4 begins the message of doom that Ezekiel will preach for the next six years.

B. He predicts a total national captivity, which was contrary to the expectations of most of his listeners.

1. Many of the people thought that an alliance with Egypt would prevent the Babylonians from invading --- but they were wrong.

2. Most of the people never thought that God would allow Jerusalem to be destroyed.

C. Why was Ezekiel told to perform the symbolic actions in these chapters?

1. Ezekiel 2:5 --- Whether they hear or whether they refuse, yet will they know that a prophet has been among them.

2. Ezekiel 3:7 --- The house of Israel will not listen to you because they will not listen to me.

3. Ezekiel was certainly not trying to blend in! God wanted him to be different, which is often the best way to get people's attention. If we are no different from the rest of the world, then why should anyone listen to us?

4. Also, when people have become very hardened, much more may

be required to get their attention. God's message to his people had not changed since he gave them the law, but the methods he used to deliver that message changed.

D. Did he actually do these things, or simply see himself doing them in a vision?

1. Some commentators think that these actions were accomplished in a vision.
2. I disagree. These actions would make no sense unless he had an audience. The lesson was not aimed at Ezekiel; it was aimed at his listeners. Also, if it was in a vision then why (later) did Ezekiel complain about the source of fuel that God commanded?

2. The Siege of Jerusalem (4:1-3)

A. These actions would be pointless unless they could be watched by a large number of people.

1. Other prophets used symbolic actions to accompany or illustrate their pronouncements: Ahijah in 1 Kings 11:30; Zedekiah in 1 Kings 22:11; Elisha in 2 Kings 13:17; Isaiah in Isaiah 20:2-4; Jeremiah in Jeremiah 13:1-14 and 19:1-10; and Agabus in Acts 21:10ff.

B. It was probably not very long before word got around that Ezekiel was doing something strange near his home.

C. Ezekiel's 7 day trance-like state in 3:15 had obviously been noticed, so the people probably

expected that some sign would soon follow.

D. The centerpiece of the act was a large, rectangular, sun-baked brick on which Ezekiel had drawn an outline of the fortifications of Jerusalem.

E. He placed it on the sand and then put siegeworks against it.

1. The word translated "fort" in the KJV and "siege wall" in the RSV denotes a chain of offensive towers that are built around a city. Another Hebrew word is used to denote mounds of earth that are piled up around a city to make the besiegers level with the walls. Assyrian artifacts have been found that showing siege towers with archers. Some of them were movable and were equipped with built-in battering-rams. (The Babylonians had once been part of the Assyrian empire.)

F. Ezekiel was next told to take an iron plate, and place it as an iron wall between himself and the city.

1. The iron plate was probably a large, saucer-shaped piece of metal that was used as a hot plate over burning embers to bake bread.

G. What does the iron plate denote?

1. Some suggest it is part of the siege wall, in which case Ezekiel would represent the besiegers.

2. Others suggest that it would be more in keeping with Ezekiel's prophetic role for him to represent God in this drama. With this view, the iron plate could represent God's determined hostility toward Jerusalem, or it could represent the sin that stood between God and his people.

a) (Lam. 3:44) "You have covered Yourself with a cloud, that prayer should not pass through."

3. But it was God who judged the city and brought the armies against it. Thus, Ezekiel could be representing the besieging army and representing God.

H. Apparently Ezekiel acted all of this out without a word of explanation to his audience. In fact, Ezekiel 3:26 may be an indication that he was unable to speak during this period.

3. The Days of Punishment of Israel and Judah (4:4-8)

A. It appears that the model of the siege was set up as a permanent visual aid that remained while Ezekiel carried on these further actions.

B. In this second act, Ezekiel plays the part of his own people and acts as the bearer of the punishment for their sins.

C. The goal is to show the duration of the punishment of the two nations, and to show that

both Israel and Judah will be punished.

1. Ezekiel is told to bear their iniquity. That means he represents the punished people.

D. The message is to Judah and Israel. The suffering of Israel was already apparent.

1. Ever since her capital city, Samaria, had been destroyed in 722, Israel had been depopulated and her people scattered throughout the Assyrian empire.

2. Ezekiel is making it clear that the Northern kingdom is being punished for its sins.

3. Only a part of Judah was in captivity at this time.

E. Ezekiel was telling Judah that it would suffer similarly, but for a shorter period of time.

F. Ezekiel lay on the ground in an east-west direction with his head westward toward Jerusalem. When he was on his left side, he was facing north toward Israel. When he was on his right side, he faced south toward Judah.

G. Ezekiel lay on his left for 390 days (Israel) and on his right for 40 days (Judah). What do these numbers represent?

1. First we are told that each day represents a year.

- a) The same symbolism occurs in Numbers 14:34, where again we are plainly told that a day represents a year.**
- b) Some take this passage to mean that a day is always equal to a year in prophecy. That is, they speak of the "day equals a year" idea as being a universal principle in Biblical prophecy.**
- c) If it is universal, then why does God point it out here but does not point it out elsewhere? Perhaps a better conclusion is that God tells us when the principle is in operation, which is what he does here --- and when he doesn't tell us, we shouldn't assume it.**

2. The significance of 390 and 40 is apparent when we add them together to get the total duration of the punishment, which is 430 days/years.

- a) Exodus 12:40-41 tells us that the Egyptian captivity lasted 430 years. ("Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.")**
- b) The Egyptian captivity wasn't partial --- it embraced the entire nation. Ezekiel is telling the people that they will ALL go into captivity. The Judeans remaining in their land would not be there for long.**
- c) Under this view, the 430 years is symbolic of another national captivity.**
- d) Hosea 8:13 describes the captivity of the northern kingdom as a "return to Egypt." Later in 9:3 he explains that when he says Egypt he means Assyria.**
- e) To threaten the people with "Egypt" was to threaten them with total captivity, which is exactly what happened.**
- f) Why break the 430 years into 390 and 40?**

(1) The 40 year period gives the reason why Judah was going into captivity.

(2) 40 years was the time of punishment for unbelief and disobedience. It was the time of the wandering in the wilderness.

(a) Numbers 14:33-34 ("For each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know my rejection.")

i) Interestingly, this is the only other passage whether the "day equals a year" is specifically mentioned --- which further supports a figurative understanding of the 390 and 40 days.

(3) Some suggest that the 390 is larger than the 40 to indicate that Isreal was more wicked than Judah, but in Ezekiel, Judah is regarded as more wicked than Israel (23:11).

3. Many commentators try to interpret the 390 years and the 40 years chronologically.

a) But how we do know when to begin or when to end? And do we look for a period of 430 years, or do the 390 years and the 40 years run concurrently?

b) If we start with the Assyrian captivity in 722 and travel forward in time either 430 years or 390 years, we end up at times of history that are not significant.

c) If we end with the decree of Cyrus in 539 and go back in time either 430 or 390 years, we start at times of history that are not significant.

d) Some start with the deportation of Jehoiachin in 597. Going forward 430 years brings us to 167, which is the time of the Maccabean rebellion. (See my notes on Daniel.)

(1) But why start here? The symbolism obviously includes Israel, and they went into captivity over a hundred years earlier.

(2) This is probably the best chronological approach, but I much prefer the figurative explanation.

H. Did Ezekiel remain on his side 24 hours a day for 390 days and then 40 days?

1. It would not be possible for Ezekiel to carry out all of the instructions in 4:9-5:4 if his hands were permanently tied as 3:25 and

4:8 suggest to some.

2. We are also told that he was to act out the siege and prepare food (verses 7, 9, and 11). How can this be true if he were all tied up? One commentator suggests that "laying bands on him" in verse 8 indicates that God had given him a strict commission to do his job without deviation.

3. But did he remain paralyzed and on his side 24 hours a day? The most likely conclusion is that Ezekiel performed a daily demonstration in front of the people, and then reverted to a more normal lifestyle when there were no spectators around.

I. His bare arm in verse 7 signifies that God was ready for drastic action.

1. (Isaiah 52:10) "The Lord has made bare his holy arm."

2. Watch out when God rolls up his sleeve!

4. The Famine of Jerusalem (4:9-17)

A. For the first 390 days, Ezekiel was limited to a stringent diet.

1. Why just 390 days? Why not the 40 days also?

a) That is a very good question! Unfortunately, I was not able to find a very good answer.

2. Some use this passage to argue that the 390 days and the 40 days ran concurrently. That is for the final 40 days, he may have spent part of his time on his left side and part of his time on his right

side.

3. Those who argue against the concurrent view point to Ezekiel 4:6, which seems to indicate that the 40 days did not begin until the 390 days were completed.

B. Two lessons are combined here:

- 1. Israel and Judah were to live on famine rations.**
- 2. Their diet would be unclean.**

C. Commentators differ on whether this symbol denotes famine during the siege, or denotes the defilement that occurred during their exile.

- 1. The simplest explanation may be that both are denoted. That is, Ezekiel's diet may denote the horrible starvation that occurred during the siege as well as the defilement that occurred under the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles.**
- 2. Most likely, those who watched the daily show also had numerous explanations for what the various actions denoted.**

D. [Verse 9-11] Ezekiel's daily diet consisted of 20 shekels (about 8 ounces) of bread made from a mixture of all kinds of grain.

E. The water measurement of 1/6 of a hin would be a little over a pint.

F. Again he may have consisted on this and nothing else for over a year, but as we noted above this may have been just part of the public demonstration, in which case he may have eaten normally at other times.

- 1. God's goal was not to punish Ezekiel, but to teach the people a lesson. In fact, when Ezekiel complains just a few verses later about the cooking fuel, God lets Ezekiel use something else.**
- 2. But, on the other hand, the people would hardly have paid any attention to Ezekiel if he put on a daily five minute show and then went back inside his house.**

G. The "from time to time" in verse 10 of the KJV conveys the wrong impression. The Hebrew refers to a recurring action that took place at the same time each day.

- 1. I imagine that people gathered each day to watch the show. Can you imagine their reaction when, after 390 days, he suddenly switched sides!**

H. [Verse 12-17] So far Ezekiel has accepted each assignment without complaint, but his whole being is revolted at the command to bake his bread over human excrement.

- 1. He was NOT commanded to eat human excrement as some commentators suggest. God wanted him to use it as fuel.**

I. This choice for fuel was intended to depict the defilement that the exiles would experience in a heathen environment.

- 1. They were not able to ensure that the meat they bought or were given had been killed correctly according to the Levitical requirements, nor were they able to know whether it had first been offered at heathen sacrifices.**
- 2. To maintain ceremonial purity in exile was almost impossible.**
- 3. Ezekiel, however, tells God in verse 14 that he at least had kept himself pure.**

J. God changes the fuel to cow's dung, which was a perfectly normal source of fuel in the East and remains so to this day. One commentator says that cow dung was probably not regarded as unclean by the exiles. If that is true, then Ezekiel may have told the people about God's initial choice to let them know the defilement that was going to occur.

K. God knew what Ezekiel's reaction would be, so he may have made the first command just to stress to Ezekiel how bad the punishment would be.

L. Hosea 9:3-4 (speaking of Assyrian exile) is very similar to this passage.

5. The Fate of the People of Jerusalem (5:1-4)

A. We have seen the siege against Jerusalem, we have seen the duration of the punishment, and we have seen the famine conditions of the siege and the exile.

B. In verse 1-4, we see the fate of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

1. The reason for the punishment is made very clear --- the Jews did not send forth the light of God to the heathen nations around her. God put her in the midst of the nations for that very purpose, but instead his people became a reproach to God and were worse than their neighbors.

2. To whom much is given, much is required. (Luke 12:48)

C. The action that Ezekiel is told to perform can be divided into two stages:

1. In verses 1-2, he cuts off his hair, weighs it out in three equal parts, and disposes of each part in a different way.

a) The first third is thrown into a fire built near his model city.

b) The second third is placed on the ground and hacked at with a sword from all directions.

c) The final third is scattered to the wind while Ezekiel runs behind hacking at it with a sword.

2. In verses 3-4, he is told to retrieve a few hairs from the third

portion and to perform further actions on those retrieved hairs.

a) One portion is placed in the skirts of his garment.

b) Another portion is thrown into the fire.

3. No doubt, it was this sort of surprise act that kept people coming back to the show each day!

D. The symbolism is clear: a third of the inhabitants would be killed within the city, a third would be killed by the sword fighting around the city, and a third would be scattered among the nations while continuing to face danger from hostile forces.

E. From among that third group would emerge a remnant that would be preserved.

F. Shaving the head was mark of mourning (Isaiah 15:2; Jeremiah 48:37) or of disgrace (2 Samuel 10:4), and both interpretations may have been intended here.

G. If an Israelite priest shaved his head, he was defiled and no longer holy to the Lord. (Lev. 21:5)

H. The remnant from the third portion is divided into two groups. One group is tucked into the folds of his garments, and the other group is burned.

1. This burned portion of the remnant probably denotes the debased group that remained near the destroyed city after the final deportation.
2. Recall from Lesson 2 how Ishmael stayed behind and murdered Gedaliah.
3. Ezra tells us that those who remained caused trouble after the exiles finally returned.
4. The portion in the fold of Ezekiel's garment denotes the faithful remnant that was preserved.

6. The Explanation of the Judgment (5:5-17)

A. These verses explain the symbols we have seen and give a justification for God's harsh actions toward his people.

B. The phrase "This is Jerusalem" reminds me of Matthew 23:37. (O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!)

1. It is both an indictment and a cry of disappointment.

C. Her situation in the center of the nations is accurate both geographically and theologically.

1. From this verse came the idea that Jerusalem was "the navel of the earth," which was popular among the rabbinical writings and was carried over into the early church fathers and medieval cartography.

D. [Verse 6-10] The crime of Jerusalem was that despite all of God's favors, its people had rebelled against the ordinances and statutes of God.

E. Worse than that, the people had exceeded the surrounding nations in wickedness and had not even acted according to the ordinances of the nations that were round about them! Judah did not think the nations around her were wicked enough! Judah imported perversions from other lands.

F. Israel was unique in its monotheism, and God had intended Israel to be a beacon proclaiming the one true God. Instead, Israel rejected its uniqueness and sought instead to be just like the other nations around her.

1. Does this sound familiar? It should. There are those in the church today who are doing the same thing. They reject any claim that the church is unique, and seek instead to be just like the denominations that surround us. God wants his church to be a beacon just like he wanted Israel to be a beacon. I hope we do a better job than Israel did.

G. For all of these crimes, the judgment is clear in

verse 8 -- "I, even I, am against you."

1. Judah had made their own gods and had made alliances, but in the process Judah had made an enemy -- God!

H. Unparalleled sin demands unparalleled judgment (verse 9).

1. Verse 9 must be taken as proverbial rather than literal. Why? Because Jesus later said the same thing in Matthew 24:21 about a different event --- the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

I. The cannibalism that occurred during the siege is described as a judgment by God (verse 10).

1. Compare 2 Kings 6:28-29; Jeremiah 19:9; Lamentations 4:10.

J. This will all be done in the sight of the nations (verse 8) to vindicate God's holiness and make a public example of his disobedient people.

K. [Verse 11] In addition to the disobedience and rebellion, there was the defilement of God's sanctuary with detestable things and abominations.

1. This is the first reference in Ezekiel to the horrible practices that were being carried out in the Temple between the captivity of Jehoiachin and the final destruction of the city. Chapter 8 describes these events in graphic detail.

2. For all of this God says that he will diminish or withdraw.

- a) The NKJV says "I will also diminish you" but the word "you" has been added.
- b) Hosea 9:12 (Woe to them when I depart from them.)

L. The phrase "as I live" in verse 11 is a very solemn oath. It appears 14 times in Ezekiel, more often than in any other prophetic book.

M. [Verse 12] The key to verse 2 is now given, and we see that the burning with fire denotes death by pestilence and famine during the siege.

N. As Ezekiel foretold, many people died in the city and many others died when Zedekiah attempted to escape from the city.

- 1. Read 2 Kings 25:1-21; 2 Chronicles 36:17-21; Jeremiah 39:1-18.

O. [Verses 13-17] These verse describe more fully the judgments that were promised in verse 8.

P. Words that are used elsewhere in Scripture to describe God's wrath against the enemies of his people are now used to describe his wrath against his own people.

- 1. Verse 13 -- "Thus shall my anger be spent, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be avenged; and they shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it in my zeal, when I have spent my fury

upon them."

2. Although God does become angry, his anger is a judicial anger. It is always just.

3. His anger is not an emotional outburst. Recall Jesus' anger in seeing the money changers in the temple. (John 2:15 --- "When He had made a whip of cords.")

4. Compare Hebrews 10:31 (It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.)

5. And compare Hebrews 12:29 (Our God is a consuming fire.)

Q. Verse 15 tells us that the object is to make Judah and Jerusalem a warning to the nations that are round about them.

1. This amounts to a reversal of the intention of the covenant, which was originally that Israel would be a witness to the surrounding nations of God's truth and mercy.

2. But instead of a blessing to the earth, Jerusalem had become a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror.

3. God's lesson to the surrounding nations is that if this is how he deals with the sin of his own people, how much more severely will he deal with the sin of the other nations?

4. The fulfillment of these verses is found in Lamentations 2:15-16. ("Is this the city that is called 'The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth.'?" ... "We have swallowed her up!")

R. The punishments in verse 16 are to consist of "deadly arrows of famine."

S. The punishment of famine in verse 16 is supplemented with pestilence, sword, and wild beasts in verse 17.

- 1. A similar quartet is found in Jeremiah 15:2.**
- 2. It is a mark of desolation when wild animals begin to wander in the empty lands. Compare Isaiah 13:20-22.**

T. All of these disasters are to prove to the world that "I, the Lord, have spoken." (Verses 13, 15, 17)

U. The more indifferent men are to God's laws, the louder he has to speak.

V. Verse 13 adds the phrase "in my zeal" or "in my jealousy." The root word in Hebrew means to grow purple in the face.

7. Why did God punish his own people?

A. Hosea tells us the tragic reasons why Israel was punished.

- 1. Hosea 4:1 (There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land.)**

- 2. Hosea 4:6 (My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.)**
- 3. Hosea 8:12 (I have written for him the great things of my law, but they were considered a strange thing.)**
- 4. Hosea 8:7 (They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind.)**
- 5. Hosea 9:12 (Woe to them when I depart from them.)**

B. And the solution?

- 1. Hosea 10:12 (Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till he comes and rains righteousness on you.)**

Ezekiel – Lesson 5 – Chapters 6 & 7

Idolatry Denounced and Punishment Promised

I. Introductory Comments.

A. Ezekiel chapter six is transitional.

B. It moves from the purely dramatic forms of the messages in chapters 4 and 5, combines dramatic and vocal elements, and anticipates the visions and messages that follow.

C. This message also contains a thematic transition from the sins of the nation in general (chs. 4-5) to the mountains and high places and detestable practices (6:11) that were associated with pagan worship.

D. Thus the focus of chapter 6 is on the individual responsibility of the people and prepares the way for the subsequent spoken messages.

II. Message to the Mountains.

A. Ezekiel commanded to preach to the mountains of Israel –prophetic dramatization of the end of false worship. (6:1-2.)

1. Although this was a spoken message, it also was accompanied by the symbolic action of setting his face against the mountains of Israel.

a) This was a symbolic gesture of judgment. (See

13:17; 21:2, 7; 25:2; 28:21; 29:2; 35:2; 38:2.)

2. After his first oracle of judgment addressed to Jerusalem (5:5-17), Ezekiel was directed to announce judgment on the “mountains of Israel,” a phrase that occurs 16 times in Ezekiel and nowhere else. (The singular occurs in Josh. 11:16.)

a) He was instructed to prophesy against the mountains as though they were a ready audience to hear God’s message (v. 2).

b) As the mountains received this message of judgment, they would later receive one of blessing. (36:1-15.)

3. The mountains were especially centers of idolatrous worship, representing Israel’s apostasy and perversion of the good and holy things of God (cf. 6:13; 18:6, 11-12; 22:9).

a) Shrines dedicated to Canaanite deities were built in groves on the hills and mountains.

b) The Hebrews tried to produce an amalgamation of elements of Canaanite worship and Jehovah worship.

B. Warning of approaching destruction of places of idolatry. (6:3-7.)

1. The words of 6:3 were used in the later message of 36:4 to describe the devastation of Israel’s pagan shrines.

a) These high places characteristically consisted of several basic elements.

- (1) There was an altar for offering sacrifices, usually built of stone or mud brick.
- (2) There was a wooden pole to represent the female goddess of fertility called Asherah.
- (3) There was at least one stone pillar to represent the male deity Baal.
- (4) There was a smaller incense altar with a tent for use in eating sacrificial meals, practicing sacred prostitution (1 Kings 14:24; 2 Kings 21:3; Isa. 57:3-12), and storage of cultic vessels.

b) Ezekiel forecasted the systematic destruction of these worship centers that attempted to combine Jehovah worship with pagan practices.

- (1) What they had made was to be wiped out (v. 6).
- (2) This was significant because Ezekiel was not describing judgment of the heathen but judgment of God's own people.
- (3) He rejected their pagan altars as idolatrous and unclean (cf. ch. 8).

(4) As a result they would know by experiencing judgment that he, Jehovah, is God and that he does not accept adulterated worship (v. 7).

2. This was a clear indication that the reform measures that Josiah initiated in 622 BC had failed.

a) After Josiah's death the people reverted to their former practice of worshiping idols.

b) Ezekiel used his favorite word for idols (39 times, 9 times elsewhere), which may have been created to sound like "detestable things."

c) It also has been associated with "dung."

3. Judgment was described in graphic terms depicting the destruction of the sacrificial altars, incense altars, and idols (vv. 4-6).

a) Whereas these worship centers usually had animal bones scattered about, Ezekiel said that their bone would be scattered around the pagan altars.

b) Through the passage the emphasis is shifted from the mountains, to the worship centers, to the people who are directly responsible.

(1) Their pollution was moral and their religion was filth – the worst kind of pollution.

(2) It is not an oil slick that is a reproach to any people. (Prov. 14:34.)

4. The message reaffirmed the sovereignty of God by his rejection of pagan worship -- you shall know that I am the Lord.

a) The exclusiveness of God is not an easy thing to learn.

(1) It took Pharaoh a 10 lesson correspondence course, and even then he wasn't completely educated.

(2) Israel had more lessons than Egypt and hadn't yet learned it.

b) 72 times in this book the phrase occurs.

(1) Ye Shall Know that I Am Jehovah.

(2) All doubts gone; all idols ripped up and ruined; all iniquity punished and holiness vindicated.

(3) The chariot of God rumbles across the soul of Israel, leaving a trail of broken idols and fully taught corpses.

C. A brief interlude of hope – a repentant remnant will be preserved in exile. (6:8-10.)

1. A word of encouragement and hope followed the hopelessness and despair presented in vv. 3-7.

a) Some people would be spared although they will be scattered among the nations (v. 8).

b) This message, which came before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, revealed that the final destruction would leave a small remnant that would be the hope for the future.

2. When the scattered remnant were among the nations, they would remember God in anticipation of their repentance (v. 9).

a) Remembrance as used here was more than mental recall of the facts but also included the idea of a new openness to God.

b) Idolatry is spoken of elsewhere in the prophets (*e.g.*, Hosea) as spiritual adultery, but was further developed by Ezekiel.

c) Ezekiel saw a future time when a repentant Israel would “know him” again, turn from idolatry, and return to Jehovah (v. 10). (This idea is developed again in 16:59-63; 23:1-49; and 36:1-38.)

D. A mocking lament of the devastation Israel’s idolatry will have caused. (6:11-14.)

1. The three forms of judgment mentioned – sword, famine, and plague – are repeated from 5:1-3, 12.

a) Ezekiel was told to clap his hands, stomp his feet, and cry “Alas” as signs of excitement and emotion used to decry the abominations and idolatrous practices of the Jewish people (v. 11).

b) The three forms of judgment are repeated in v. 12 with the message that the judgment will be all-inclusive and therefore inescapable.

2. Diblah has not been identified with certainty.

a) It may be a reference to Riblah, which is not mentioned elsewhere in the book, but was a border city.

b) Nebuchadnezzar captured Zedekiah and blinded his eyes at Riblah (2 Kings 25:5, 7; Jer. 39:6-7; 52:8-11, 26-27).

3. The closing formula (v. 14) specified the aim of the judgment.

a) This phrase was used throughout the message in chapter 6 and illustrated the longing of the prophet for all people to know the God of Israel as the one true God.

b) The point was that people will know him either through response to his loving attempts of salvation and fellowship or through judgment; God’s preference was

the former.

III. Prophetic Dramas of Judgment in Summary. (7:1-27.)

A. Judgment announced. (7:1-4.)

1. Ezekiel announced that the end had come – the Day of Jehovah's judgment was imminent (vv. 1-2, 7-10, 19.

a) This is an example of prophetic past tense.

b) It proclaimed the absolute certainty of a future event.

2. The end was to come upon all the land – four corners – suggesting that no city would be spared (v. 3).

a) The end of Jerusalem was expanded to encompass the end of Judah.

b) God promised to punish the entire nation.

(1) The end that was upon them was of their own doing – God would feed them on their own ways.

(2) There is in every nation and individual a self-destruct button – sin.

(3) Part of the punishment that God lays on the wicked is to let them have their own way – to give them up (Rom. 1) and permit them to practice without obstacle from him all that their heart desires.

(4) The Jews had asked for, had begged for what God was now about to give them.

3. The purpose of this judgment was to bring a new knowledge of God (v. 4).

a) He never judged people capriciously or for the enjoyment of judging.

b) His goal was always redemptive – to open a way for mercy and grace.

B. Calls for judgment. (7:5-9.)

1. This passage is punctuated by the use of the word “come” (five times in vv. 5-12).

2. This unheard of disaster (lit., “an evil which is one”) is an unprecedented or singular disaster.

3. The doom mentioned in vv. 7 and 10 results in the loss of joy of the mountains – those high places where the fertility rites and harvest celebrations of joy took place would not be filled with cries of anguish and pain.

4. Vv. 8-9 repeat the ideas expressed in vv. 3-4.

a) The fruit of judgment had ripened.

b) The fact that this idea was repeated several times with no response from the people bears testimony to the

deadening power of sin.

(1) It is amazing how easily messages of judgment are forgotten.

(2) The messages must constantly be reinforced.

c) At the conclusion of this section God stressed the redemptive purpose of judgment – then you will know that it is I, the Lord (v. 9).

(1) Judgment often brings renewed interest in spiritual things.

(2) The tragedy is that this usually happens after judgment has befallen a nation or an individual.

(3) Tragedy usually rekindles interest in God.

C. Certainty of judgment. (7:10-13.)

1. After announcing the end had come (vv. 1-4) and stressing the unprecedented nature of this judgment, Ezekiel pointed out that the judgment was imminent, permanent, fixed and irreversible.

a) God would use the Babylonians as the rod of his anger to judge Israel.

b) The rod that blossomed (v. 10) may be a reference to Aaron's rod in Num. 17:8. (The almond rod that

budded suggested God's choice of Aaron as high priest but also was a sign of his displeasure with the arrogance of the people (Num. 17:10-11), who had just witnessed the awesome judgment of Korah (Num 16:1ff.))

2. Buying and selling, like rejoicing and grieving, suggest activities of normal business, social, and personal life.

a) Ezekiel announced the cessation of those normal activities (v. 11).

(1) The people had heard the prophets, but they went about their business, they heard, but they didn't hear.

(2) They half believed, but didn't believe – the judgment was at most for another generation.

b) Divine wrath wiped away all the regular elements of human stability.

(1) There were also overtones of the law of the Sabbath Year (Deut. 15:1-2) and the Jubilee Year (Lev. 25:1-6).

(a) In the Sabbatical Year all slaves were set free, and in the Jubilee Year all property was restored to its original owner.

(b) Land was a sacred trust from God that the

Hebrews had received at the conquest under Joshua.

(c) Therefore property was only sold in cases of extreme need.

(d) Such sales were regarded as temporary and redeemable.

(2) In the day of judgment prophesied by Ezekiel the seller would not recover his land, and the individual judgment of the coming bondage of the exile would not be reversed (v. 13).

c) Material things would be of no value in a time of divine judgment.

(1) Unbridled materialism and secularism that divorces God from human society tends only to intensify judgment.

D. The concluding verses of this message contain three elements to underscore the picture of the total destruction of the nation.

1. Destruction announced. (7:14-18.)

a) The alarm would be sounded, but defense would be useless since the knowledge of the invasion would paralyze and terrorize the populace (v. 14).

b) The three scourges of war previously mentioned –

sword, plague, and famine (cf. 5:12; 6:11-12)) were divided between the city and the country (v. 15).

(1) This was not so much to identify the location of each scourge as it was to proclaim that the entire nation would be affected.

(2) The people would respond like doves mourning in the valleys (v. 16).

(3) They would seek remote hiding places to escape the invading armies.

(4) They would be overwhelmed with the terror, suffering, and shame brought upon them because of their inequities.

c) Limp hands and weak knees describe a complete paralysis of strength and ability to resist the invading army (v. 17).

d) Sackcloth and shaved heads were traditional elements of mourning and appropriate to the contest of judgment (v. 18).

(1) These were not signs that resulted from true repentance, but mourning over the catastrophe of destruction and the resulting famine and plague.

(2) The people were not sorry for their sin so much as they were sorry that they were having to

cope with the discomforts and horrors of the invasion.

2. Uselessness of physical resources. (7:19-22.)

a) Their silver and gold were useless for averting judgment (v. 19).

(1) This was a sobering reality for a materialistic society.

(2) When the invading armies came, the silver and gold would be abandoned like an unclean object, signifying the repulsiveness of materialism.

b) They had misused their jewelry by making and adorning places of worship (v. 20), and it would now be given to foreigners (v. 21).

(1) Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple and took the golden and silver vessels to Babylon where they were profaned in the temple of his pagan gods.

(2) Belshazzar used these same objects as objects of pagan worship and as a means of ridiculing the Hebrews and their God.

(3) Rather than letting the Hebrews profane the temple while pretending to worship, God would profane it by turning it over to the heathen.

c) V. 22 seems to anticipate the departure of God's Spirit from the temple in Jerusalem and the temple's desecration and destruction at the hands of the Babylonians.

(1) Ezekiel carefully chronicled all the basic elements of the sins of the people to show that they deserved the impending judgment of God on the nation.

(2) These elements included pride (7:10, 20, 24), self –confidence (7:14), materialism (7:19), and superficial worship (7:20-22).

3. Fall of Jerusalem announced. (7:23-27.)

a) Ezekiel depicted the violent overthrow of Jerusalem with its inhabitants taken captive.

(1) Chains were a sign of captivity (v. 23).

(2) The kind of chain mentioned was used as a fetter for captives in transport to Babylon (cf. 1 Kings 6:21; Isa. 40:19).

(3) The word for “bloodshed” was literally “judgment of bloodshed” (v. 23), signifying that the captives were guilty of crimes punishable by death.

(4) Violence often characterizes a sinful society as a manifestation of self-inflicted judgment.

b) Capture of houses was part of the warning given by Moses as he described the penalties of disobedience (see Lev. 26:31-32).

(1) The search for comfort and guidance in the midst of the destruction of the nation would be futile, like Saul's attempt to seek counsel from the deceased prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 28:1-5).

(2) Instead of the peace, prosperity, and solidarity that should have characterized Hebrew society, the exile brought pain, loss, and confusion (vv. 24-27).

(a) Neither the prophets, priests, nor elders would be able to make sense of the situation, leaving the people with no direction from their national leaders (cf. Jer. 18:18).

(b) Ezekiel envisioned a time of desperation in which people would return to the usual methods of revelation.

(i) They would seek a vision from a prophet, a teaching of the law from the priests, and counsel from the elders, all to no avail (v. 26).

(ii) Finally, such desperation would be the experience of all, even those at the top

of society (v. 27, cf. “the pride of the mighty,” v. 4).

c) By judging Judah in accordance with the standards and punishments declared to them from the beginning in the Mosaic covenant, the Lord would cause them to recognize him as different from the gods of the nations, a God not to be manipulated or taken for granted, but rather obeyed and trusted wholeheartedly.

Lesson 6: Ezekiel 8 & 9

1. Introduction to Chapter 8

A. *The vision in this chapter occurred 14 months after his first vision in Chapter 1.*

1. 14 months is approximately 420 days. Ezekiel was told to lie on his side for at least 390 days and possibly 430 days (depending on whether the final 40 days is concurrent with or subsequent to the 390 days). Thus, he may have still been lying on his side (at least part of each day) during the events in this chapter.

2. In the intervening weeks since the first vision, Ezekiel had become recognized and respected as a prophet.

3. The elders of the exiled Judeans had apparently come to his house for consultation or to await another message from God.

B. *Ezekiel is at this time caught up in a trance that lasts from 8:2 until 11:24.*

C. *The vision begins with his transportation to Jerusalem. He then sees the same vision of God's chariot that he had seen in the first vision.*

D. *Then in four separate movements he is shown four abominations that are taking place within the temple.*

E. *These visions show that a complete disintegration of the Jewish worship had taken place.*

2. Transported to Jerusalem (8:1-4)

A. *The elders have come to Ezekiel, possibly for assurance. The*

context suggests that Ezekiel may have been reluctant to tell the elders of the judgment that was coming.

1. After all, they aren't bowing down to idols. We learn in 14:1-3 that the idols these elders worshipped were inside their own hearts.

B. In the vision, Ezekiel is taken to Jerusalem and set down at the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north.

1. Note that Ezekiel specifically says that this trip was not an actual trip but was taken in a vision. This seems to suggest that the activities in Chapters 4-5 were actually undertaken since Ezekiel did not say he did them in a vision.
2. There is a stress in these verses on "north."
 - a) The filth in Jerusalem poured out toward the North, and it was as if God followed the stream of garbage back to its source.
 - b) God's judgment in the form of the Babylonian army would also come from the North.

C. The Image of Jealousy had been erected nearby.

1. This image is called an image of jealousy because it provokes God to jealousy.
2. Its description is vague; it cannot be identified with certainty.
3. Some commentators link it with the "queen of heaven" that was denounced by Jeremiah in Jeremiah 7:18 and 44:17-30.

D. "It is remarkable that, despite all the corruptions that existed, Ezekiel should say that the glory of God of Israel was there."

1. Ezekiel may have wanted to stress the difference between the God who belonged in the temple and the deviations that were being practiced there.
2. This may also be an indication that God would stay with His people until the very last moment of their rejection of Him.

E. *The cherubim reappear in verse 4. "They are the protectors of God's holiness; they are his war-wagon!"*

F. *Ezekiel is taken to Jerusalem.*

1. Jerusalem was the city of David. The people of God lived there. God's temple was located there. Jerusalem was therefore the center of truth and purity and a beacon of light to the heathen. Right? Wrong!
2. Jerusalem was a center of rot. It led the nations, but it led them away from God.
3. God wants Ezekiel to know that his own people are driving him from their midst.

3. The Image of Jealousy (8:5-6)

- A. *This image of jealousy blocked the way into God's own house. You could not enter the temple without stumbling over it.***
- B. *Manasseh had put a wooden image of Asherah, the Canaanite goddess, in the house of the Lord (2 Kings 21:7).***
- C. *Although 2 Chronicles 33:15 tells us that Manasseh later removed the image, it must have reappeared because Josiah later had it taken out and burned (2 Kings 23:6).***

D. From Ezekiel's description, one of Josiah's successors must have made another one and set it up by the northern gate.

1. The northern gate was the most honorable of the three gateways because the royal palace was on the north side of the temple and thus the king used the northern gate when he went in to worship.
2. It is called the altar gate in verse 5 because the sacrificial animals were slaughtered 'on the north side of the altar before the Lord.' (Lev. 1:11).

E. "Great abomination" in verse 6 is translated "utterly detestable" in the NIV.

1. One commentator: "A more serious or devastating evaluation is unimaginable than to have one's behavior judged 'utterly detestable' by the Lord of Life."

4. Animal Worship (8:7-13)

A. The exact location of this scene is not identified.

B. It was something that was done in secret, and Ezekiel is told how to gain access to surprise the elders in the very act. Why were they doing this is secret?

1. One commentator said that this "secret" door was a door for hypocrites!
2. Another explanation is that these men were worshipping Egyptian gods, which would have been offensive and possibly illegal under Babylonian rule.

a) If this view is correct, then these men were no doubt

worshipping Egyptian gods in hope that those gods would save them from the Babylonians! We know for a fact that Judah sought alliances with Egypt against the Babylonians.

3. You can almost see the horror spreading across Ezekiel's face as he enters this secret room.

C. *Engraved on the walls were all kinds of creeping things, loathsome beasts, and idols.*

1. The Egyptian, Canaanite, and Babylonian religions all worshiped serpent-deities.

2. No doubt many of these foreign cults were incorporated into the worship for political rather than religious motives.

D. *Ezekiel saw 70 elders engaged in the false worship.*

1. Why 70?

a) This is not the Sanhedrin from the New Testament; it was not around yet.

b) It is a representative number. 7 is the number of perfection and 10 is the number of completion. Their product 70 stresses that this represents the whole group. Also, see Numbers 11:16ff. These 70 elders represent the whole nation.

2. The size of this group indicates that the majority of those left behind were now worshipping the false gods.

a) Only two times in the history of the world have God's people been in the majority on this earth -- at creation and after the flood.

3. The naming of Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan suggests a direct indictment of a man whose family had been prominent in Jerusalem's public life.

a) Shaphan is probably Josiah's secretary-of-state from 2 Kings 22:3.

b) Ahikam, another of Shaphan's sons, was an influential supporter of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26:24).

c) Jaazaniah appears to have been the black sheep of a very worthy family. It would also be an indication to the exiles of the extent of the decline.

4. God tells Ezekiel in verse 12 that he has seen what every man does in his chamber of imagery. What does this mean?

a) Perhaps it means that this vision was typical of what all of the people were doing individually.

b) Or perhaps these chambers were built into the wall of the temple, which fits the context a little better since the focus here is on activities in the temple.

5. Nature Worship (8:14-15)

A. *Ezekiel next sees women weeping for Tammuz.*

B. *Tammuz was a Sumerian god of vegetation who in the popular mythology died and became god of the underworld.*

1. Ishtar was his wife and she went after him into the underworld, which caused the vegetation to die in the summer and winter.

2. The mourning was a longing for the return of earthly abundance.

3. The eventual revival of Tammuz was marked by the return of spring and fertility of the land.
4. The cult associated with him included mourning rituals (which we see here) and licentious fertility rituals celebrating the return of spring.
5. It became very popular in the Near East and Eastern Mediterranean areas, where it was linked with the Greek gods Adonis and Aphrodite.
6. It is also mentioned in Isaiah 17:10f, which refers to the planting of Tammuz-gardens.
7. After the exile, the fourth month of the Hebrew calendar was called Tammuz. It was during that month that it was time to harvest the grapes.

6. **Sun Worship (8:16-18)**

A. The crowning abomination was to take place at the very door of the temple of the Lord.

1. Verse 15 tells us that what Ezekiel is now seeing is a greater abomination than what he had previously seen.
2. The other abominations are said to be "other great abominations" in verses 6 and 13, but this one is said to be greater.
3. This abomination would be particularly horrific to a young and idealistic priest like Ezekiel.

B. The priests were deliberately turning their backs on God.

1. They faced east toward the rising sun.

C. *By its east-west orientation, the Temple lent itself to solar worship, as is indicated by the fact that Josiah in his reformation had to destroy 'horses dedicated to the sun' and 'the chariots of the sun' (2 Kings 23:5, 11).*

1. Hezekiah also dealt with this problem. (2 Chronicles 29:6-7)
2. The events recorded in this chapter show that these were not one time events. Pagan worship had become a regular event in the temple.

D. *Why 25 priests?*

1. First, these men are assumed to be priests because only priests were allowed in the inner court (2 Chronicles 4:9; Joel 2:17). Also, that would explain why this was a greater abomination.
2. The number 25 may represent the entire priesthood. David divided the priesthood into 24 courses (1 Chronicle 24:7-18 and Isaiah 43:28). Those 24 plus the high priest results in 25 priests.

E. *"They put the branch to their nose"?*

1. Perhaps a reference to an obscure ritual. Fire worshipers held bunches of twigs called barsom in their hands as they worshipped the sacred fire. They held the twigs up to their mouths as they prayed.
2. Early Jewish commentators translated it as "they put forth a stench before my nose."
3. One commentator said it may simply mean the people were thumbing their noses at God!

F. *Notice how this chapter stresses that it was the elders of the*

people who were leading this false worship.

1. We should thank God every day for the strong elders we have at this congregation.
2. The biggest problem facing the church today is weak elderships. The other problems can be dealt with if a congregation has strong elders.
3. Another lesson we learn here is that big departures start out as small departures.
 - a) **The pagan worship pictured here began in 1 Kings 11:1-8, where we read that Solomon allowed his pagan wives to build altars to their own gods in Jerusalem.**
 - b) **God had told the people not to intermarry with the nations around them, but Solomon did not listen. We are reading now about the end result of that initial departure from God's word.**

G. In verse 17 God asks Ezekiel if this is a light thing.

1. God appears to be trying to convince Ezekiel of the justice and necessity of the judgment that is coming.
2. We may not like the idea that God's patience can run out, but it can.
3. Isaiah 55:6 ("Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near.")

7. A Modern Tour

A. When God asked Ezekiel if what he saw was "a light thing,"

what might a modern response have been?

1. "Oh yes. It is a light thing because the people have no doubt set aside a corner of the temple in which God was still worshiped."

a) If you start with a vat of sewage and add a spoonful of fine wine, what do you have? A vat of sewage.

b) If you start with a vat of fine wine and add a spoonful of sewage, what do you have? A vat of sewage.

2. "Oh yes. It is a light thing because there is some good in all religions."

a) There is nothing good about a false religion! If you disagree, then reread Chapter 8 and also look at Acts 4:12.

b) We must see false religions as God sees them, not as the world sees them.

B. A Tour Through "Christendom" at Large

1. In addition to twisting the gospel, have some denominations also mixed Christianity with these same false religions that we see in Ezekiel?

2. Sun worship? How many "Christians" read their horoscopes each day?

3. Worship of Tammuz? How many "churches" mix Christianity with New Age practices?

4. Child Sacrifice? How do many of the denominations view abortion?

C. A Tour Through the Lord's Church

1. Where had these abominations in Chapter 8 come from? They had come from the surrounding religions.
2. We all know that the church today is facing a number of problems. Where are those problems coming from? Aren't they coming from the denominations that surround us just as surely as the perversions in Chapter 8 came from the false religions that surrounded Jerusalem? We are bringing many of the problems in from the outside just like the Israelites brought in the false gods!

8. Introduction to Chapter 9

A. The punishment that was pronounced in 8:18 upon the people of Jerusalem is now executed in the vision.

1. The time for talk has ended.

9. Punishment by Slaughter (9:1-7)

A. The seven executioners appear from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, which is the same gate we saw earlier. They are coming from where the image of jealousy stands.

B. Six of the seven have destroying or slaughter weapons in their hands.

1. The word used here is almost identical with the word translated "war-club" in Jeremiah 51:20.

C. Beside them was a man clothed in linen. The linen clothing was a mark of dignity, as befitted a priest (Exodus 28:42) or a messenger of God (Dan. 10:5). He is the one element of mercy in this vision.

1. Linen often denotes the purity and holiness of God.

D. *At his side was an ink-horn. This word translated "ink-horn" denotes a writing case that would have included a pen, an ink-horn, and a wax writing tablet.*

E. *The seven figures enter the inner court and stand waiting beside the bronze altar.*

1. The bronze altar was the altar of burnt offering. See Exodus 27:1-8.

F. *The glory of the God of Israel moves from the cherubim (verse 3) to the threshold of the house.*

1. The cherubim were in the holy of holies. This movement of the glory of God was the preliminary movement before the final departure of God from his temple in 11:23.
2. From this new vantage point, God gives instructions, first to the recording angel in verse 4 and then to his six companions in verses 5-6.

G. *The mark that was to be put on men's foreheads is "taw," the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet.*

1. Early Christian commentators were quick to point out that in the oldest Hebrew script the letter was written as X, a sloped cross.
2. Ellison: "This is one of the many examples where the Hebrew prophets spoke better than they knew."
3. Others have noted that the same mark is used elsewhere as a signature (Job 31:35) and was used as an asterisk for marginal notations in some of the Dead Sea scrolls. (This latter usage has

caused some to conclude that the Qumran community was a Judeo-Christian group.)

H. *Those who have the mark are not punished.*

1. That some people in the city received this mark tells us that there are a number of righteous people in Judah.
2. John uses the same symbolism in Revelation 7:3, where the mark is referred to as a seal of God.

I. *The punishment is selective, which is in keeping with the principle of 18:4 that "the soul that sins shall die."*

1. But what about the children? One commentator says that this stresses the severity of the judgment and is not an indication of what God thinks of babies.
2. Indeed, one reason for this judgment was that the people had been sacrificing their own children to their false gods. See Jeremiah 32:35 ("nor did it come into my mind that they should do this abomination").
3. Also, there is an important difference between suffering due to your own punishment and suffering due to the punishment of others.

a) All suffering isn't punishment! The faithful in the city suffered greatly when the Babylonians came, but they were not be punished.

b) But if both groups suffered, what difference does it make what group you were in? A big difference! The difference is whether they died in the Lord or out of the Lord.

c) Children died in the flood without being punished by the flood.

J. *The basis for exemption from the slaughter was having a deep concern ("men who sigh and groan" in verse 4) over the city's apostasy.*

1. This was the same attitude that Amos had looked for among the luxury-loving revellers of Jerusalem and Samaria. Their sin was that they 'did not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.' (Amos 6:6)

2. God was not looking for an outward sign, but for an inward attitude -- a passionate concern for God and for His people.

a) As we look around us at the state the church is in today, what is our attitude? Do we "sigh and groan" over the false teaching that is coming into the church? Do we care?

3. Without this mark, judgment followed just as it had for those households in Egypt without blood on their doorposts during the first Passover.

4. The first to be slain were "the elders who were before the house."

a) Their slaughter [in the temple] meant defilement of the holy place, but that was a small price to pay for the vindication of God's name.

10. The Prophet's Plea and God's Response (9:8-11)

A. *The phrase "while they were smiting" in verse 8 is a chilling statement!*

B. *Ezekiel appeals to God not to destroy "all the residue of*

Israel."

1. Ezekiel, like God (18:23), had no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

C. The appeal is not successful. Israel's sin had gone too far for any intercession. "I will have no pity" (verse 10).

D. One commentator notes:

1. "For all Ezekiel's outward appearance of severity, beneath the hard shell there was a heart that felt deeply for and with his people. He did not relish the message of judgment that he had to give, still less the reality that followed when the message was rejected. This was one of the secrets of his greatness. Though his forehead was made as hard as flint (3:9), his heart was always a heart of flesh (36:26)."

E. When the judgment came, the people blamed it on God. They said it was because Jehovah had forsaken the land (verse 9).

1. They may have thought God was missing or may have even hoped that he was missing, but he was not missing. He was right there punishing Judah for its iniquity!

F. The chapter ends with a report from the man in linen that he had done what God had commanded.

G. Chapters 8 and 9 teach us some very important lessons.

1. Our worship service is very important. The pattern for our worship is found in the word of God. God wants us to follow that pattern -- without addition or subtraction.
2. There is nothing good about false religions. They are utterly

detestable to God, and they should be to us as well.

3. Toleration may have become the greatest virtue of our own modern age, but it is not one of God's attributes. He does not tolerate sin, and neither should we.

4. God's people should love his church and be concerned about his church.

Ezekiel -- Lesson Seven

Chapters 10 - 11

1. The doomed city. Chapter 10.

1. *The appearance of God's chariot throne (10:1).*

1. This is the fourth time Ezekiel has mentioned the throne of God.

1. It is an important thing to him as it was to John in the book of Revelation.

2. He speaks of the likeness of the throne which lets us know that he is aware of the visionary nature of what he is seeing.

1. Ex. 24:10 -- And they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the very heaven for clearness.

2. Blue has often been used for royalty and heavenly purity; perhaps that is the thrust here.

2. *The man in linen and his second commission (10:2).*

1. This is the servant who faithfully carried out God's work of mercy in the last chapter.

2. He is now chosen to get coals from under the cherub and cast them on the city that it might be burnt.

3. His obedience is evidenced from the fact that "he went in my sight."

1. From his choosing to carry out this act of justice we learn

that justice is not despised by mercy.

2. He who was faithful in administering mercy has no reluctance when he is asked to administer chastisement.

1. Learn: It's much easier to be the "good guy" and leave all the unpleasant duties to someone else.
2. Mercy mustn't despise the demands of justice or else it has ceased to be mercy.

3. *The commission in execution (10:2-8).*

1. The cherubim again (10:2-3).

1. Coals of fire are not always punitive (See Isa. 6:6), but here they are clearly a sign of coming judgment.

1. Jerusalem is to suffer as Sodom suffered (Gen. 19:24).
2. The cherubim are standing by watching because they are keenly interested in vindication of the holiness of God.

2. The glory of Jehovah and the cloud (10:4).

1. The whole inner court and the temple are filled with dense clouds due to the presence of the glory of the Lord.

2. God often appears in a cloud; run a concordance and you will be surprised.

3. The awesome sound of the cherubim (10:5).

1. The awesomeness of the cherubim is emphasized by the sound of their wings that could be heard from a great distance.

2. It was a booming sound, deep and resonant, in keeping with the power of God which is stressed in the use of the term "Almighty."

4. The man in linen receives the coals and leaves to execute his commission (10:6-8).

1. He wasn't presumptuous -- he waited by one of the wheels until the coals were given to him.

2. Mercy and judgment agree together that Jerusalem must go under.

3. Again the obedience of the man in linen is emphasized -- he took it and went out.

5. Two lessons to be learned from this scene in the vision.

1. The judgment of God cannot be distinguished from the glory of God.

1. The same burning coals that threaten such destruction upon Jerusalem are the same burning coals that are a part of the glory and purity of God's throne.

2. God's burning purity may hold either threat or promise.

2. The judgment of God marked the departure of God.

1. There is clearly a movement of the chariot-throne of God which accelerates as the vision continues.

2. The movement of God is a part of the ominous judgment, for the judgment of a God who is present is surely preferable to the absence of God.

- 1. The absence of God is the ultimate horror.*
- 2. This first step in God's evacuation of his temple is forced upon him.*
- 3. He does not want to leave; he is evicted by an evil people.*

4. The cherubim described again (10:9-22).

1. There is little new in this description (vv. 9-12 are almost identical with 1:15-18).

1. The creatures described in ch. 1 are said to be cherubim.

2. Repetition is for the sake of emphasis -- Ezekiel is being told of the terror that is to come (and is thus emboldened to speak), and we are being told that the judgment is being carried out rationally and with forethought.

3. The repetition delays the climax of the vision as a whole and builds up the tension.

4. v. 14 substitutes the face of a cherub for that of an ox.

1. The reason for the substitution is not clear.

2. Rabbinic interpreters explained that the ox face was removed at Ezekiel's request because he associated it with the golden calf of Exod. 32.

3. Whatever the reason he made the substitution, he tells us that the faces he saw were the same that he saw in chapter 1 (v. 22).

2. The Lord, who has been standing at the threshold of the temple, now returns to his "seat" above the cherubim.

1. He is ready to leave.

2. The cherubim rise from the earth and take off.

1. This is one of the passages that says that the cherubim are the chariot of God.
2. 1 Chronicles 28:18 -- and for the altar of incense refined gold by weight; and gold for the pattern of the chariot, even the cherubim, that spread out their wings, and covered the ark of the covenant of Jehovah.
3. Psalm 18:10 -- And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly; Yea, he soared upon the wings of the wind.

3. This move to the east gate anticipated the departure from the temple complex and from the city that follows in 11:22-23.

1. God withdraws from unholy worship.
2. We cannot come before the Lord at any time and in any manner that we choose.

2. Political and moral corruption -- the vision of the pollution of the temple that began in chapter 8 concludes with a final view of judgment, a glimmer of hope, and the departure of God from his sanctuary, the city, and the land. Chapter 11.

1. *Treason against God taught by the leaders (11:1-4).*

1. The leaders in rebellion (11:1).

1. The cherubim carried Jehovah to the east gate (10:19).

2. The Spirit now carries Ezekiel there, where he saw twenty-

five leaders of the nation, two of whom were sufficiently prominent to name -- Jaazaniah and Pelatiah. We know nothing of them, apart from their existence, other than what is revealed by Ezekiel.

1. One commentator reported that archeological discoveries in the city of David have yielded over 250 clay seals used on official documents from the period just prior to the fall of Jerusalem.
2. They were preserved because they were burned when the building in which they were housed was destroyed, probably in the destruction of 586 BC.
3. The names of both Jaazaniah and Pelatiah appeared in this archive of seals of royal officials.
4. In addition to these, the name Jeremiah and the seal of Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch, the son of Neriah, were found.

2. Their rebellion pointed out (11:2).

1. They have gone down in God's eternal record as men who plotted treason against God.

2. They are leaders in Israel, but their leading is away from and in opposition to God.

3. God will not hold such leaders guiltless.

1. They were devisers of iniquity.
2. They took pains to plan it all out.

3. Their rebellion defined (11:3).

1. Possible meanings of their advice.

1. They are asking the people to pay no attention to people like Jeremiah who urged submission to the Babylonians.

1. Jeremiah taught the people at home and in captivity that submission to Babylon was not only the way to salvation -- it was the will of God (see, e.g., Jer. 29:4ff.

2. In ch. 17 God condemns Zedekiah for not remaining submissive to Nebuchadnezzar.

3. In essence, they were saying this is not a time to build houses, the city is cooking and we are the meal, fortify against the Babylonians. (Compare vv. 7, 11, and ch. 21:21.)

2. ASV footnote -- the time is near to build houses -- the false leaders are urging the people to despise the words of a Babylonian invasion, but it is difficult to harmonize this view with the city as a caldron.

4. Their rebellion to be denounced (11:4).

2. Moral wickedness outlined and punishment announced (11:5-13).

1. Murder and oppression denounced (11:5-7).

1. Not only have they said it, God knows what they have been thinking.

2. The leaders are murderers; the city is a caldron, but flesh in it is the people whom they have slain.

3. They will not be permitted to die in the city; they cannot point to their assessment of things as being even partly correct.

2. The threat and the irony (11:8-11).

1. What they had feared and sought to fortify against, God would bring upon them.

2. They would not die peacefully with loved ones around them; strangers will stand around and enjoy the torture before the dying.

3. It is bad enough to die in torture, it is even worse when one dies without God and faces the future torment of judgment.

3. The justice of the punishment proclaimed (11:12).

1. Their wickedness consisted in doing the things of the nations round about.

2. Ch. 5:7 says that they didn't do the things of the nations round about.

3. Ezek. 16:47 resolves the apparent conflict -- Yet hast thou not walked in their ways, nor done after their abominations; but, as if that were a very little thing, thou wast more corrupt than they in all thy ways.

4. The death of Pelatiah and another protest from the prophet (11:13).

1. As the vision proceeded, Pelatiah drops dead.

2. Ezekiel protests to the Lord as he has done before (9:8); his love for his people shines through once more.

3. The self righteous denounced and the remnant assured (11:14-21).

1. *The self-righteousness of the Judeans (11:14-15).*

1. The only thing that the false prophets (in Judea and Babylon) all agreed on was that Ezekiel and Jeremiah were both liars.
2. They each had their own school of thought and rejected that of the other.

1. Those in Jerusalem espoused the position that those already taken into captivity got what they deserved.

2. Another, set forth here, is their self-righteousness.

1. This corruption is often more destructive than any other.
2. It is not easy to tear people away from their self-righteousness.
3. Often it is not a man's acknowledged weaknesses that draw him away from the Lord.
4. Often it is his strengths that lead him to feel independent and self-sufficient.

2. *The righteous remnant assured (11:16-20).*

1. It is true that God has sent the present captives away from Jerusalem and the sanctuary, but here he assures them that he will be a sanctuary to them.

1. What a swap -- a temple in the middle of perversion for the living God himself; the Judeans had the bricks and mortar, but the captives had the Lord himself.

2. We are not to conclude that there will be no wicked ones when the promises are fulfilled; v. 21 makes it clear that there will be.

3. V. 18 does not speak of all the people, but of those who have the heart to put away detestable things.

2. V. 19 makes clear that it is God who gives the new heart and the new spirit.

1. Jer. 31:33-34 -- ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Jehovah: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: ³⁴and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.

2. Jer. 24:7 -- ⁷And I will give them a heart to know me, that I am Jehovah: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.

3. Jer. 29:13-14 -- ¹³And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. ¹⁴And I will be found of you, saith Jehovah, and I will turn again your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith Jehovah; and I will bring you again unto the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.

4. Here the stress is on the divine initiative.

5. Ch. 18:30-32 makes it clear that human cooperation is involved -- ³⁰Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord Jehovah. Return ye, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. ³¹Cast away from you all your transgressions, wherein

ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? ³²For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord Jehovah: wherefore turn yourselves, and live.

6. The fact that God makes the first move toward his sinful creatures is taught throughout the scripture -- 2 Cor. 5:17ff; Rom. 5:6ff; 1 Jo. 4:19.

7. God is the one who initiates moral reformation.

1. Phillipians 2:12-13 -- ¹²So then, my beloved, even as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure.

2. Hebrews 13:20-21 -- ²⁰Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of an eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, ²¹make you perfect in every good thing to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

3. Will God give the fish water and the bird air, and not equip his children to wage war against the destroyer of the soul?

8. Perhaps the new spirit and the new heart are different, but it may be two ways of looking at the same thing.

1. In any event, God will take the stony heart from them and make them reachable.

2. John 6:44-45 -- ⁴⁴No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me.

3. God still does the drawing, but through the teaching of the word.

1. The scripture knows nothing of Calvinism's limited atonement and irresistible grace.

2. The scripture knows of God's calling all men, but it knows nothing of his calling some with a calling that will not enable them to come, while calling others with a calling that they cannot resist. Matt. 23:37; John 5:40.

4. Because of the hardness of the hearts of God's creatures, the wonder is not that so few are saved, but that so many are.

3. The impenitent threatened (11:21).

3. *The Lord leaves the city and the vision ends (11:22-25).*

1. Away from the temple and away from the city the Lord moves out.

2. God endures so much for so long but finally, because justice demands it, brings judgment to those whom he loves.

3. Ezekiel is "brought back" to Babylon (11:24).

1. He has seen all there is to see of Judea -- the land he loves and misses.

2. He is taken back to Babylon and tells us that the vision ended.

4. Ezekiel tells what he saw and heard (11:25).

1. He spoke and did not hold his peace.

2. He spoke only what the Lord told him to speak.

3. He told all that the Lord had told him and not just some of the favorable things, e.g., the marking or sealing of the righteous.

Lesson 8: Ezekiel 12

1. Oracles About the Sins of Israel and Jerusalem

A. *The book of Ezekiel has so far dealt mainly with the message that Jerusalem is doomed.*

1. Ezekiel has proclaimed this message by symbolic action, in vision, and by spoken oracle.
2. He has given the justification for the fate of Jerusalem by describing the iniquities that brought the judgment about.

B. *Chapter 12 starts with two more enacted messages, and then begins a series of actions and oracles dealing with objections raised by Ezekiel's listeners to the horrible news of Jerusalem's impending doom.*

1. The people still hoped for any early return to Palestine from their exile. They viewed the continued preservation of Judah and Jerusalem as signs of security.

a) Although physically they lived far away from Jerusalem, their hearts still lived in that corrupt and doomed city.

2. In the next few chapters, God through Ezekiel will deal with some of the objections and arguments that are raised against Ezekiel's message.

a) First, what Ezekiel is predicting has not come to pass and thus will never come to pass. (Chapter 12)

b) Second, if judgment is to come, it will not be in our lifetime. (Chapter 12)

c) Third, Ezekiel is just one prophet. There are a lot of other prophets that are predicting just the opposite --- peace and prosperity and a swift return from exile. (Chapter 13)

d) Fourth, the leaders in Judah were the ones who were responsible. If there is going to be a judgment, it will be on them. (Chapter 14)

e) Fifth, if there is a danger of judgment, then all we need is a righteous person to intercede with God and He will then change his mind. (Chapter 14)

f) Sixth, how could Ezekiel possibly believe that God would judge his own chosen people? He would never do that. (Chapters 15-16)

g) Seventh, the real culprits here are our forefathers and it would not be fair for God to judge us for something they did. (Chapter 17)

h) Eighth, if judgment is really coming, there is nothing we can do to stop it. It doesn't matter whether we repent. (Chapter 18)

i) Ninth, Zedekiah can be trusted. He will triumph over Babylon. (Chapter 19)

3. They had plenty of excuses and objections! Do any of them sound familiar?

2. Enacted Message: Going Into Exile (12:1-16)

A. *Ezekiel is always very careful to give specific dates for his visions and oracles, yet no date is given here.*

1. From this we can assume that these messages were given very shortly after the events of Ezekiel 8-11.

B. *Ezekiel is told to act out the exile for all to see.*

1. The action consisted of two parts:
 - a) By day, Ezekiel collected the the bare essentials for the long journey into exile. The word "prepare" suggests that he was to make a "big deal" out of getting ready.
 - b) Then, as evening came, he dug through the wall of his house (as though making a secret getaway) and went out into the night carrying his bundle on his shoulders.
 - c) "From thy place to another place" indicates that the prophet had marked out a specific walk for himself.
 - d) He is to walk "as when men go forth into exile" -- with gloom, with a slow pace, with a defeated air, with slumped shoulders. Much different from how men walk when they are returning from exile!
 - e) Verse 6 tells us that he was to cover his eyes as he did all of this.

C. *Again, we ask, why did Ezekiel act out these messages?*

1. First, he was competing with false prophets.
 - a) The false prophets were unlikely to go to the extremes to which Ezekiel went.
 - b) These actions probably served to further distinguish Ezekiel from those who proclaimed messages of peace and

safety.

2. Second, it was a very good way of spreading his message.
 - a) **No doubt, his strange activities were becoming a real source of conversation among the exiles.**
 - b) **One commentator notes that Ezekiel "soon developed as good a system of communication as any in Tel Abib."**
 - c) **This is a lesson for us today. The best way to get the world's attention is to be different from the world. Christians are called to swim upstream.**
3. Third, it shows the extent that God was willing to go to so that people would understand what was coming and why it was coming.
 - a) **You don't understand what I told you? Okay, let me act it out for you...**

D. *Ezekiel 12:2-16*

1. Verses 2-3 speaks of a rebellious house that has eyes to see but does not see and that has ears to hear but does not listen.
 - a) **This may be an allusion to the messages that Ezekiel has already given the exiles, but which have not been heeded.**
 - (1) They had been listening and watching Ezekiel for over a year now, but they still did not believe that judgment was imminent.
 - (2) Ezekiel had been warned. Compare Ezekiel 2:5. (And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them.)

(3) Jeremiah had the same problem. Compare Jeremiah 5:21. (Hear this now, O foolish people, Without understanding, Who have eyes and see not, And who have ears and hear not.)

(4) They were willfully blind and deaf to God's message. Yet God very graciously continued to try and get his message across.

b) God now speaks to Ezekiel and expresses the hope that perhaps the people will now understand. But even if they don't, God's plan will continue. In fact, sometimes it is part of God's plan that people who are already hardened NOT understand and heed his message (or at least not immediately).

(1) Compare Isaiah 6:9-10. (And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. 10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.)

(2) Jesus quoted this passage in Matthew 13:13-15 and said that it explains why he spoke in parables.

c) That your words may be ignored is never an excuse for not uttering the words.

d) Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, had to be reminded that it was always possible that some might understand.

e) Also, as one commentator noted, "even though the result may still be negative, the obligation to speak is still there, if only to justify the hearer's condemnation."

f) God tells us in 2 Timothy 4:2 to "Preach the Word!" Jesus said in John 12:32, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men

unto me." He said in John 6:44 that no man can come to him unless the Father draws him. The next verse tells us how God draws men --- through His word.

g) We preach the word and then He draws men through the proclamation of His word. When we start trying to draw men apart from the word, we are telling God that His word just isn't good enough anymore! We can do it all so much better! If the word doesn't work, then what we need is entertainment!

h) Many of our problems would go away if we just kept our respective roles straight! Ezekiel is a good example. Proclaim the word as God commands. His word will then have the effect that He desires.

2. The "wall" in verses 5-7 is the wall of a house. A different Hebrew word is used when referring the wall of a city. (The area in which the exiles lived was probably not surrounded by any city walls.)

a) This description gives us a glimpse of the life of the exiles. They must have now been living in typical Babylonian dwellings built of sun-dried bricks.

(1) Compare Ezekiel 8:1 (And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in mine house) and Jeremiah 29:5 (Build ye houses, and dwell in them).

b) Archeologists tells us that these bricks could have been removed by hand (verse 7), but not without effort.

c) What does this message depict?

(1) It may depict the difficulties of escape from Jerusalem.

(2) More likely it depicts the attempt by Zedekiah to breach the walls and escape the besieged city.

(a) *Compare 2 Kings 25:4 (And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain.)*

(b) *Compare Jeremiah 39:4 (And it came to pass, that when Zedekiah the king of Judah saw them, and all the men of war, then they fled, and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, by the gate betwixt the two walls: and he went out the way of the plain.)*

3. Verses 8-16 provide the meaning of these symbolic actions.

a) Ezekiel received this explanation "in the morning" after he had performed the actions.

(1) This indicates that Ezekiel himself did not know the details of what he was doing while he was doing it.

(2) Do you wonder how God would have reacted if Ezekiel had just all on his own decided to improve on God's plan?

(a) *"I know that God said to dig through a wall, but this would be much more dramatic if I climbed out of an upper window and went down a rope."*

(b) *We (like Ezekiel) must not tamper with God's plans and patterns. We are in no position to improve on God's plans. Our role is to follow the pattern, not to come up with our own pattern.*

(c) *Moses goes into elaborate detail about the tabernacle and its furnishings. Why was it so important that he follow God's pattern*

so exactly? We find out in Hebrews 8:5. Moses made everything "according to the pattern" because what he made was a "copy and shadow of the heavenly things."

b) Ezekiel's actions were a sign that additional exiles were going to be coming to Babylon.

(1) Since all of Ezekiel's listeners had participated in an exile themselves, they should have known exactly what Ezekiel was showing them.

(2) Yet verse 9 tells us they still asked him what it all meant. Why?

(a) *They may have wondered whether Ezekiel meant that they would be sneaking out of Babylon and returning to the Palestine. That hope is soon shattered.*

(b) *One commentator notes that the question "what doest thou?" in verse 9 may have been made in a mocking tone rather than as an honest question.*

c) These verses confirm that Ezekiel's actions were prophetic of what was to happen to King Zedekiah, who is the "prince in Jerusalem" mentioned in verse 10.

(1) Note the use of the word "burden." This was a weighty oracle. God did not enjoy giving it. Ezekiel did not enjoy hearing it. Ezekiel did not enjoy proclaiming. But proclaim it he did.

(2) Note the use of the word "prince" rather than "king." Recall our discussion in Lesson 2 regarding Jehoiachin (the real king in exile) and Zedekiah (the puppet king in Jerusalem).

(3) These verses tell us that Zedekiah would flee the city in the dead of night.

(4) What is meant by the phrase "he shall cover his face" in verse

12?

(a) *It may indicate that Zedekiah would wear a disguise as he fled. The Septuagint follows this view, translating the verse "he shall cover his face, so that he may not be seen by eye."*

(b) *It may instead refer to the blinding of Zedekiah by his captors at Riblah. (This event is very clearly referred to in verse 13 -- "yet he shall not see it.")*

(c) *Recall from Lesson 2 that Zedekiah's sons were killed before his eyes and then he was blinded and carried off back to Babylon, where he died. Ezekiel told the people about it before it ever happened.*

(5) JOSEPHUS [Antiquities, 10.7] reports that Ezekiel sent a copy of this prophecy to Zedekiah. The prince, however, fancying a contradiction between Ezekiel 12:13; "he shall not see Babylon," and Jeremiah 24:8,9, declaring he should be carried to Babylon, believed neither.

4. Verse 13 tells us that Zedekiah had more than the armies of Nebuchadnezzar arrayed against him. He also had God against him.

a) The failure of his escape plan and his capture and blinding by the Babylonians were God's doings.

b) God is pictured here as a hunter. ("I will spread my net...he shall be caught in my snare.")

(1) Compare Hosea 7:12. (When they shall go, I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven.)

(2) Babylon was God's net!

5. Verse 14 tells us that all of the armies and helpers of the prince

are scattered with the sword, and verse 15 tells us that their experiences would teach them what they otherwise might never have learned --- that "I am the Lord."

a) One commentator: "What men fail to appreciate in prosperity, they will occasionally learn through adversity."

6. Verse 16 tells us that God would allow a few to escape so that they could "declare all their abominations among the Gentiles wherever they go."

a) Their confession would show that Jerusalem had fallen as a punishment by God rather than because God was unable to save it from the Babylonians.

b) This latter notion was very common in the ancient Near East. Each nation had a patron deity. If a nation suffered defeat in battle or suffered from famine or disease, it meant that its god was incapable of protecting them.

c) To make it very clear that such was not the case here, this remnant is to declare the reason for the judgment to the surrounding nations.

d) Ezekiel was very concerned with God's reputation among the heathen nations. God here tells Ezekiel that those nations would know "I am the Lord."

3. Enacted Message: The Terror of Jerusalem (12:17-20)

A. *The second enacted message is very brief. It simply involves how Ezekiel was to eat the rations that were allocated to him in 4:9-17.*

1. Ezekiel is to quiver and tremble while he eats and drinks.

2. He is to put on a show of fearfulness and terror and then explain it as depicting the frightening violence and destruction that were to come.
3. The Hebrew word for "people" in verse 19 ("people of the land") refers to the peasant population in Judah as distinct from the ruling classes.

B. Verse 19 tells us that all of this would come about "on account of the violence of all those who dwell in the land."

1. The sufferings to come on the people are attributed directly to the sufferings that they had inflicted on others.
2. Violence breeds violence. We reap what we sow. Our society celebrates violence -- on TV, in the movies, in video games -- and we wonder why we live in such a violent society.
3. If you want to know God's views on violence, a good place to start is with the prophets. God tells Ezekiel here that this judgment is coming on account of the violence in the land. Both Israel and Judah had filled the land with violence:

a) God told Ezekiel in 8:17 that Judah had filled the land with violence.

b) Jeremiah 22:17 tells us about Judah and King Jehoiakim: "But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it."

c) Micah 2:1-2 tells us more about Judah: "Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power

of their hand. 2 And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage."

d) Amos 3:10 tells us about Israel: "For they know not to do right, saith the LORD, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces."

4. Two Popular Sayings Corrected (12:21-28)

A. *What begins in verse 21 is a group of oracles that continue through 14:11 and relate to the problem of true and false prophets.*

1. This was a problem for nearly all of the Old Testament prophets, and especially for men like Ezekiel and Jeremiah who were telling the people things the people did not want to hear.

a) Compare 2 Timothy 4:3 (For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.)

b) Compare Jeremiah 5:31 (The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?)

2. The struggle between Jeremiah and Hananiah in Jeremiah 28 is a perfect example.

a) The two men were proclaiming contradictory messages, each seemingly from God.

b) The listeners were unable to know who to listen to.

(1) We should give them credit at least for recognizing that both

messages could not be true. In our modern society, we are raising an entire generation who have no problem with contradictory ideas bouncing around inside their heads. ("I know that baptism is essential for salvation, but I certainly don't think the unbaptized are lost." --- That statement was made to me by a preacher with a Masters degree in theology from ACU.)

(2) The tests in Deuteronomy 18:22 and 13:1-3 did not help.

(a) *Deuteronomy 18:22 (When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.)*

(b) *Deuteronomy 13:1-3 (If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, 2And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; 3Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.)*

(3) The first test could not yet be tested because the time of fulfillment was too far distant and the second test did not apply to the messages involved here.

c) Eventually Jeremiah announced a death prophecy against Hananiah in Jeremiah 28:16 that came to pass in verse 17, thus showing (very convincingly!) that Jeremiah's message was the true one.

B. *Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, had a depressing message to deliver.*

1. Ezekiel is an example for us today: No one is going to pay any attention to the good news, until they understand the bad news.

a) But Ezekiel was negative. Doesn't that mean he was unloving? No! The MOST UNLOVING thing that a person can do is to tell someone that he is all right with God when in fact the exact opposite is true. Nothing we can do is more unloving than that.

2. But don't preachers who deliver the bad news along with the good news sometimes get shown the door? Yes, and it doesn't just happen to the preachers!

a) A recent issue of World magazine included an article about a new "mega-church" in Los Angeles called the Agape Church. On one Sunday there were 1500 members singing "praise songs" led by a 160 member choir. And what is so strange about that? Well, the Agape church "makes no pretension of being Christian at all." Instead, as the "pastor" explained, they combine "new thought" with "ancient wisdom."

b) The author of the article wrote: "The New Age movement has discovered the church growth movement. Or perhaps religious entrepreneurs are realizing that Christ, as He said, is the ultimate stumbling block, an obstacle to growth in this new cultural climate."

c) Jesus said in John 14:6 that he was the way, the truth, and the life and that no one could come to the Father but by him. That does not go over very well in our modern society.

d) It used to be that when Jesus made people uncomfortable they would have to work to somehow explain away what he had said. (He didn't mean that, or he really never said that.) The Agape church came up with a new solution! Just show Jesus the door and carry on with your

praise songs and your choir, but without all that negativity! If Jesus is an obstacle to church growth, then we will just have to get rid of him!

e) One of the most comforting verses to me in the Bible is Romans 3:4 -- "Let God be true, but every man a liar." Truth is not subjective! Jesus is lord of lords and king of kings regardless of what the world thinks. The world may think that truth is some subjective creation of man, but it is not. Man is like a howling dog that thinks it howls the sun up each day -- but that sun is going to come up regardless of what that dog does!

C. *Ezekiel's listeners could ignore him in at least two ways:*

1. They could point to Deut. 18:22 and say that what Ezekiel predicted had not yet happened, so he must be a false prophet.
2. Or, they could determine that the fulfillment was a long way off and thus his message had no relevance to their lives.
3. Ezekiel now deals with each of these attitudes.

D. *In verse 22, Ezekiel confronts a clever slogan that was being used by the people: "Time passes, but no vision ever comes to anything."*

1. The Hebrew version consists of four words: "(They-lengthen) (the-days) (and-it-dies) (every-vision.)"
2. "A memorable slogan can wield tremendous influence, for good as well as for evil."
3. This same attitude had arisen before.

a) (Isaiah 5:19) "That say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!"

b) (Zephaniah 1:12) And it shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.'

4. Mockers may frequent appearances throughout the Scriptures. Yet, they never seem to have the last mock.

a) (Jeremiah 20:7) "I am in derision daily; Everyone mocks me."

b) (Hebrews 11:36) "And others had trial of cruel mockings..."

c) (Jeremiah 17:15) Behold, they say unto me, Where is the word of the LORD? let it come now.

d) (Amos 5:18) "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light."

e) My personal favorite is found in 2 Kings 2:23-25. (I will let you read that one for yourself, but with one word of warning: When you meet up with Elisha in Heaven, don't make any bald jokes!)

E. *God's reply in verses 23-25 also comes in the form of a four word slogan: "(They-draw-near) (the-days) (and-the-word-of) (every-vision)."*

1. God creates his own slogan! He tells the people that the days

are near when every vision will be fulfilled.

2. The Hebrew term "word" in this verse is used in the sense of fulfillment.

3. This is the nature of God's word -- it does not return to him empty.

a) Compare Isaiah 55:11 (So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.)

b) Compare Hebrews 4:12 (For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.)

c) God's word is a living word that goes forth with all of the power and authority of the God who utters it.

4. The fulfillment of God's word would be the death of all the catchy slogans and the false prophecies that produced smooth or flattering messages.

a) The use of the term "divination" in verse 24 suggests that the false prophets may have used mechanical means (such as lots or augury) to obtain their oracles.

5. And when will all of this happen? "In your days, O rebellious house!" (verse 25)

a) It was only because of God's grace that He had not disciplined them earlier. He had waited so that Israel might

change her mind and return to him. Instead, they strayed further away.

b) "In your days" means in your lifetime. Compare Matthew 24:34, which speaks of a later judgment against Jerusalem that would come to pass in the lifetime of those listening.

6. These verses remind me of the "famous last words" we often hear.

a) God will never punish us! God will never judge us!

b) "They couldn't hit an elephant at this dist..." -- The last words of General John Sedgwick spoken while looking over the parapet at enemy lines during the Battle of Spotsylvania in 1864.

c) "Lady, God himself couldn't sink this ship!" -- A steward speaking to a boarding passenger on the Titanic.

F. *Verse 26-28 deal with a second attitude.*

1. Verse 27 -- The vision he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.

2. This attitude is slightly different, but the answer is the same.

3. It is less skeptical than the first attitude in that it does not deny the truth of the prophecies, but relegates them to a far distant time.

4. God's answer is that the time for fulfillment is at hand. There will be no more delay.

5. These attitudes are still with us today. There are two broad schools of thought among those outside of Christ.

a) The first says that judgment is just a pipe-dream of religious fanatics. There will be no judgment.

b) The second says that judgment is so far off that there is no need to prepare for it now.

6. Compare:

a) (2 Peter 3:3-4) 3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, 4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

7. The very long-suffering of God that ought to lead men to repentance is instead made an argument against His word.

a) (Ecclesiastes 8:11) "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

b) (Amos 6:3) "Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near."

5. Conclusion -- Lessons for Today

A. *We must continue to proclaim God's word even if we are ignored, mocked, or disbelieved.*

B. *If we sow violence, we will reap violence.*

1. (Hosea 8:7) "For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind."

2. (Galatians 6:7) "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for

whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

3. (Matthew 26:52) "All who take the sword will perish by the sword."

C. *That judgment has not yet occurred does not mean it will never occur or that it is a long way off.*

1. (Matthew 24:44) "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

2. (2 Peter 3:9) "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

D. *Beware of preachers who say only what their listeners want to hear -- who say peace, peace when there is no peace.*

1. (Jeremiah 5:30-31) "An astonishing and horrible thing Has been committed in the land: 31 The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?"

Ezekiel -- Lesson Nine

Chapters 13 -14

1. False Prophets Denounced (Ch. 13). (In chapter 12 Ezekiel spoke against the false security that led them to think that judgment was not imminent. They had received encouragement in this position by the visions and divinations of false prophets. Now Ezekiel delivers God's denunciations against these prophets.)

1. *The Men (13:1-16).*

1. The indictment and the description (13:1-7).

1. Ezekiel was instructed to charge the prophets to listen to the Lord's word, not to their own hearts, because judgment ("woe") was about to fall upon them because of their foolish ways. (13:2-3.)

2. He doesn't deny them their title, but he denounces them for the deleterious effect their empty-headed pronouncements have on the hearers.

3. Ezekiel delineates the characteristics of the false prophets that brought this judgment upon them (13:4-7), before delivering the judgment itself. (13:8-16.)

1. They are foolish.

1. *Ezekiel uses a strong term to describe their folly.*

2. *"Foolish" covers more than stupidity.*

1. The fool was morally and spiritually insensitive.
2. He was inclined to blasphemy. Psalm 74:18.
3. He was inclined to atheism. Psalm 14:1.
4. He was churlish and arrogant, like his namesake Nabal of Carmel. 1 Samuel 25.
5. He was capable of gross immorality. 2 Sam. 13:13.

3. *Ezekiel described the basic cause of their foolishness as their reliance on their own hearts and failure to seek God's revelation. Read Jeremiah 23:16-22 and Jer. 29 in connection with this.*

2. These prophets had misled those who relied on them.

1. *The prophets followed their own hearts and saw their own perversions as God's revelation.*

2. *Their visions were false and full of lies (vv. 6, 8; cf. 10, 16), because the prophets had really not seen anything at all. (13:3.)*

3. They used the prophetic formula, "the Lord declares," but the Lord had neither spoken nor sent them (13:6-7).

1. *They hoped for a confirmation that never came.*

2. *God emphatically denied that he had spoken through these men (13:7b).*

3. *The false prophets were prophesying out of their own hearts, while Ezekiel provides a true message from God.*

4. Self-made religion is vain (Mt. 15:9), in conflict with God (Mt. 15:3, 6), and will be rooted up (Mt. 7:24-27; 15:13).

5. The religion of these prophets is man-made religion; it is God made in the image of man.

4. All who speak something other than the word of God are false speakers but they are not necessarily insincere.

1. Even sincerity does not guarantee truth.

2. Sincerity is not a substitute for truth.

1. Hal Lindsey, of the Late Great Planet Earth, predicted that the end of the world would come around 1988; he has since backed off of that prediction.

2. To follow one's own spirit is to follow the wrong spirit. Eph. 4:4.

3. False prophets are like jackals (Heb. word is same for fox and jackal) in the wilderness -- they dig holes that create points of stumbling for people.

1. False teaching undermines morality and security.

2. The only safe path is to follow a thus saith the Lord.

3. We are not being helped when people tell us that doctrine doesn't matter.

1. There is certainly abroad a real feeling against insisting on doctrinal purity in fundamental issues, but such a feeling is not of God.

2. If doctrine is irrelevant, then sections such as

the one we are now studying are hard to fathom.
2 John 9ff.

3. To suggest that it applies only to the "core gospel" is subjectivism run amuck since the scripture does not identify a "core gospel."

4. Who, then, is to determine it? What standard shall be applied? Where shall it end?

4. *The basic crime of the false prophets was that they offered hope where there was no hope. (13:10.)*

1. They made promises in the name of God that God did not make.

1. *We are going home in two years.*

2. *God won't permit anyone to destroy the temple.*

3. *If Babylon does come, Egypt will help us destroy them.*

4. *The people's futile hopes are encouraged by the prophet's lullabies of peace.*

1. *It is a common failing for preachers to want to speak pleasing and appeasing things to their hearers, but if they are to be faithful to God they must proclaim his whole counsel. Acts 20:26-27.*

2. *The strongest condemnation goes not to the people, but to those who led them into error. Matt. 18:7.*

5. God asks (accuses) them -- haven't you spoken lies when you said that I said these things.

1. See the hanging heads, the shuffling feet.

2. We are deafened by silence (It's really quiet now, isn't it?).

6. But think of the judgment day when teachers of basic error who keep people from obeying the Lord must stand before the God of heaven.

1. What answer will they give for having made his commands optional?

2. What answer will they give for making his commands something that you can take or leave.

3. If all the tears shed over unfulfilled hope could be gathered, we would need another ark; how much worse will it be when there is no room for repentance.

2. The coming exposè and punishment (13:8-16).

1. Once again we hear the familiar formula, the word of the Lord came unto me saying, but it takes on special significance at this point (v. 8).

2. To those false prophets, the voice of God, like the crack of doom, says, "I am against you" (v. 8).

1. What an adversary.

2. Usama ben Laden cannot start to begin to commence to compare.

3. The false prophets would be exposed, seen for what they were (v. 9).

1. They would not be asked into the councils of the people in the future.

2. They wouldn't be listed in the "Who's Who" of Israel -- the lists of the worthy.

3. No monuments would be built to them.

4. The reason -- they seduced the people and failed as watchmen, crying peace when there was no peace.

1. *The only peace is that which God gives. Rom. 5:1.*

2. *The world offers various kinds.*

1. The peace of unbelief -- no convictions so no nagging conscience to bother him.

2. The peace of self-righteousness -- he has such a view of himself that he cannot but believe that God is fortunate to have him as a servant.

3. The peace of presumption -- presumes on God's mercy and believes that God is too kind to punish evil.

4. The politicians would build their walls behind which the people would find shelter. (13:10.)

1. They would make alliances and pay tribute to keep the people safe.
2. The false prophets would then come in and whitewash these schemes with a "thus saith the Lord" which they got from between their ears.
3. We don't expect much of politicians, but when a man claims that he has a revelation from the Lord, more is expected.

5. The alliance has been made and its defects are hidden by "holy whitewash" (hogwash), the people are hiding behind it for protection.

1. The wind comes, the weaknesses are exposed, the wall collapses, and the people perish. Mt. 7:24-27.
2. While they are dragging their dead out from under the debris, they ask where is the mortar that you used on that wall.

1. *The politicians thought out the scheme; the prophets claimed that God approved.*
2. *The wall should have stood in the storm.*
3. *The work of the prophets is examined carefully; they are shown to be cheats.*

2. The Women (13:17-23).

1. The description and the indictment (13:17-19).

1. The human harangue.

1. There are only a few passage in the Old Testament that are critical of a class of women. Isa. 3:16 - 4:1; 32:9-13; Amos 4:1-3.

2. Out of the hidden back room comes the great one wearing her veils and ribbons, fluttering in the breeze as she walks.

1. *She mutters her words and sells that client what is needed to ward off the evil of the day.*

2. *Charms, amulets, beads, astrology charts, rabbit's feet, and the like are crutches for those who have lost their faith in God, or never had any.*

3. *But we have nothing to learn from this today; this is an enlightened society.*

1. Does anyone today tell fortunes from tea leaves or tarot cards?

2. Does anyone today sell holy oil or healing cloths?

1. *Whatever happened to "freely you have received, freely give"?*

2. *One wonders how these hustlers can sleep at night.*

4. *These women were hunters of people, not just their bodies, but their souls.*

1. They stalked their prey with influence.

2. They could speak so as to have those killed who should have lived (because of their righteousness) and those who should die (because of their wickedness) to live.

2. The profanation of God.

1. They sold God for a handful of barley and a crust of bread.

1. Actually they sold themselves, like Joseph's brothers and Judas.

2. While we would not sell God for barley and bread, do we have our price?

1. Are there preachers and elders who will sell principles for a successful ministry, a bigger church, a greater reputation?

2. Are we not tempted to be silent when we ought to speak so that we do not rock the boat?

3. Are there not those who castigate the weak and sinful in the name of "standing for the truth"?

4. They make a name for themselves as "lovers of the truth" while they leave the mangled bodies of brothers and sisters as though they were set upon on the Jericho road.

2. How often do we trade off truth, kindness, justice, mercy, and uprightness for trivia?

2. The coming rescue of God's people (13:20-23).

1. God would rescue his people from the spell of such ungodly women.

1. These women who ensnare people as a boy ensnares a bird will pay the price.
2. God will expose them and the people will see them for what they are.
2. **There is the earthquake, the tornado, the hurricane that devastate and destroy, and then there are words.**
3. Ten characteristics of false teachers from this passage.
 1. **They spoke of their own will, not God's will. vv 1-3, 17.**
 2. **They made the people a prey instead of performing a ministry for them. v. 4.**
 3. **They had no crisis ministry. v. 5.**
 4. **They claimed their revelations were divine to deceive their followers (vv. 6-7) and easily deceived others because they were deceived themselves.**
 5. **They failed to stand against sin (vv. 6-9) and declared an empty message without truth.**
 6. **They preached a message of peace, prosperity, and safety in the face of imminent judgment (vv. 10-12) because they failed to relate the consequences of sin.**
 7. **Their ministry provoked the wrath of God and invited his judgment. vv. 13-16.**
 8. **They often used false methods and occult practices to legitimize their work and control their victims. vv. 17-21.**
 9. **They encouraged iniquity by word and personal**

example. vv. 22-23.

10. They set up the worst idols, their own self-will. 14:1-7.

2. Inner Idolatry (Ch. 14).

1. *Idolaters indicted and threatened (14:1-11).*

1. The denunciation of idolatrous elders (11:1-5).

1. The visit of the pious looking elders.

1. Here they come again -- the pious looking elders.

1. *Their tongues spoke well but their souls were deformed.*

2. *How wise and holy they looked; their faces looked good but their hearts were warped.*

2. Idolatry goes further than merely stooping before a dumb stick or stone; it is not the body that idolizes, it's the spirit within.

2. The description of the pious looking elders.

1. No one could have looked at these men and told that they were idolaters, because the idols were inside.

2. Nothing had changed outwardly in their allegiance to the Lord, but they had taken idols into their hearts.

3. These judges needed judging.

4. They had their idols before their face; they loved them; their every thought was of them.

5. They were their constant companion, and yet they came to inquire of the Lord.

6. They desired to serve two masters (Mt. 6:24); they were guilty of breaking the first commandment, but they still wanted to hedge their bets.

3. The word to the pious looking elders.

1. God will give them answer.

2. When men of divided heart inquire of the Lord they will receive an answer, but it will not be one they will like.

3. This language has a sinister meaning, and v. 8 enlarges on the meaning.

4. It will be an answer in deed, not just in word.

5. The ultimate end is put positively in vv. 5 and 11.

2. The denunciation of idolaters and their sympathetic prophets (11:6-11).

1. Idolatry denounced.

1. The way to this right relationship is through repentance (v. 6).

2. There follows a denunciation of of idolaters and those prophets who would be sympathetic with them.

3. There were many false prophets to whom the elders would go who would assure them that everything would be all right.

4. Obviously their word did not completely satisfy; thus they came to Ezekiel.

5. How like the words of Ahab after he had heard all of his prophets; "Is there not here a prophet of Jehovah besides that we

may enquire of him. 1 Kings 22.

2. False prophecy "explained" and assessed.

1. Will God permit men to get what they want? 2 Thess. 2:10; Rom. 1.

2. The blind both fall into the ditch.

1. *If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. Mt. 15.*

2. *Each has a fundamental responsibility to God.*

3. *We have the obligation to stand before God and to obey him in the light of clear Biblical instruction no matter who is saying something different.*

3. God will answer the idolaters by himself (v. 7).

1. *He will give the prophet a word which is not the prophets.*

2. *God also speaks in deeds as well as in words. Isa. 26:9.*

3. *God is instructing his people in order that they might turn to him; the judgment is intended to be remedial.*

1. But judgment there will be because Judah has gone too far.

2. They are so wicked that not even three O.T. heroes could save them.

3. Their spiritual life is so low that they cannot be saved except through judgment; they are more wicked than Sodom (see chapter 16).

2. *Prevailing sin makes judgment inevitable (14:12-23).*

1. The sore judgment of famine (14:12-14).

1. When God sends a famine it is out of absolute necessity.

2. The people had committed a trespass.

1. This is a strong term, the root meaning is of "acting treacherously."

2. It is used of breaking a solemn contract (Achan in relation to the devoted thing, Joshua 7:1, and a wife's adulterous act, Numbers 5:12, both of which were punishable by death.

3. The people are so wicked, their spiritual life is so low, that not even Noah, Job, and Daniel can save them.

2. The sore judgment of evil beasts (14:15-16).

1. Desolation would cause the wild beasts to wander into the land and infest it.

2. It was not rare for wild beasts to infest lands. See, 2 Kings 17:24-26; Jer. 12:5.

3. When the wild beasts came it was evidence that the people had in fact gone too far and the land was not only desolate, but beyond being influenced by the presence of Godly people.

3. The sore judgment of military invasion (14:17-18).

1. Would God have foreign armies marching over his land and taking his people captive if they had not provoked him in a radical manner?

- 2. The very presence of troops is evidence of the wickedness of the land.**
- 3. The land isn't being run over because of God's weakness -- sin is the problem.**
- 4. God does not judge without reason.**
- 4. The sore judgment of pestilence (14:19-20).**
 - 1. God permits diseases to multiply and this results in death.**
 - 2. In all of these judgments it comes through that God does not judge without sufficient reason.**
 - 3. A land desolated by God is a land that has asked for it.**
- 5. The four sore judgments and Jerusalem (14:21-23).**
 - 1. All of this is applied to Jerusalem.**
 - 2. All four judgments leaves no conclusion other than that the land is so evil that it is beyond redemption without radical purging.**
 - 3. This was exactly the position that Jerusalem was in.**
 - 4. However God assures him that there will be some left (v.22), and some day this group will arrive where Ezekiel is.**
 - 1. When they arrive he will see for himself what manner of people they are.**
 - 2. God tells them that when he sees them he will know that God**

did not do to them what he did without cause.

Lesson 10: Ezekiel 15-16

1. Chapter 15: The Useless Vine

A. *Introduction to Chapter 15*

1. Today's lesson covers the shortest chapter in Ezekiel (Chapter 15 with 8 verses) and the longest chapter in Ezekiel (Chapter 16 with 63 verses).
2. Chapter 15 contains a short parable about a useless vine, and we can infer from this parable that the people still doubted Ezekiel's message about Jerusalem's doom.
 - a) They were God's chosen people -- his choice vine. How could He destroy them as Ezekiel was prophesying?
 - b) They had been through two invasions and deportations already, yet they had not been destroyed. Jerusalem was indestructible. Right?

B. *The Parable of the Vine (15:1-5)*

1. God answers the people with the parable in verses 1-5.
2. God tells them that they are a vine and, as they all knew, the only thing a vine is good for is to produce fruit.
 - a) Its wood is too weak to make anything useful. It can't even be turned into a peg to hang things on.
 - b) And after it has been burned, it is really useless! If it wasn't worth anything whole, how much less is it worth when it has been charred by fire?

C. *The Parable Applied to Jerusalem (15:6-8)*

1. Verses 6-8 give us the explanation of the parable.

a) The vine represents the people of Jerusalem.

(1) This was a common symbol for Israel in the Bible. See Genesis 49:22; Psalm 80; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Hosea 10:1.

(2) Usually the focus of the symbol is the fruit, yet Ezekiel ignores the fruit here -- suggesting there is no question of Israel producing anything good. Instead Ezekiel pictures a wild vine that, if it supplied anything, would supply its wood.

b) Although not producing fruit now, Jerusalem had always been intended by God to be fruitful.

(1) Jerusalem was never like other nations in strength and military power (i.e., the trees) except when it was trusting in the Lord and bearing fruit.

(2) God had chosen Israel to bring forth fruit and to be a blessing to the nations (Genesis 12:1-3), yet Israel had never been very fruitful in that respect. Now, Israel had stopped producing any fruit at all.

c) Jerusalem was not just a vine, but she was a charred vine.

(1) The better translation of verse 7 is "they have gone forth from the fire" rather than "they shall go forth from the fire." Jerusalem had already experienced the fire of God's judgment with the Babylonian invasions and deportations of 605 BC and 597 BC.

(2) The people may have thought this was a good sign -- Jerusalem had been burned but not consumed. Yet, her value was entirely gone. She was fit only as fuel for fire -- which would be her fate when the Babylonians returned in 586 BC and burned the city to the

ground.

(3) She could not even serve as a tent peg. The Hebrew word used here for "peg" is used elsewhere to describe people who are dependable. Israel was neither useful nor dependable.

(4) Jerusalem was a branch among trees. Without God, she was the most insignificant of cities and Judah was an insignificant nation.

d) And why the fiery judgment?

(1) Yet again the Lord tells Jerusalem the reason for her fate -- she had been unfaithful to Him and to the covenant that He had made with her.

(2) Chapter 16 will paint a vivid picture of Jerusalem's faithlessness.

2. Chapter 16: The Unwanted Child

A. *Introduction to Chapter 16*

1. Not only is chapter 16 the longest chapter in Ezekiel, one commentator claims it is the longest prophecy in the Bible. It is certainly the longest allegory in the Bible. This single chapter is longer than Jonah, Nahum, Haggai, or Obadiah.

2. How can we describe this chapter? "It is tender and brutal. It is heartwarming and heartbreaking. It is beautiful and pornographic. It is frightening and hopeful."

3. "Basically what we get here is a peek into God's heart. ... What we get here is not history as it happened so much [like we get in 1 and 2 Kings] but history as it felt to God. These are not just the facts but the divine emotions."

4. Is God ever disappointed in his children? Does he ever feel

rejected? Chapter 16 will answer those questions.

B. *Summary of Chapter 16*

1. The Birth (16:1-5)

a) Verses 1-5 describe the birth of Jerusalem and picture it as the birth of an unwanted child -- a child of mixed parentage that was left out in a field to die.

2. The Marriage (16:6-14)

a) Verses 6-14 describe the Lord's courtship and marriage to Jerusalem. He cleans up the child and cares for the child. After she has matured, he enters into a marriage covenant with her and adorns her with gold and silver.

3. The Rejection (16:15-22)

a) Verses 15-22 tell us that the Lord's new wife does not trust in the Lord, but trusts instead in her own beauty. She makes idols of the jewelry she has been given and then offers the Lord's food to those idols. She even offers her own children to the false gods -- forgetting that she herself had once been an unwanted child.

4. Prostitution and Worse (16:23-34)

a) Verses 23-34 tells us how the Lord's wife first becomes a prostitute and then worse than a prostitute. She engages in prostitution with all of her neighbors, and her conduct is so bad that even the Philistines are shocked! Eventually she becomes worse than a prostitute -- because she pays her customers! "How weak-willed you are," the Lord tells her in verse 30.

5. The Judgment (16:35-43)

a) Verses 35-43 describe the judgment of the adulterous wife. The Lord uses her former customers as instruments to discipline her. She receives the punishment of women who commit adultery and who shed innocent blood -- because she had done both of those things. The Lord tells her that he will put a stop to her prostitution.

6. Like Mother, Like Daughter (16:44-59)

a) Verses 44-59 tells us the depth of the perversion into which the Lord's wife had descended. We find that she is one of three sisters -- all of whom, like their mother, are perverse. Although all three sisters are known for their wickedness, the one that the Lord found and married is the worst -- making the other two appear righteous by comparison. God had judged the other two sisters -- how could he not also judge the third?

7. The Covenant Remembered (16:60-63)

a) His wife had been faithless to him. She had become a prostitute and then worse than a prostitute. She had offered her own children to false gods. Yet the Lord remembers the covenant he made with her. His wife would be restored, her sins atoned for, and she would be ashamed of her former conduct.

b) Let's now consider this chapter in detail.

C. *The Birth (16:1-5)*

1. The exiles were no doubt unconvinced by the parable of the vine. Certainly Israel had made some mistakes, but they weren't as

bad as all that. After all, Israel was chosen by God.

2. God thus tells Ezekiel to confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices. Ezekiel would show the people just how corrupt they really were.

3. Verse 2 is important in interpreting this chapter -- it emphasizes that God is dealing with Jerusalem and its history rather than the history of the nation as a whole.

4. Jerusalem was conceived by the Amorites and the Hittites in the land of Canaan.

a) The city was not founded by the Hebrews, but by the heathen people of Canaan.

b) The land of Canaan in the Bible is also known as the land of the Amorites and the land of the Hittites, especially when the discussion involves the hill country of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. (See Joshua 1:4 and Amos 2:10.)

c) Some commentators see this reference to mixed parentage as a message to the people that their actions repudiated any relationship they had with faithful Abraham. (John 8:39, 44). They "spiritually" were descendants of the Hittites and the Amorites.

d) Remember the wives of Esau in Genesis 26:34-35 that "were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah"? They were Hittites.

5. Jerusalem began life as an unwanted child.

a) Joshua 15:63 tells us that the people of Israel failed to conquer the city of Jerusalem under Joshua. The city was

uncared for by the people throughout the period of the Judges.

b) It was a widespread custom in the ancient Near East to eliminate unwanted children (especially girls) by exposing them -- and this is how Jerusalem is pictured here.

D. *The Marriage (16:6-14)*

- 1. The Lord saw Jerusalem in its despised condition, and He sent King David to rescue the city from the Jebusites. (2 Samuel 5:6-10)**
- 2. He looked at the city and said "Live!" The city received blessings and riches from the Lord. It grew in population and matured as a city.**
- 3. The Lord visited the city and claimed her in marriage by spreading his garment over her. (Compare Ruth 3:9).**

a) The Lord entered into a marriage covenant with the Jerusalem as described in Psalm 132:13-17. She became the Lord's city, where he dwelt when David brought the ark there and purchased land on which to build the temple.

(1) Hosea also described the relationship between the Lord and his people as a marriage, and he drew on the experiences of his own wife's unfaithfulness to demonstrate Israel's spiritual adultery.

(2) God is married to his people even today. Paul describes the relationship between Christ and his church as a marriage in Ephesians 5:22-33.

b) God lavished marriage gifts on the city (Psalm 45:13-15) and she became the royal city under King David and King Solomon.

c) Her fame and beauty became renowned throughout the land. She was called "The perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth." (Lamentations 2:15)

E. *The Rejection (16:15-22)*

- 1. God had warned Israel not to forget Him when they obtained all the blessings that had been promised for them. (Deut. 6:10-12). That warning was not heeded.**
- 2. As soon as the Lord crowned the city with beauty and fame, she began to trust in that beauty rather than in the God who had given it.**
 - a) She used her beauty (verse 15), her garments (verses 16, 18), her jewelry (verse 17), and her food (verse 19) in turning away from the Lord.**
 - b) She fell in love with the blessings of God and forgot the God who had blessed her.**
- 3. She began to commit spiritual adultery with every nation that surrounded her.**
 - a) Solomon started this spiritual adultery by making treaties with the surrounding nations. It was customary to seal a treaty with marriage. Solomon's many wives attested to his reliance on treaties rather than on God. These foreign wives brought their foreign gods into the Lord's city.**
 - b) Once she turned her eyes away from her husband, it was no surprise that she soon found herself far along on the path of corruption. These verses describe in graphic detail the pagan rituals that were brought into and practiced in the city.**

c) She entered into every kind of religious abomination -- even offering her own children to the pagan deity Molech. (Jer. 32:35, Lev. 18:21).

(1) Ahaz and Manasseh were both guilty of this horrible practice.

d) The vivid graphical language in this chapter has been greatly softened by our English translations. Ezekiel left no doubt (at least in the minds of his Hebrew readers) about the depth of the city's perversion. Jewish tradition reserved this chapter for study by only the most mature students.

4. She forget what God had done for her when she had nothing and deserved nothing. She forgot that He had rescued her and elevated her to royalty and beauty.

a) People sometimes have very short memories! Suddenly this unwanted child was a self-made person who had no need of God.

b) The situation looks very bad now, but it soon becomes much worse!

F. *Prostitution and Worse (16:23-34)*

1. Jerusalem did not just practice these abominations, but she became what one commentator described as a "militant advocate" of the heathen practices.

a) She established the pagan high places in every street. She did not wait for the abominations to come to her -- she went out and sought them like a prostitute seeking customers.

(1) These high places would have been used for the fertility rites that

were practiced as part of the Canaanite religions. The city's prostitution was both figurative and literal.

b) (Jeremiah 3:2) "Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: Where have you not lain with men? By the road you have sat for them like an Arabian in the wilderness; And you have polluted the land with your harlotries and your wickedness."

c) Just how bad was Jerusalem? Verse 27 tells us that the Philistines were embarrassed by her behavior!

(1) (Jeremiah 6:15) Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; Nor did they know how to blush.

2. Jerusalem also began to play the harlot with Egypt.

a) Egypt had lusted after Israel throughout the period of the United Kingdom.

b) Later kings prostituted themselves with Egypt while prophets like Hosea and Isaiah condemned their spiritual and political adultery. (2 Kings 18:21).

c) From Josiah's time the Jews were in strict confederacy with Egypt, and, to ingratiate themselves, they practiced the Egyptian idolatries. They were allured by the riches and grandeur of Egypt.

d) The very people to whom Ezekiel was speaking hoped that Egypt would come to their rescue against the Babylonians! In the very next chapter, Ezekiel will describe an appeal to Egypt made by the puppet prince Zedekiah.

3. Jerusalem also sought "relations" with Assyria and Babylon.

a) Ahaz sought relations with Assyria (2 Kings 15:19-20) and Hezekiah sought relations with Babylon (2 Kings 20:12-19).

b) These alliances generally were accompanied by demands that the weaker party (always Judah!) worship the gods of the stronger party as an acceptance of its patronage.

c) The combination of religion with politics is not unique to our present day!

d) Jerusalem's "customers" took advantage of the city, but were at the same time disgusted and ashamed for it. Jerusalem found no satisfaction, but craved insatiably for more.

4. Jerusalem did not wait for these nations to come to her. Instead she sought them out and bribed or paid them to enter into a relationship.

a) Hosea 8:9 (For they have gone up to Assyria, like a wild donkey alone by itself; Ephraim has hired lovers.)

b) As one commentator notes, a prostitute may have the excuse of stark necessity, but Jerusalem had no excuse. She "scorned hire" and instead paid those that took their pleasure of her.

c) Not only was Jerusalem a faithless wife, but she was a disgrace to prostitutes!

d) The Jews went around borrowing religious rites and idols from their neighbors -- but no one came to Jerusalem to borrow hers.

5. Listen to God's great disappointment in verse 30 -- "How weak is thy heart!"

- a) Moving ahead 2500 years, how does God feel when he looks down at his wife today? When he looks at the church, does he see the beautiful bride of Christ adorned with truth and purity --- or does he say "How weak is thy heart!"**
- b) Does he see the loveless church in Revelation in 2:1-7?**
- c) Does he see the compromising church in Revelation 2:12-17 that permitted false doctrines to be taught?**
- d) Does he see the corrupt church in Revelation 2:18-29 that tolerated sexual immorality?**
- e) Does he see the dead church in Revelation 3:1-6?**
- f) Does he see the lukewarm church in Revelation 3:14-22 that was neither hot nor cold?**
- g) How terrible to be a disappointment to God!**

G. *The Judgment (16:35-43)*

- 1. Jerusalem had engaged in obscene, spiritual adultery with the surrounding nations, and God would use those same nations to judge her.**
- 2. Those nations that she had loved and the others that she had hated would all strip her bare of all the riches and blessings that God had given her, and the surrounding nations would then see the barrenness and nakedness of the city without God's blessings.**
 - a) Babylon destroyed the city, but Ezekiel 25 will tell us that**

the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Edomites, and the Philistines all played a part in its destruction.

3. The city would face the prescribed penalty for adultery and murder -- death by stoning. Then she would be hacked to pieces.
4. Her houses would be burned and her punishment would be a public one.
5. Jerusalem's idolatrous abominations came to an end in 586 BC when Nebuchadnezzar finally had enough and destroyed the city.
6. The city was destroyed, but a remnant was taken to Babylon. God's anger subsided and he sought out the remnant.

a) "Anger is an essential element of divine love. God's love is inseparably connected with His holiness and His justice. He must therefore manifest anger when confronted with sin and evil."

H. *Like Mother, Like Daughter (16:44-59)*

1. The figure changes slightly here to make a comparison of Jerusalem, Sodom, and Samaria -- the three sisters.
2. All three were the daughter of their Hittite mother and their Amorite father.
3. A common proverb applied to all three sisters -- Like mother, like daughter!

a) All three had inherited the false perverted religious practices of their mother, the Hittites.
4. All three were bad, but Jerusalem was far and away the worst.

a) God tells Jerusalem that Sodom never did what she had done, and Samaria (the wicked capital of the northern kingdom) had not committed half the sins that Jerusalem had done.

b) (Jeremiah 23:14) "Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem: They commit adultery and walk in lies; They also strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one turns back from his wickedness. All of them are like Sodom to Me, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah."

5. Verses 49-50 tell us about the sin of Sodom.

a) What was the sin of Sodom? She had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness. Neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. She was haughty and she committed abomination.

(1) Are those the sins that we generally think of when we think of Sodom? God lists "abomination" last -- which is generally the only one that we think of.

(2) But there was more to the sin of Sodom than sexual abomination. There was pride, there was fullness of bread, and there was abundance of idleness. Also, there was a lack of concern for the poor and needy and there was haughtiness.

(3) "The sin of Sodom as described here, very different from the traditional interpretation, has much to say to the affluent Western world of today."

(4) One 1849 commentary I read said: "Such is the depravity of human nature, that plenty, and a freedom from toil and danger, often prove people's ruin; and therefore if we were truly wise, we should be as much afraid of prosperity as we are of any of those supported evils which are the frequent objects of our fears."

(5) Paul said in Philippians 4:12 that he knew how to be abased and how to abound.

b) What then was the chief sin of Sodom? The one listed first here is pride.

(1) God hates a proud look. (Proverbs 6:17)

(2) (Peter Kreeft) "Nothing distinguishes Christian morality from pagan morality more sharply than their opposite attitudes toward pride."

(3) Pride puts self before God. It is essentially a lust for power. The deepest reason Gods hates pride is that it keeps us from knowing Him.

(4) (1 John 2:16) For all that is in the world-the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-is not of the Father but is of the world.

(5) (Proverbs 16:18) Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.

c) So what did God do with Sodom? He took her away as he saw fit!

d) And what about Jerusalem? She was worse than Sodom!

(1) If God failed to punish Jerusalem then He would owe Sodom an apology!

(2) And what about Samaria? God had sent Samaria off into Assyrian exile, and Samaria had not done half of what Jerusalem had done.

(3) Jerusalem was so self-righteous, yet God tells her that she is

instead so evil that she makes Sodom and Samaria appear righteous by comparison! (verse 52)

e) Just as haughty Jerusalem had abhorred Sodom and made its name a byword for corruption (verse 56) [a byword that remains to this very day!], so Jerusalem would become a byword to Edom and the Philistines (verse 57). Imagine becoming a byword for corruption to the Philistines!

6. Verses 53-59 have always been troubling for the premillennialists.

a) If all of scripture is to be taken literally, then Sodom will someday be restored to its former position. Also, the northern kingdom will be brought back as an independent kingdom.

b) But what about Jude 7? (as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.)

c) And what about Ezekiel 37:22? (and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again.)

I. *The Covenant Remembered (16:60-63)*

1. Verse 60 begins with "Nevertheless" -- a beautiful word!

a) Who would have thought that the first 59 verses of chapter 16 would be followed with a "Nevertheless"?

b) We are all familiar with Isaiah 55:8. ("For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord.") We may be less familiar with its context. God is speaking there of his willingness to forgive!

2. Jerusalem was being disciplined under the Mosaic covenant.

a) The Israelites had entered into the Mosaic covenant with an oath. (Exodus 24:7-8, Deut. 29:10-21).

b) The curses for breaking that covenant had also been agreed to. (Lev. 26:14-39; Deut. 28:14-68).

c) Judah, represented by her capital Jerusalem, had broken that covenant exactly as described in Deut. 29.

(1) We are all familiar with Deut. 29:29 ("The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.") but we may not be as familiar with its context.

(2) Deut. 29:22-28 describes what would happen if the people turned their backs on the covenant and served other gods. God told them the land of milk and honey would become a land of salt and sulfur.

(3) The people no doubt wondered if this would ever come to pass. God told them that those secret things belonged to him. What was revealed (the law) belonged to the people so that they could avoid the curses it contained.

3. Yet when the judgment is complete, God will remember the covenant he had made with Abraham -- that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Genesis 12:3).

a) Jerusalem would be reestablished and once again be given preeminence. Her former evil sisters would be given to

her as daughters.

(1) Just as God had promised, he would bring blessings to all families of the earth through Abraham -- and those blessings would even be available to the likes of Sodom and Samaria!

(2) Those blessings would not come from the old covenant ("my covenant with you" in verses 60 and 61), but from the new everlasting covenant in verse 60.

b) God himself would make atonement for her and restore her. After all that had happened, God would accept her back. There would be a new Jerusalem!

(1) Verse 63 tells us that God himself would make the atonement. Generally in the Old Testament it was the people who did the atoning, but here God looks ahead to the day when his Son would come into this world to make the perfect atonement.

c) (Jeremiah 31:31-34) "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah- 32“not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. 33“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34“No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

3. Lessons for Today

A. *The Church exists to bring forth fruit unto God.*

1. (Ephesians 2:10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.
2. When we cease bearing fruit, we become a useless vine.
3. John 15 and Ezekiel 15 should be read together.
4. (John 15:5) "I am the vine; ye are the branches."

B. *We must always guard against the sin of ingratitude.*

1. According to a French proverb, ingratitude is the mother of every vice.
2. We should be the most grateful of all people. (Ephesians 1:3) "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."
 - a) **"There was no beauty in us by nature, but everything to cause abhorrence to the Holy God. And if we are washed and clothed, decked with gold and silver, arrayed in fine linen, silk, and brodered work, eating fine flour, and honey and oil, exceedingly beautiful and arrayed in royal estate, it is all of grace -- of the exceeding and eternal grace of God. There is nothing of it at all in which we can boast ourselves." (F. B. Meyer)**
3. Luke 17:11-19 is an example of man's ingratitude to God. Ten lepers were cleansed -- yet only one came back to glorify God, and

he was a Samaritan.

4. As King Lear said, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!"

5. (Psalm 103:2) "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

C. *God is faithful even if his children are faithless.*

1. (2 Timothy 2:13) If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

2. God remembered his promise to Abraham despite the faithlessness of Jerusalem.

3. God's promises may be conditional, but his faithfulness is not.

D. *God is Love in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.*

1. The same father who ran down the road to meet the prodigal son is the God who said "Nevertheless" in verse 60 and accepted back his faithless wife.

E. *God loves the New Jerusalem (the church) just as he loved the old Jerusalem.*

1. (Hebrews 12:22-24) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

2. (Ephesians 5:25-27) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Ezekiel -- Lesson Eleven -- Chapters 17 & 18

1. The Parables of the Eagles. Chapter 17.

1. *The parable of the eagles and the vine/willow. 17:1-10.*

1. The great eagle and the cedar. 17:1-4.

1. Why a riddle? (The historical background for this riddle is found in 2 Kings 24:6-20, 2 Chron. 36:8-16, and Jeremiah 37; 52:1-7.)

1. Riddles can sometimes convict the heart even before it realizes what has happened, e.g., David and Nathan. 2 Samuel 12.

2. Riddles can make the truth more vivid, making the truth easier to grasp and remember.

2. The Babylonian eagle came to Lebanon (Israel, Jer. 22:23); the cedar represents all that was left of Israel -- Judah.

3. The tallest part of the cedar is the royal house, from which the eagle cropped the topmost young twig (Jehoiachin) and carried it into the land of traffic (Babylon).

2. The great eagle and the willow tree. 17:5-6.

1. The eagle then took the seed of the land (Zedekiah, one of the royal family, v. 13) and planted it in a fruitful soil beside many waters. (Nebuchadnezzar established Zedekiah as king and placed him in conditions conducive to his prospering.

2. Though set as a willow tree (bowing, not regal as a

cedar), it became a vine that spread under the eagle that planted it; it was to act gratefully toward the kingdom that gave it sustenance; it was dependant upon and flourished under Nebuchadnezzar.

3. The second eagle and the conniving vine. 17:7-8.

1. The second eagle appeared (Egypt under Hophra); though not as glorious as the first eagle, the vine turned toward the second eagle. (Read Jeremiah 21, 37, 39, and 52 for background to this section.)

2. Verse 8 makes it clear that the conduct of Zedekiah was wholly unnecessary; he had been treated well by Babylon and was in great shape, yet he appealed to Egypt.

4. The threat of uprooting. 17:9-10.

1. Like many today, the Jews were smarter than God.

2. Since no alliance with Egypt had ever saved them before, why had they not learned that they could not depend on this alliance with Egypt?

3. These verses make it clear that Judah had done it again -- they had "politicked" themselves into another hole.

4. Zedekiah had listened to the Egyptian party in Jerusalem instead of to Jeremiah, thus, the willow/vine would be uprooted after having been withered by a hot east wind from the desert.

2. *The explanation (straightforward and clear) and the indictment. 17:11-21.*

1. The exile of Jehoiachin. 17:11-12.

- 1. Nebuchadnezzar will come and take away Jehoiachin, and with him the princes and nobles.**
- 2. This would leave Judah with no one to lead in a rebellion.**
- 3. Some leader, however, must be left behind so that the kingdom could function.**

2. The covenant with Zedekiah. 17:13-14.

- 1. The "seed of the land" is identified as Zedekiah (uncle of Jehoiachin and youngest son of Josiah).**
- 2. Nebuchadnezzar made a covenant with Zedekiah and made him swear by the name of Jehovah. 2 Chron. 36:13.**
- 3. He left Zedekiah with little help so that the kingdom might not become independent or ambitious (v. 14).**
- 4. Nebuchadnezzar clearly intended for Judah to prosper under this rule because that suited his purpose.**

3. The treachery of Zedekiah. 17:15.

- 1. But Zedekiah rebelled.**
- 2. As early as the fourth year of his reign he seems to have been discontent.**
- 3. He finally cast his lot with Pharaoh, which led to the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel that assured Judah of coming total captivity.**

4. Judgment coming for faithless use of God's name. 17:16-21.

1. V. 16 plainly says that the king of Judah -- one of David's seed -- would enter and die in Babylon.

2. Zedekiah had despised the covenant he made with Nebuchadnezzar, and Nebuchadnezzar would rather destroy Judah than have it as an ally with Egypt if war with Egypt came.

3. Jeremiah tells us (Jer. 37:5-15) that when the Egyptians came in support of Jerusalem, the Babylonians terminated the siege of Jerusalem long enough to take care of the Egyptians, and then returned to destroy Jerusalem.

4. Zedekiah had sworn an oath to Nebuchadnezzar in the name of Jehovah.

1. In despising this oath Zedekiah demonstrated that Jehovah didn't mean much to him.

2. Nebuchadnezzar was led to think little of Jehovah, for clearly, anyone who swore in Jehovah's name and then despised the covenant didn't think that his God was very important.

3. If the servant of that God didn't think him important, why should the stranger?

3. *The parable of the tender twig.* 17:22-24.

1. The Lord, the cedar, and the strange planting. 17:22.

1. This section is messianic.

2. God has no intention of violating the covenant that he made with David (Ps. 89; 2 Sam. 7:11ff).

3. God will take a tender twig (see Isa. 53:2) and plant it on a high mountain (Mt. Zion, high in regard to its importance).

4. Planting it where it seems to make the least sense, God once more makes human wisdom to be foolish and apparent foolishness to be wisdom. 1 Cor. 1:18-31.

2. The successful planting of the Lord. 17:23-24.

1. The royal family under the direction of God will prosper and grow.

1. Isa. 9:6-7 also tells us of the success of this Davidic king.

2. The House of David will rise again and glory will return to that family in the Messiah. Amos 9:14.

2. The God who could bring his people down and overthrow the throne of David could also restore it; he was completely in control of things.

1. While Babylon wanted to sustain Judah, God wanted to bring it down and down it came.

2. Later, when God wanted the House of David back up again, back up it came.

1. *It takes no genius to predict success for strong and rising kingdoms or the fall of small and declining ones; God was predicting the downfall of the strong and the rise of the fallen, and it happened. Isa. 33:23.*

2. *Such a God is to be trusted.*

3. *To turn from such a God is spiritual lunacy.*

2. Sour Grapes -- God and the Individual. Chapter 18.

1. *A proverb denounced.* 18:1-4.

1. The parable stated. 18:1-2.

1. An apt parable -- the ungodly are not without their good talkers with a quick turn of speech.

2. The fathers were wicked and the children are being punished for it.

2. The parable rejected. 18:3-4.

1. God addresses himself to the parable by stating the governing principles: all souls are mine and the soul that sinneth it shall die.

2. Israel knew this principle (Deut. 24:16), they just didn't believe it.

3. There are those today who still don't believe this principle assert that God does punish people for the sins of another and insist that it is heresy to deny that he does.

4. To put it differently, they believe that God brings condemnation on people for the sin of Adam.

1. God says that all souls are his, implying that he cares for all.

2. If he cares for all, he would mistreat none.

3. If all souls are his, he cares just as much for the sons as he does for the fathers, and vice versa, and he declares that punishment is not administered on a generational basis -- the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

2. *God's cause stated in three illustrations. 18:5-20.*

1. The righteous man (1st generation) assured. 18:5-9.

1. Here God outlines the character of a righteous man (not one who is called righteous, but one whom God regards as righteous.

2. If he is just and does what is right he shall live.

1. He is a man of high moral conduct who refuses to get involved in the garbage of life.

2. He is not an idolater; he doesn't run around with other men's wives; he doesn't extort or abuse his debtors.

3. He feeds the poor, executes justice between a man and his neighbor, and he reverences the word of God as a light to his search for doing truly.

4. God doesn't make us guess.

2. The wicked man (2nd generation) warned. 18:10-13.

1. The righteous man has a son who becomes wicked; he does everything his father wouldn't do and refuses to do what his father did.

2. V. 13 -- he will come under condemnation and die in his sin.

3. It makes no difference how good his father was; he will die in his sin and his blood will be upon himself.

4. There is no argument here -- God flatly asserts it.

1. What about Prov. 22:6?
 2. Some regard it as a general rule; some regard it as misunderstood.
 3. One thing is for sure, this very passage makes it clear that a man may be righteous before God (and surely God would not call him righteous and just and true if he made no attempt to bring up his child in the way of the Lord) and have a child who is an abomination.
 4. We can't forever cast suspicion on Godly parents of wicked children and inwardly hold them responsible.
 5. After all, Adam had the best of fathers!
-
3. The righteous man (third generation) assured. 18:14-18.
 1. **Here is the third generation -- his grandfather was a lovely man, his father was a villain, how will he turn out?**
 2. **He is not held accountable for his father's deeds or attitudes (assuming he did not encourage or approve of them).**
 3. **Not suggesting that environment is not important, but there are folks who have taken all that their environment could throw at them and they have more than conquered it.**
 4. **V. 14 says it is fear (ASV) that helps him avoid the pitfalls into which his father wandered.**
 1. "Fear" and "seeth" are from the same Hebrew word. The repetition is used to intensify the thought. It is variously translated "considereth" and "fear."
 2. There is nothing wrong with the right kind of fear; I would be

afraid to not fear the things that God says I should fear.

3. The right kind of fear keeps our children safe and seeks a cure for cancer.

4. The scripture doesn't teach that we should grovel in slavish fear before God, but neither does it teach that he is our cosmic buddy.

5. V. 18 tells us that the father can't cash in on the righteousness of the son.

4. The summary. 18:19-20.

1. God asserts it one more time to be sure that have an opportunity to understand -- the soul that sinneth it shall die.

2. Every tub shall sit on its own bottom.

3. *The blessing and curse of a change of mind. 18:21-29.*

1. The fruit of a righteous change. 18:21-23.

1. Bad habits can be overcome -- a wicked man can become righteous.

2. The reality of human living is that it is rarely (if ever) a straight line from beginning to end.

3. Have you ever wondered if you can overcome sin that clings like a vine, sinking its suckers into your very heart.

4. This verse encourages us never to give up; we can become free from both the power and penalty of sin. Rom.

6.

5. Good news -- none of his transgressions shall be

remembered against him.

1. All filthy talk forgotten; all selfish ambition forgotten; all impure thought forgotten; all bitter speech forgotten; all the indolence and indifference forgotten: ALL -- FORGOTTEN!

2. It Is Well With My Soul, stanza 2.

6. This is what God wants -- I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked -- I don't want you to die unforgiven.

1. John Calvin believed and clearly taught that it was God's good pleasure to create some men unto eternal condemnation and some to eternal life without reference to their will in the matter. Institutes, Book III, Chapter XXI, section 5.

2. If this is true, then God does indeed have pleasure in the death of the wicked; their death and damnation is the fulfillment of His eternal decree which Calvin says was made according to the good pleasure of God.

1. From this text it is clear that God wants the wicked to turn from his ways, but if Calvin be correct the wicked can no more turn that a computer can get up and do a song and dance routine.

2. These sinners were born totally depraved because of the sin of Adam; they were incapable according to God's eternal decree to choose to do right.

3. They stand before God utterly incapable of choosing to do good without a direct intervention of God.

4. What a hypocrite God is if Calvin is correct to here claim that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked when in fact it is all going exactly as he planned.

2. The curse of a wicked change. 18:24.

1. But when the righteous turns away from his righteousness, he none of his righteous deeds will be remembered, not the Bible classes he taught, not the good influence on the young.

2. He will die in his sin.

3. Can a righteous man so sin as to be eternally lost: Ezekiel thought so.

1. There are those who tell us that it is impossible.
2. Who can believe it in light of this passage?
3. But was the man really righteous: God said that he was.

3. God's right ways and Israel's perversion. 18:25-29.

1. The wonder of these verses is that God bothers to justify himself.

2. Here is the ungodly man calling God to account, accusing Him of acting immorally.

3. God responds by repeating in different words -- the soul that sinneth it shall die.

4. The problem lies with Israel; they want the guilty to go free, not the penitent.

5. They want their sins overlooked and they don't wish to repent and turn.

4. *The call to repentance and life. 18:30-32.*

1. Avoid ruinous sin. 18:30.

1. I will judge you -- every one of you -- according to your ways.

2. The stress on the individual is brought home.

2. Adopt a changed heart. 18:31.

1. He doesn't want sin to be their ruin.

2. He wants them to acknowledge and repudiate sin because it is ruinous.

3. God's lack of vindictiveness. 18:32.

1. Why will ye die? They died because they wouldn't (not couldn't) come to him.

2. Christ spoke similar language. Mt. 23:37.

3. Some generations suffer the results of guilty acts by others, but no man suffers punishment because of the sins of others.

1. It is certainly true that a father's sin can have sorry consequences for his children.

2. It is not true that God holds people responsible for the actions of others.

4. Just as these exiles needed to understand personal responsibility before they would turn from their sins, so too do we.

5. "Liberty means responsibility," George Bernard Shaw

wrote in his Maxims for Revolutionists. He continued, "That is why most men dread it."

- 1.** We may perceive the prison we are in and long for liberty, but deep down it is easier for us to remain there, cherishing the illusion that we are prisoners through no fault of our own.
- 2.** To recognize responsibility may necessitate the recognition of fault, and that in turn may require courage followed by repentance.
- 3.** Yet we can never be fully free unless we are willing to shoulder the responsibility for our actions.
- 4.** Still, responsibility for all our actions may become too heavy a burden to bear.
- 5.** It remains possible throughout life only with the knowledge of the divine forgiveness which lies at the heart of the gospel.

Lesson 12: Ezekiel 19-21

1. Chapter 19: Prophecy Lamenting Jerusalem's Leaders

A. *Introduction to Chapter 19*

1. Chapter 19 contains two funeral laments -- one for the king and one for the people of Judah. These two laments are both set in poetic meter and are both allegorical.
2. This chapter is about the last days of Judah, the death of the kings, the death of Jerusalem, and the death of the nation.

B. *Funeral Lament for the King (19:1-9)*

1. The lioness in this lament represents the royal Davidic line, and the first lion cub represents King Jehoahaz.
 - a) A lion was a common figure for Judah, and especially for the line of David. (Genesis 49:9; 1 Kings 10:19-20).
 - b) Recall from Lesson 2 that Jehoahaz was the son of King Josiah and became king in 609 BC when Pharaoh Necho killed Josiah at Megiddo. (Jehoahaz became king instead of his older brother Jehoiakim.) Necho carried Jehoahaz off to Egypt where he died, having only reigned for 3 months. Necho then installed Jehoiakim as a vassal king.
2. Who does the second lion cub represent?
 - a) Some have identified this cub with Zedekiah (Josiah's youngest son), who reigned as the last king of Judah from 597 to 586 BC. He and Jehoahaz had the same mother. (2 Kings 23:31; 24:18). But he is dealt with later. Also, he was not a legal king --- Ezekiel refers to him only as a prince. (He

refers to exiled Jehoiachin as the king. (Ezekiel 1:2)).

b) It probably does not represent Jehoiakim, who (recalling from Lesson 2) was killed by his own people during a Babylonian siege and received the burial of an ass. In fact, Jeremiah tells us in 22:18 that "They shall not lament for him." Also, verse 9 indicates this king would undergo exile, which did not happen to Jehoiakim.

c) The most likely choice is Jehoiachin (the son of Jehoiakim and nephew of Zedekiah) who was captured and taken off to Babylon as verses 8-9 suggest. He was carried off (along with Ezekiel) during the second deportation.

d) The grandiose descriptions of these kings given here speaks in idealized terms --- not in terms of attainment but in terms of potential. Both Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin ruled for only a few months and did very little of note. The description given here is an ideal one.

C. *Funeral Lament for the People of Judah (19:10-14)*

1. In the second poem, we have branches and a vine rather than cubs and a lioness.

a) We saw a vine metaphor earlier in Chapter 15:1-8 and in Chapter 17:5-10. God had planted Israel in a home of her own and given her rest. But the people rebelled, and so the vine was uprooted, stripped of its fruit, caused to wither, and consumed by fire. But the vine was not totally destroyed. Instead, it is transplanted in the desert.

b) This transplanted vine denotes the final Babylonian invasion in 586 BC, the destruction of the city, and the exile of the survivors to Babylon.

2. This vine had no branches left on it strong enough for a ruler's scepter.

a) Men like David, Solomon, and Hezekiah had come from this vine, but now there were no strong branches left.

b) All that Judah had left in the way of a king was the loathsome Zedekiah, who was not really a legal king at all. It was foolish for the people to put any trust in him.

3. Chapter 19 concludes the prophecies that began in Chapter 12 about the fall of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem. Why did this happen? Ezekiel has given us at least five reasons:

a) Judah failed to submit to God's chastening and rebelled in the face of captivity.

b) Judah rejected divine revelation by ignoring the true prophets and listening to the false prophets who said only what the people wanted to hear.

c) Judah failed to be fruitful as God had intended when he created her.

d) Judah was continuing a long history of unfaithfulness to God.

e) Judah looked to political alliances for security rather than to God.

2. Chapter 20: Enumeration of the Rebellions of Judah

A. *Introduction to Chapter 20*

1. This is the fourth dated prophecy in the book of Ezekiel. (August

591 BC)

2. The date indicates that this chapter begins a new series of messages.

a) It has been 11 months since Ezekiel delivered the messages that began in Chapter 8. The siege of Jerusalem will begin in about 3.5 years.

B. *Ezekiel Speaks to the Elders (20:1-4)*

1. As in Chapter 14, a group of elders come to see Ezekiel and inquire of the Lord. God cuts them off right at the start and says that he will not let them inquire of him.

a) It seems that the elders still held out some hope for a return from exile.

b) They may have been encouraged by news of an Egyptian victory in Sudan during the summer of 591. Rumors spread that the Pharaoh would soon make a triumphal entry into Palestine.

c) The text is silent regarding the elders' question but it probably had to do with whether Egypt would free them from the Babylonian captivity. God would not even listen to such a foolish question.

d) Zedekiah shared the same dream as these elders when he revolted against Babylon and placed his confidence in Egypt. Egypt never showed up to help, however.

2. Instead, God tells Ezekiel to confront these elders with a record of the past sins of Israel.

a) The elders came with hearts full of rebellion and idolatry and wanted a sweet message of comfort from Ezekiel. They wanted Ezekiel to give them the word of man --- but instead they got the Word of God!

C. *Lessons from the Exodus (20:5-9)*

1. The phrase "I chose Israel" in verse 5 is covenant language.

a) God heard their cry in Egypt and led them out of captivity. He then chose them to be his people by the covenant he established at Sinai.

b) The phrase "I swore with uplifted hand" suggests that God took a solemn oath to fulfill the promises of that covenant. But that covenant also contained curses for disobedience -- and these he also swore to fulfill.

c) Based on their covenant relationship, God commanded them to stop all vile, foreign religious practices --- and be faithful to him as in a marriage covenant. (Recall Chapter 16).

d) Instead of obeying God, the people rebelled. Indeed, just shortly after their departure from Egypt they worshipped a golden calf --- a sign of their longing for the gods of Egypt they had left behind.

2. Why didn't God destroy the people then?

a) After the golden calf incident, God expressed a desire to destroy the people and start a new nation with Moses. (Exodus 32:7-10).

b) Moses, however, appealed to God in Exodus 32:11-14 not to destroy the people because if he did the Egyptians would

question his character.

c) Here in verse 9 God says he spared them for the sake of his name. That is, he spared the people so the surrounding nations would not question his character.

d) The name of the Lord is holy, and the Israelites were to bear continually a proper witness to that holy name (Exodus 19:5-6). If they would not do so, the Lord would do so himself.

(1) God is concerned about his name and he expects us as his children to be concerned as well. The world has no concern for that name. Hollywood apparently takes great pleasure in taking the name of Jesus in vain at every opportunity --- but one day every knee will bow at that name and confess that Jesus is Lord of all. All men will honor the name of God --- the only question is when.

D. *Lessons from the Wilderness Days (20:10-14)*

1. Ezekiel next turns to the wilderness experiences of the exodus for a second example of Israel's rebellion.

2. God freed them from Egypt and gave them laws and decrees for living.

a) The word translated "decrees" means laws that were general axioms or principles. The word translated "laws" means rules that were associated with a specific penalty when broken.

b) God did not just liberate the people, but he honored them with a great law. He not only gave them freedom, but he gave them dignity. They chose to wallow in dishonor instead.

c) God gave them the law, but what did they want? They

lusted after the garlic and the cucumbers they had left behind in Egypt! (Numbers 11:5)

3. In addition to providing laws, God also provided the Sabbath.
 - a) **The Sabbath denotes more than just the day of rest. The Sabbath was a perpetual sign of God's presence with the people and of his pledge to keep his covenant with them. It was a constantly recurring reminder of God as the creator of the universe. Yet the people desecrated the Sabbath.**
 - b) **"By continually observing the weekly Sabbath, Israel would be reminded that God graciously set her apart as an instrument of blessing to the world and as a witness against the pagans who had exchanged the worship of the Creator for the worship of his creation."**
4. God gave the people laws, decrees, and the Sabbath so that they would "know" him (verse 12).
 - a) **The word for "know" here is the Hebrew word "yada." It speaks specifically of knowledge by personal experience.**
5. Again, God spared the people for the sake of his own reputation.

E. *Lessons from the Forty Years of Wandering (20:15-22)*

1. In spite of their history of rebellion, God gave them the promised land --- but they rebelled and would not enter.
 - a) **So God left them to wander in the wilderness for forty years until all that generation had died. Only those twenty years old and under were allowed to enter the land.**

2. Though God took care of their needs, the people continued to rebel against him and to desecrate his Sabbath.

a) In Numbers 22-25 we read of the people's choice to worship Baal prior to their entry into Jericho.

3. Yet God again withholds his hand and continues to spare the nation.

4. The phrase "the man who obeys them will live by them" in verse 21 is from Lev. 18:5. Paul quotes the same passage in Romans 10:4-5 when he contrasts justification under the Old Covenant with justification under the New Covenant.

F. *Past Rebellions Committed in the Land (20:23-29)*

1. God promised to disperse the people among the nations if they continued to rebel.

a) Of course, the fulfillment of this promise was a current event for Ezekiel's listeners. Moses himself had warned about the very exile they were now enduring.

2. The people rejected God's law, desecrated his Sabbath, and lusted after idols. They filled the land of promise with pagan idols and offered their children to pagan gods.

a) Do you notice how often this child sacrifice issue comes up in Ezekiel? When God wants to really make His point and show just how bad these people are, He confronts them with their murder of their own children. Apparently to God it just doesn't get any worse than that.

b) The next time you hear a modern liberal theologian explaining how God supports abortion rights, you might ask

how the modern sacrifice of our children on the altar of our own convenience is any different from the sacrifice of the Israelite children on the altar of Molech.

3. Verse 24 contains the fifth reference in this chapter to the Sabbath.

a) The repeated reference probably refers to more than the weekly Sabbath day, but likely also includes the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee Year discussed in Leviticus 25.

b) Leviticus 26 (the very next chapter!) contains a prophetic warning against idolatry and details the consequences of such a rebellion.

(1) (Lev. 26:17) "I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you."

c) The Babylonian captivity lasted 70 years. During those 70 years, the land lay at rest to enjoy her Sabbaths.

(1) (2 Chronicles 36:20-21) "And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years."

d) Ezekiel's repeated references to the Sabbath stresses the connection between the exile and the desecration and disregard of God's Sabbath.

4. When they finally entered the land what did they do?

a) Verse 28 tells us they immediately went to the hills and

offered thanks to the idols!

5. So what did God do this time? He gave them over!

a) He gave them over to the practice of idolatry and the abandonment of his laws. Verse 25 tells us that God gave them statutes that were not good -- that is, they would be given the worldly laws of the surrounding nations that brought only misery and death.

b) The people had become like those people in 2 Kings 17 who "feared the Lord, yet served their carved images" --- and God gave them up.

c) Where else have we seen this? Romans 1:22-26 talks about those who worshipped the creature rather than the creator. What did God do? Verse 26 tells us He gave them up to their vile passions.

d) What a terrible state to be in -- to be given up on by God! Why does God do that? Perhaps he hopes that the people he gives up will become so defiled that they will come to their senses. Or perhaps he wants their defilement to be a lesson to others.

e) The phrase "What is the high place you go to?" in verse 29 is rhetorical. The people thought they could worship these other gods without God knowing.

G. *Present Rebellions and the Coming Exile (20:30-39)*

1. Having focused on their past rebellions, attention now turns to their present rebellions.

2. The people who came to Ezekiel were as guilty as their

ancestors, as had been made clear in Chapter 18.

3. God speaks of the wilderness experiences in verses 37-39 as a time of purification.

a) Those who rebelled against God were purged from among the people.

b) Verse 37 says they passed under the rod. What does that mean? Shepherds did this with their flock as they were bedding them down in the fold. They would hold their staff across the entrance and stop each sheep to check for injuries. They also made sure that the sheep were theirs and not from another flock. In this way, God would purge the rebels from out of his people.

c) The phrase "bond of the covenant" in verse 37 does not occur very often in scripture. The people were in obligation to the covenant they had made with God.

4. "Go and serve your idols!" is a remarkable command in verse 39.

a) "God is not urging them to commit idolatry but is calling for them to quit limping on both sides -- if you must sin, he is saying, go ahead, but keep my name out of it."

b) Recall Jesus' message to the church of the Laodiceans in Rev. 3:15-16.

(1) I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth."

c) I think I had rather be an honest atheist on judgment day

than a so-called Christian who professes a belief in God but lives every day as if God does not exist. Sometimes God looks down and just shouts "Make up your mind! Get off the fence!"

(1) (1 Kings 18:21) And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word.

(2) Oh, but you know there are two sides to every issue. If I make up my mind one way, people on the other side may be upset with me. We need to study this some more. Let's not be hasty... As Chesterton said, we are raising a generation of people who are too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table!

d) "Go and serve your idols!" It was too late for repentance. Judgment was coming.

H. *The Purification After the Exile (20:40-44)*

1. After the nation had been purified by the exile, the people would once again return to the "holy mountain."

a) The "holy mountain" is a reference to Jerusalem. (Joel 3:17 -- So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, Dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, And no aliens shall ever pass through her again.)

2. This future restoration would encompass four events:

a) God's name would be vindicated among the heathen nations. He would show himself holy among his people in sight of the surrounding nations. (verse 41)

b) His people would again know that He is the Lord. (verse

42)

c) The people would repent, turn to God, and express deep remorse for their sinfulness. (verse 43)

(1) "I wonder if God came today through our cities, in judgment, sparing only those who cried and hurt over the wickedness so rampant in our nations -- how many of us would survive the purge?"

d) The people would see that God had been merciful in his dealings with them. They had received much less punishment than they deserved. (verse 44)

3. Are verses 40-44 looking toward the actual return from exile that occurred under Cyrus or is it looking to the spiritual restoration of Israel that occurred under Christ?

a) I think there are elements of both restorations here. Certainly there would be a physical return from exile after this purification, but that restoration was only temporary. I think these verses also have in mind the spiritual restoration that occurred through Christ.

b) The phrase "all the house of Israel" is speaking of a united kingdom. Later in 37:22 Ezekiel speaks of the church as a single kingdom with a single king. (Yet Ezra 6:17 speaks of offerings being made on behalf of the twelve tribes.)

I. *The Call for Judgment to Begin (20:45-49)*

1. Before the restoration can occur, judgment must occur.

2. The process of purging the land would begin with refining fires of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem.

a) Ezekiel looks toward the South to deliver this message.

That is, he looked toward Jerusalem.

b) Verse 48 tells us that this judgment would be so severe and of such a scope that it would be clear to all that it was an act of divine judgment.

3. This chapter ends with a complaint by Ezekiel that he was not being taken seriously because he spoke in parables rather than using plain words.

a) Chapter 21 gives the message in plain words. (He may have had the opposite complaint by the time the next chapter came to an end!)

3. Chapter 21: Prophecy of the Sword of the Lord

A. *Introduction to Chapter 21*

1. The phrase "Son of man, set your face against..." occurs nine times in the Bible, all in Ezekiel. We see it here in verse 2.

a) Each time it indicated a message of judgment. Here Ezekiel is commanded to prophecy judgment against Jerusalem.

b) A New Testament parallel can be found in Luke 9:51. There Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem" and he pronounced a judgment against that city very similar to the judgment prophesied by Ezekiel. (Luke 19:41; 21:20-24).

2. The collection of sword oracles in this chapter continues the messages of judgment against Judah and Jerusalem.

B. *The Sword is Drawn (21:1-7)*

1. Verse 2 mentions the city, the sanctuary, and the land. God's judgment would be complete. Nothing would be spared. God's sword in verses 3-5 was the Babylonian army itself!
2. In 20:46, the face was toward the "South." Now it is toward "Jerusalem."
 - a) **Is that plain enough? They wanted plain language? They are getting it! No more riddles. No more parables. Read my lips --- Jerusalem is going to be smashed with a sword! (The only thing worse than hearing everything in parables is not hearing everything in parables!)**
3. Verse 4 indicates that both the wicked and the righteous would be cut off. Does this contradict what Ezekiel was told in Chapter 18 -- that each man was responsible only for his own sins?
 - a) **The righteous were not being punished for the sins of others -- but they were certainly suffering due to the sins of others.**
 - b) **Read Exodus 34:6-7. (And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7"keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.")**
 - c) **Children died in the flood. Were they being punished by the flood? No. Were they suffering because of the sins of their parents? Yes.**
 - d) **It may seem to us like there is a fine line between suffering and punishment --- but to God there is a great deal**

of difference.

e) Also, taking the righteous from the land is a terrible punishment in and of itself on those unrighteous who remain behind.

f) Finally, sometimes the righteous die so that they might be spared a coming evil.

(1) Isaiah 57:1 (NIV) -- "The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil."

(2) 2 Kings 22:20 -- "Therefore, behold, I will gather thee [Josiah] to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil which I will bring upon this place."

(a) *God had just been telling Josiah that he was pleased with his humility. Verse 20 was a promise of blessing! It was better for Josiah to die in battle with Pharaoh Necho than to live on and see what would happen to the people because of their sin.*

C. *The Sword is Used (21:8-17)*

1. This section is predominantly poetic, with some prose statements interspersed.

2. First, the sword is sharpened and readied for the slaughter. (v. 8-11)

a) The meaning of the phrase in verse 10b (the scepter or rod despises every stick) is uncertain. Some take the rod to be a rod of discipline. Others note that in Genesis 49:10 both "scepter" and "my son" are used to describe the promise of the royal line in Judah, which is a subject of discussion here.

b) The translation that makes the most sense to me is in the NKJV -- "It despises the scepter of my son, as it does all wood." That is, this sword is impartial. It chops down foreign kings as well as kings in the Davidic line.

c) This idea reappears a few verses later in verse 13 -- "And what if the sword despises even the scepter? The scepter shall be no more."

3. Second, Ezekiel cries and smites his chest as a symbol of the carnage. (v. 12)

a) Yet again we have a physical demonstration by Ezekiel. (After hearing this message, Ezekiel might very well have done this without even being told!)

4. Third, the sword strikes twice, then three times to indicate the extent of the judgment. (v. 13-14)

a) The three strikes may denote the three Babylonian invasions and deportation.

(1) The first was in 605 during the reign of Jehoiakim. The second was in 597 BC during the reign of Jehoiachin. The third was in 586 during the reign of Zedekiah.

(2) It may simply stress the severity of the judgment. Amos used similar language at the beginning of his book. For three judgments, no four!

5. Finally, the sword is instructed to do its work. (v. 15-17).

a) The sword is stationed at the gates to intercept those who might flee. It will slash until its work is done, at which time God will clap his hands together to indicate the completion of his judgment.

D. *Nebuchadnezzar's Decision (21:18-27)*

1. Ezekiel next makes a drawing of the road by which Nebuchadnezzar would approach Judah.

a) The King had two choices. He could attack Rabbah (a city of the Ammonites) or Jerusalem. Damascus was the normal junction where the road divided.

b) Faced with this decision, the King uses divination to decide what to do. Three forms of soothsaying are mentioned in verse 21.

(1) Belomancy was the shaking of arrows, letting them fall, and interpreting the pattern.

(2) Consulting the teraphim meant consulting idols about what to do.

(3) Hepatoscopy was the examination of the liver of an animal to determine the future.

c) Nebuchadnezzar chooses to attack Jerusalem. The message here is that God controls both this pagan and his pagan divination and Nebuchadnezzar will do whatever God wants him to do. (In Jeremiah 27:6, God describes Nebuchadnezzar as his servant.)

2. What does the phrase "sworn allegiance" in verse 23 mean?

a) One possible paraphrase: "And this decision to come against Jerusalem will seem to the Judean false prophets to be a false divination contrary to Nebuchadnezzar's best interests. These Judean false prophets have sworn oaths to the Judean people that everything would work out all right for them. But God (through Babylon) will bring their iniquity

(their lying to the people, etc.) to remembrance."

b) Another possibility: "This decision to go against Jerusalem will seem to the Judeans to be a mistake for Nebuchadnezzar. The Judeans had sworn oaths to Nebuchadnezzar and didn't keep them so the Babylonian will bring this faithlessness to remembrance."

3. The "profane and wicked prince of Israel" in verse 25 is Zedekiah.

a) He would lose his crown and the kingdom of Judah would end (verse 26). Zedekiah would be dethroned and humiliated (verses 25-27) and his kingdom would become a ruin (verse 27).

4. The removal of the priesthood and kingship from Judah are pictured here by the removal of the high priest's turban and the king's crown.

a) With these removed, all would be different. The low would be exalted and the exalted would be brought low. (verse 26)

5. The crown and the turban would be held in reserve until "he comes to whom it rightfully belongs." (verse 27)

a) That coming king is, of course, Jesus Christ.

(1) Genesis 49:10 --- The scepter shall not depart from Judah.

(2) Psalm 2:6 --- But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.

(3) Jeremiah 23:5 --- Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and act wisely And do justice and righteousness in the

land.

(4) Ezekiel 37:24 --- My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them.

b) Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (Revelation 17:14)

(1) Not "will be" King of Kings as we sometimes sing. (See #577 in our song books and see my comments about that song at <http://www.thywordistruth.com/Songs/index.htm>. You can also find out there why premillennialists deny that Jesus is presently reigning on the throne of David.)

(2) Jesus is presently wearing the crown of David as he rules over everything, having been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

6. In about 500 years, the Davidic throne had gone from King David to the loathsome and pathetic Prince Zedekiah.

a) The Davidic throne was established in 1047 BC. David sat on it and ruled for 43 years. The kings after David all the way down to Zedekiah occupied a literal throne in Jerusalem on Mt. Moriah. After Zedekiah's rebellion, the throne was vacant for 600 years.

b) The next mention of the throne is in Luke 1:33 --- "The Lord God will give Him [Jesus] the throne of His father David."

c) Jesus is now on the throne of David, and that throne is now in heaven where Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. (Hebrews 8:1 --- "Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the

heavens...")

d) After the Babylonians came the Medes and the Persians and then the Greeks. The Jews revolted against Greek rule during the the Maccabean Rebellion, which eventually gave rise to the first independent Jewish nation since before the Babylonian captivity. This nation only lasted 79 years. In 63 BC, the Romans under Pompey conquered Jerusalem and once again the Jews were under foreign domination.

e) Aristobolus was the first Maccabean to call himself king, but he was not of the Davidic line. The Romans later set up Herod as the King of the Jews. Not only was Herod not of the Davidic line, but he was not Jewish! Herod was an Edomite.

E. *Prophecy of Judgment on the Ammonites (21:28-32)*

1. God next turns his attention to the Ammonites. Why?

a) "Israel and Ammon were family but that didn't prevent them from hating one another." The Ammonites aided the Babylonians in the conquest of Jerusalem, and they mocked Judah during her defeat.

b) Recall that the Ammonites were descendants of Lot. The father of the Ammonites, Ben-Ammi, was the son of Lot born to him by one of his own daughters, who fled Sodom with Lot and his wife. (Genesis 19:30-38) The other group who came about this way were the Moabites. Both were bitter enemies of God's people.

c) Just because Nebuchadnezzar went down the road to Jerusalem first does not mean that the Ammonites had been spared. Their own judgment would come quickly.

2. Who are the people in verse 29 who see the false visions?

a) It could be either the Ammonite false prophets or the Judean false prophets.

b) Possible paraphrase: "It is true that what the Judean false prophets have been saying about you is all wrong. You will not be judged by Babylon at this time. The Judeans are lying when they say you will be piled up in heaps of dead bodies. The truth is that the Judeans will be piled up in heaps."

3. Why judge the Ammonites? Weren't they really helping God here?

a) God doesn't need any help! Even though they participated in the judgment of Judah, they (like Babylon) would also receive a judgment.

b) The Ammonites were wicked. They were known for idolatry. (1 Kings 11:7, 33). They had been condemned for their cruelty. (Amos 1:13). They had been condemned for their pride. (Zeph. 2:9-10). They were enemies of God's people. (Deut. 23:3-4; Neh. 4:3, 7-8).

c) Verse 30 tells us they would be judged in their homeland. God is telling them that He is no local deity with limited power. He is going to go right to where they live to judge them.

d) Their fate would be worse than Judah because they would be remembered no more.

(1) In 581 Nebuchadnezzar attacked and devastated the Ammonites. They survived up through Roman times, but today the city of Rabbah is in ruins.

e) Ezekiel delivers another message against the Ammonites in Chapter 25.

Ezekiel -- Lesson Thirteen

Chapters 22-24

1. The cause of judgment: Judah's idolatrous rulers (22:1-31).

1. *Deliberate disobedience of the Mosaic covenant (22:1-16).*

1. The city is still standing, but it is clear from Ezekiel's words that its days are numbered.

1. The city that is still called the "holy city" had become the "bloody city"; the bloodthirsty deeds of its citizens had transformed the character of the city.

2. While the words are addressed to Jerusalem, they are heard by exiles in Babylon who, upon hearing, lost their few remaining hopes that rescue might come from Jerusalem.

2. The condemnation of the city moves from the general to the specific, and from the sacred to the secular.

1. Jerusalem had been guilty of idolatry and bloodshed, and so had hastened the day of its judgment (vv. 4-5).

2. The city had not only lost its true faith in its acts of idolatry (v. 3), but in addition its inhabitants had committed a multitude of social crimes making it the "sin city" of the ancient world.

3. The crimes of their capital city demanded punishment (the sins charged parallel those in the holiness code of Lev. chs. 17 - 26).

4. The phrase "O infamous city full of turmoil" (v.5, NIV) can be translated literally, "O defiled of the Name, abounding in tumult."

1. "Name" with the definite article was regularly used as a substitute for the personal name of God, which represented his holy nature and character.
2. They defiled "the Name," meaning the person and character of God, especially his holiness.

1. Laughter at the proud city rung around the world -- "Look at her now."

2. Have you hear the latest Jerusalem joke?

3. Can this not be the lot of the church of the Lord when we live like the world while making claims of being different?

4. Where would that (this) world look for light if not to Jerusalem (the church)?

5. What is clear is the interrelationship between the faith of the city and the moral behavior of its citizens.

1. When the faith of a nation or individual is healthy, moral behavior towards human beings flows from that faith.
2. When the faith collapses, it undermines the foundation of moral life so that crime and immorality flourish.
3. Thus, the root of Jerusalem's evil in the worship of false god's, or the worship of the true God in the form of an idol.
4. Thus, the catalog of crime is secondary; the root of the problem is the loss of faith.

5. The interrelationship between faith and morality is illustrated over and over again in the Old Testament; it is a lesson that needs to be learned if any life is to be successful.

1. The Ten Commandments deal first with the life of faith before moving on to the social and moral areas of human behavior (theft, adultery, murder, etc.).

2. Israel's educational system as developed in the Book of Proverbs, started with the foundation of faith (1:7 --the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom); when that foundation has been established it is possible to learn the way of morality.

3. The loss of faith is accompanied by a decline in morality; there is no longer a commonly shared vision as to what constitutes the good, and so evil may flourish unnoticed.

4. The tragedy in this process of decline is the transformation of character that is an integral part of the process; the "holy city" become the "bloody city"; the good person becomes the evil person; both invite the judgment of a God who is both good and holy.

5. That judgment will be severe (v. 14 --Can your heart endure or can your hands be strong in the day when God shall deal with thee? Thank God for Jesus Christ!)

2. The purification of judgment (22:17-22).

1. The image is that of a smelter.

1. Various types of metals are dumped into a furnace to obtain something precious, but there is nothing but dross.

2. There is nothing precious.

2. In the same way God acts as a smelter.

- 1. The melting down of the people is a metaphorical description of God's coming judgment.**
- 2. There is nothing precious to be found; Israel has become dross of no value.**
- 3. Ezekiel takes a familiar Old Testament metaphor and converts it from one of hope to hopelessness.**
 - 1. Isaiah describes God as a smelter (Isa. 1:21-27), but his message has an element of hope: the judgment of God would remove the dross, but it would also be a process of refinement and restoration.**
 - 2. Ezekiel sees no prospect of refinement; beyond the smelting there remains only dross.**
 - 3. Israel's evil has been taken so far that the prophet, at this point, sees no prospect beyond judgment.**
- 4. The prophecy is one of waste.**
 - 1. In every life there is potential both for dross and for silver.**
 - 2. Life's purpose, from one perspective, is to remove the dross and refine the silver.**
 - 3. That goal may be obtained by maintaining a relationship with the living God, but when one loses that relationship and dross dominates where silver should have been, life has lost its purpose.**
 - 4. To have lived without knowing the purpose of human**

existence (Eccl. 12:13-14) is the greatest of human tragedies and waste.

3. *The void of righteous leaders (22:23-31).*

1. Now Ezekiel's condemnation becomes quite specific in terms of the various segments of society.

2. The picture is that of an enormous court; before the court the people are lined up in various ranks -- princes (v. 25) responsible for the government and administration of the nation; priests (v. 26), to whom were entrusted the worship and spiritual welfare of the nation; prophets (v. 28), who were responsible for declaring God's word to his people; and the citizens as a whole.

1. Princes.

1. The princes had power that should have been exercised in the course of their leadership for the good of the nation, but it was abused.

2. They no longer saw the people as sheep entrusted to their care, but as prey upon whom they could feed by destroying their lives and seizing their wealth.

2. Priests.

1. The priests were responsible for maintaining the divine law and guarding the sanctity of worship.

2. They failed miserably; they had neither fulfilled their responsibilities with respect to worship and the Sabbath, nor had they taught the people the fundamentals of the faith.

3. Prophets.

1. The prophets had succumbed to the pressure of popular demand.
2. No one wanted to hear bad news, so they declared none.
3. They whitewashed the dark truth of Israel's terrible estate and declared instead the cheerful things that the people wanted to hear.
4. They claimed the authority of God for all their hollow pronouncements, but God had not spoken.

4. Citizens.

1. The people as a whole were just as guilty.
2. They committed every type of crime, exploited the poor, and exercised no concern for the rights of immigrants and other marginal members of their society.
3. In this prophetic condemnation by rank and file, a number of things become clear about God's judgment of the chosen people.

1. The judgment was to be all-inclusive (vv. 17-22 made this clear), and no single class of people could claim innocence or exclusion from it.

1. The judgment announced by Ezekiel was not only justified, but it was demanded by the national collapse of faith and morality among the people as a whole.
2. However, if there had been a single person to stand in the breach (v. 30) judgment could have been turned aside, but there was none.

1. God was looking for someone to take the lead and stand in the breaches of the wall so he would not destroy the land.

- 2. This was similar to the proposal found in Gen. 19:22-33 where God promised to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if but ten righteous persons were found.*
- 3. God's plan for reaching people and nations is still the same.*
- 4. He uses godly men and women to stand in the breaches in morality and spirituality and make the difference by calling the nation and individuals to repentance.*
- 5. Many are willing to do an easier task, seeking to ban pornography and drugs, etc.*
- 6. The harder job is what God asks -- help me change people from the inside.*

2. Ezekiel's declaration removes a natural human tendency in time of trouble to blame someone else.

1. When a nation has gone wrong we blame the government; when the economy goes bad, we blame the workers; when the church is in decline we blame the preachers and elders; fault must always lie elsewhere.
2. Yet the fault, albeit rampant elsewhere, also lies within.
3. Ezekiel seeks to bring home to the people not only the pervasiveness of evil, but also the responsibility of individuals for evil, regardless of rank or vocation.

3. Each group that disobeys is responsible for its own condemnation.

1. If the princes had maintained their integrity; if the priests or prophets had retained faithfulness in their calling; if the people had kept the faith, there would still have been hope.

2. But there was no honest person left, and so there was no hope.

4. The declaration of judgment is a challenge to accept responsibility.

1. God seeks for one person to stand in the breach.

2. Though we may not be able to see the impact of one such person, we (I) am required to stand and not conform to the tenor of our times.

2. An allegorical summary of Israel's political prostitution (23:1-49).

1. The whole chapter is taken up with the story of Oholah and Oholibah, together with its various levels of interpretation.

1. On the surface it is a story of two sisters whose lives are characterized by blatant immorality and eventual failure.

2. But the story serves as an allegory: it is really a tale of two cities and their fate in history of the world nations.

1. Oholah ("her tent"; a possible reference to a place of worship such as the pagan shrines prevalent in the north) represents Samaria, the capital city of the northern state of Israel.

2. Oholibah ("my tent is in her"; a reminder that God had selected Jerusalem as the place for his place of worship) represents Jerusalem, the capital of Judah.

3. The method of the story is to cause comprehension by shock.

1. It is a lewd tale told in a vulgar fashion.
2. It would have raised eyebrows and offended sensibilities when it was first told, as it continues to do today.
3. Yet the complacency of many people is so firmly set that only a shocking approach can break the shell of hardness.
4. Ezekiel is saying, if you think this story is crude, what do you think that God's reaction must be to your lives.

3. The story is one of horror and unfaithfulness in terms of international relationships.

4. It is expressed as a horrifying tale of moral turpitude, easily understood and easily abhorred by any listener.

2. *Israel's sordid youth (23:1-4).*

1. The story begins with two sisters living in Egypt where, as young women, they had already adopted the life of a prostitute.

2. Despite their unworthiness, God took them as his wives (v. 4 - they became mine).

3. *Samaria's prostitution (23:5-10).*

1. Oholah took lovers and was unfaithful to her husband.

2. She fancied the young warriors of Assyria and devoted her attentions to them until at last her husband turned her over to them.

3. Only then did she discover the cruelty of her lovers; they slew her, and in death she became a byword among women, one whose immoral life was told to the young to warn them of the final end of the profligate.

4. Israel fell to Assyria in 722 B.C.

5. George Bernard Shaw said that there were two horrible times in each one's life, the time when you don't get what you want and the time when you do get what you want. Psalm 106:15 said it best, "And he gave them their request but sent leanness into their soul."

4. *Jerusalem's prostitution (23:11-35).*

1. Oholibah was worse; knowing full well the fate of Oholah, she continued to behave in the same fashion.

2. Sometimes it was the Assyrians that caught her fancy; sometimes it was the Babylonians, until at last she too had gone so far beyond the limits that her husband turned from her in disgust (v. 18).

3. Even that did not halt her; she continued the lewd lifestyle that had been her only companion since youth.

4. Oholibah would drink the same cup that her sister had drunk, a cup of "horror and desolation" (v. 33).

5. From all the bleakness of this continuing tale of two sisters, two lessons emerge:

1. The source of all the sins (both of the city and the sister) was unfaithfulness.

1. Covenants of every kind required faithfulness between the partners.

2. The first of the ten commandments specified the primary requirement of Israel -- that it be faithful to the one true God.

3. Failure in this first requirement leads to collapse elsewhere.

2. There is a deeper diagnosis of Israel's failure -- acts of unfaithfulness culminated in disaster, but behind the unfaithfulness lay forgetfulness (v. 35 -- ye have forgotten me, see 22:12.).

1. When one forgets God and leaves his ways, the path into every kind of abomination opens before him.

2. A healthy memory was a necessary part of a healthy relationship (Deut. 8:11-20).

3. By forgetting God's past mercies, Israel had no brake in its headlong rush into disaster.

5. *Judgment for prostitution (23:36-49).*

1. The allegory draws to a close in this passage in which some elements of the preceding story are recapitulated and a number of minor new elements are added.

2. The behavior of the cities and sisters invited judgment, and so God summoned judgment (v. 46).

3. The judgment would be administered by righteous men (v. 45), not in the sense that they were righteous before God, but in the sense that they were more righteous than Israel and Judah.

4. Only one small positive note emerges -- all women may take warning and not commit lewdness as you have done (v. 48).

5. If they or their children should survive the exile and return to life in Jerusalem, it was a lesson that they could take with them.

6. The only future was for the faithful; if they were to hope once

again for a future for their city and land, they would first have to relearn the daily practice of faithfulness to God.

3. The execution of Jerusalem's judgment (24:1-27).

1. *The parable of the cooking pot (24:1-14).*

1. Once again Ezekiel specifies a date for what he is about to declare.

1. The last date referred to was the summer of 591 B.C. (20:1).

2. Now, some 2 1/2 years later, he specifies a winter date, probably in January, 588 B.C.

3. It is presented distinctively -- he is told to write it down.

1. The date was important, because it was the date on which he was instructed to announce that the Babylonian king had begun the siege of the city of Jerusalem.

2. Although the expedition might have been known (the exiles probably heard of the expedition that had been dispatched to Palestine), the date that the siege had actually begun was something that could not have been known by normal means.

3. This is one indication that the prophecy was taking place in Babylon, not Jerusalem; the whole point in writing down the date was that he could not have known it by normal means, an exercise that would have been futile had he been in Jerusalem.

2. The Ezekiel was told to declare an allegory -- a pot is set on the fire and meat and bones are added to make a tasty stew.

1. The pot has not been properly cared for -- it is corroded

with rust and cannot do its job properly.

2. The rust ruins the stew and it is poured out.

3. The pot is put back on the fire where the dry flesh and bones burn, and eventually the pot itself melts down to bits of useless metal.

4. The scene of domesticity has been turned into one of destruction -- the pot is not good for the task for which it was created and so it must be destroyed.

5. Interpretation of the allegory.

1. The pot is Jerusalem.

2. The flesh and bones are its citizens.

3. The fire beneath is the Babylonian enemy.

4. A healthy (uncorroded) city and use external heat to its own purposes, strengthening those within in times of adversity.

5. But when the city is corrupted, external adversity destroys both the city and its inhabitants.

2. *Signs to the exiles (24:15-27).*

1. The death of Ezekiel's wife (24:15-24).

1. This event was after the dated allegory (24:1-14), but it is uncertain how long after.

2. It may have been some 18 months which would have been in the fateful summer of 586 B.C. when Jerusalem finally fell.

3. God's word on this occasion would have caused Ezekiel instant shock -- his wife is about to die.

1. In the book as a whole, she is an anonymous person; nothing is known of the relationship between her and Ezekiel except for the statement that she is the delight of his eyes.
2. The shock is compounded by the instruction that when she dies Ezekiel is not to mourn her in the conventional manner, but to hold his grief within himself.
3. Further, he is told to announce the event to the people which he did on the same morning that he received the revelation.

4. In the evening, Ezekiel's wife died; the following morning he exhibited none of the customary signs of mourning as required by convention and compelled by grief.

1. We do not know how she died except at a stroke, which may indicate suddenness.
2. Nor do we know whether she had been sick and vulnerable to death.
3. All that is known is that her death was announced, and she died later on the same day.

5. Ezekiel's hearers were curious about the sequence of events and questioned him as to the absence of mourning.

1. Usually he would have been weeping loudly, he would have removed his priestly turban, taken his sandals off, and dressed in sackcloth and ashes.
2. Ezekiel explained.

1. As his wife had been the delight of his eyes, so the temple in Jerusalem had been the delight of the exiles eyes (v. 21).

2. That striking temple, beautiful in architectural form and profound in its symbolism of God's presence would die as did Ezekiel's wife.

3. As had Ezekiel, so too would the exiles control their grief.

1. For both parties the tragedies would be too great for resort to formal grief.

2. As one part of the prophet's life and hope had died with his wife, so too hope would die for those in exile when the temple was destroyed.

3. The destruction of the temple in Jerusalem would seem to mark, in an external sense, the end of the religion of Israel -- God's presence would no longer be among them.

2. The removal of Ezekiel's muteness (24:25-27).

1. From the time of his wife's death until news was received by those in exile of the temple's destruction, Ezekiel was to be totally speechless.

2. Only when he received news of the temple would he be able to speak again.

3. When his speech returned, the people would be speechless from the news of Jerusalem's destruction.

4. Ezekiel was obedient and faithfully fulfilled his

instructions; we completely misread the man if we think that his obedience came easily.

- 1.** He was a man who loved deeply, and true grief is born of true love.
- 2.** Yet even his grief was to be used in the service of God; no part of his human existence was excluded from the totality of his vocation.
- 3.** We begin to perceive how the real tribulations of mortal existence may be more direct messengers than the words of sermons and speeches.

Lesson 14: Ezekiel 25-26

1. Introduction to Chapters 25-28

A. So far Ezekiel has focused on Judah and Jerusalem. He has told us that the city will be destroyed, the people will be killed or exiled, and he has told us why this is happening.

B. Chapters 25-33 of Ezekiel contain oracles against the foreign nations that had in some manner cursed or ridiculed Judah and Jerusalem. (Similar groupings of oracles can be found in Isaiah 13-23 and Jeremiah 46-51.)

C. God promised Abraham in Genesis 12:3: "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

D. Chapters 25-28 will deal with six nations: the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Edomites, the Philistines, the people of Tyre, and the people of Sidon. (See Map.)

E. Chapters 29-32 will deal with Egypt.

F. It is interesting that Babylon is not listed among the foreign nations condemned in these oracles. Why? Babylon's day was coming, but at this time Babylon was God's sword to bring judgment on others. At this time, Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant. (Jeremiah 27:6)

2. Prophecy Against Ammon (25:1-7)

A. The Ammonites (literally, "children of Ammon") were descendants of Lot, who was both their father and their grandfather.

1. The Ammonites were descended from Ben-Ammi, who was born to the younger daughter of Lot after they fled from Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:38).
2. After Lot and his daughters fled the city, the daughters worried that there would be no one to carry on the family name. Rather than look to God for a solution, they made Lot drunk and fathered children by him. Those children became bitter enemies of God's people. (The Moabites also trace their history back to these events.)
3. Ezekiel has already given one message of judgment against the Ammonites prior to this one. (See comments on 21:28-32 in Lesson 12.)

B. *The Ammonites were known for:*

1. Their idolatry.
 - a) **1 Kings 11:7 tells us that Molech was an Ammonite god --- the same Molech to which the Israelites had sacrificed their own children (Jer. 32:35).**
2. Their cruelty.
 - a) **Amos 1:13 tells us that they ripped open women with child.**
 - b) **1 Samuel 11:2 tells us about a peace covenant proposed by the Ammonites that included as one of its provisions that the right eye be put out in every man on the other side of the controversy.**
3. Their pride.
 - a) **Zeph. 2:9-10 speaks about their pride and arrogant**

threats.

4. Their opposition to God's people.

a) See Deut 23:3-4; Judges 3:13; 2 Sam. 10:1-14; 2 Kings 24:2.

b) Remember Tobiah who ridiculed the rebuilding of the wall in Neh. 4:3? He was an Ammonite.

C. Starting in verse 3, Ezekiel reviews the crimes of the Ammonites.

1. They said "Aha!" over the sanctuary -- that is, they reacted with malicious delight over the destruction of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem.

2. They were pleased that Judah had been carried off into exile.

D. The Ammonites hostility toward the Israelites was not new.

1. In the days of the judges, the Ammonites harassed the eastern tribes until they were finally crushed by Jephthah. (Judges 10-11)

2. Saul defeated the Ammonites in the early days of his monarchy. (1 Sam. 11)

3. Amos condemned the Ammonites for their savagery in warfare and predicted their ultimate destruction. (Amos 1:13-15)

E. Ezekiel prophesied four coming judgments on the Ammonites.

1. First, they too would be taken captive.

a) Ammon would not escape unscathed the invasion of

Nebuchadnezzar. History tells us that their land was eventually occupied by the desert tribes of Arabs who lived to the east of the Ammonites. These desert tribes may be the "men of the East" in verse 4. Another possibility is that the "men of the East" refers to Babylon itself, which was also located to the East.

- 2. Second, their capital (Rabbah) would be destroyed.**
 - a) It would no longer be a great city, but would become a habitation and pasture for camels. (verse 5) It would be desolate and overgrown. (21:25)**
 - b) The reason for the coming judgment is restated in verse 6 -- the Ammonites gloated and rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem.**
 - c) The modern day city of Amman, Jordan is located on top of the ancient city of Rabbah -- 25 miles east of the Dead Sea.**
- 3. Third, Ammon would be plundered by the nations around them.**
 - a) The Ammonites would become a spoil of war.**
- 4. Fourth, the country would disappear from the family of nations.**
 - a) Ammon, as a nation, no longer existed after its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar and its plunder by the Bedouins from the east (verse 7).**
 - b) But what about Jeremiah 49:6, which predicts the return of the Ammonites?**

(1) (Jeremiah 49:6) "But afterward I will bring back the captives of

the people of Ammon," says the Lord.

(2) Not all of the people of Ammon would be destroyed --- a remnant would remain. Jeremiah 48:47 tells us the same thing about the Moabites (who will be discussed by Ezekiel in the next section). They would be brought back. They would be restored.

(3) When? They would be restored when all the nations of the world would be blessed through Jesus Christ. The entire Old Testament looks forward to a time when the entire world (including these pagan nations) would be blessed by Jesus Christ.

(4) God did not write them off completely because He had a plan to someday bless the entire world through the very Hebrews that the Ammonites had ridiculed and sought to destroy.

3. Prophecy Against Moab (25:8-11)

A. *The Moabites descended from the older daughter of Lot in the same illicit union that produced the Ammonites (Gen. 19:37).*

B. *The Moabites lived in the land to the east of the Dead Sea. When the Hebrews first approached the land after forty years in the wilderness, it was the Moabites who introduced them to Baal worship.*

1. (Numbers 25:1-3) "Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel."

C. *The Moabites are condemned in verse 8 for mocking Judah for being like all of the other nations. The purpose of the taunt was to contradict Judah's claim that they were God's chosen people.*

1. (Jeremiah 48:26b-27) "Moab shall wallow in his vomit, and he shall also be in derision. For was not Israel a derision to you? Was he found among thieves? For whenever you speak of him, you shake your head in scorn."
2. The "Mesha Stone" discovered in 1868 recounts the king of Moab's boast that his God Chemosh had vanquished Israel. That stone refers to an earlier event, but the attitude it expressed was no doubt reexpressed when Jerusalem fell.

D. The reference to Seir in verse 8 is a foreshadowing of the next judgment.

1. Seir is a reference to Edom (Gen. 32:3), which is pictured here as sharing the same disdain for God's people that was shown by Moab. God will deal with Edom starting in verse 12.

E. Ezekiel prophesied in verse 9 that God would expose the flank or border of Moab to invading forces.

1. Moab would be unable to protect its border, and soon the whole country would be at risk. As with the Ammonites, the Moabites would be overtaken by forces from the east and they would cease to exist in the family of nations.
2. Also, as with the Ammonites, the Moabites would finally realize that there is no god but the God of Judah (verses 7, 11).

4. Lesson for Today

A. The judgment of God on Ammon and Moab is a commentary on the tragic consequences of wrong choices.

1. Lot never dreamed that when he chose to live in Sodom that

choice would affect his descendants forever.

2. His daughters carried the corruption of Sodom with them as they ran from the city, and, as a consequence of that corruption, Israel was beset by and corrupted by two powerful enemies.

3. How did it all begin? Genesis 13:12 tells us that Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom! Rather than flee or build a fence, Lot went right in and made himself at home.

4. We should all consider the consequences --- both short term and long term --- before we decide to pitch our tent toward Sodom. Lot no doubt thought that he was strong enough not to be corrupted by the wicked city --- and he appears to have been right! But what about his family? And what about his descendants?

B. We should never be happy at the misfortune of others.

1. Romans 12:15 tells us that we should weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. Sometimes it seems we have turned that around -- we weep with those who rejoice and rejoice with those who weep!

2. Proverbs 17:5 says that "he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished."

3. Did the Moabites and the Ammonites learn a lesson? Apparently not.

a) (Ezekiel 25:6) "Because you clapped your hands, stamped your feet, and rejoiced in heart with all your disdain for the land of Israel..."

b) Images of airplanes crashing into skyscrapers are not the only images burned into our minds by September 11. Most of

us also vividly recall the images of Palestinians dancing in the streets and shouting for joy when they heard the news.

c) "He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished."

C. *God can turn great evil into great good.*

- 1. (Genesis 50:20) "But as for you [Joseph's brothers], you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.**
- 2. Remember Ruth? Ruth was the great-grandmother of King David and is mentioned by Matthew in the genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1:5). Ruth was a Moabite!**
- 3. Interestingly, King David sent his parents to safety with King Mizpah of Moab when he fled from Saul. (1 Sam. 22:3-4)**

5. Question

A. *We have seen Ezekiel's prophecies that these nations will cease to exist, and history tells us that in fact they did cease to exist.*

B. *Yet the Jewish nation did not cease to exist. It continues to the present day. Doesn't that prove (as the premillennialists teach) that the Jews must have some special role to play during the end times?*

C. *No. It only proves that they were well designed for the purpose that God intended them to fulfill -- a purpose that was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ when all the families of the earth were blessed as God had promised to Abraham.*

D. *On March 2, 1972, NASA launched the Pioneer 10 spacecraft.*

Its original mission was to photograph Jupiter. That mission was intended to last for only 21 months.

E. In 1983, Pioneer 10 became the first manmade object to leave our solar system, and it is now headed for Aldebaran, a red star in the Taurus constellation (which it should reach in about two million years).

F. On March 2 of this year (2002), Pioneer 10 celebrated its 30th anniversary -- and it is still going strong! On March 1, NASA beamed it a message, and an answer came back 22 hours later.

G. Does the fact that the Pioneer 10 is still sending us messages prove that its designers intended for it to be still active and playing some role in the space program today? No. It only proves that it was very well designed to carry out its original mission, which it did --- nearly 30 years ago!

6. Prophecy Against Edom (25:12-14)

A. Located just south of Moab, Edom was also associated with the area around Mount Seir mentioned in verse 8. Edom and Moab were close allies.

B. The Edomites were descendants of Esau (Gen. 25:25), who was characterized as red and hairy. (The word "Edom" means "red.")

C. There was a natural enmity between Esau's descendants (the Edomites) and Jacob's descendants (the Israelites), which was perpetuated by the memory of Jacob's perceived treachery and his deception, which cost Esau his birthright (Gen. 25:29-34) and his blessing (Gen. 27:1-40).

D. The Bible pictures the Edomites as:

1. Warring. Isaac told Esau in Gen. 27:40 that he would live by his sword.
2. Idolatrous. After King Amaziah defeated Edom, 2 Chron. 25:14 tells us that he brought Edom's gods back with him to be his own gods.
3. Proud. (Jeremiah 49:15-16) "Now I will make you small among the nations, despised among men. 16 The terror you inspire and the pride of your heart have deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks, who occupy the heights of the hill. Though you build your nest as high as the eagle's, from there I will bring you down," declares the LORD.
4. Cruel. (Amos 1:11) This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Edom, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because he pursued his brother with a sword, stifling all compassion, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked.
5. Vengeful. (verse 12)

E. Esau despised his birthright and thus held the promises of God in contempt. (Hebrews 12:16-17, which describes Esau as a "profane" person). This same contempt was also found in his descendants, who were bitter enemies of God's people.

1. Edom consistently took sides with the enemies of Israelites, and often helped them.
2. Edom's hatred of Israel was shown by their refusal to allow them passage through their country on the way up from Egypt. (Numbers 20:21)
3. 2 Chronicles 20:10-11 reminds us that Israel did not invade

Ammon, Moab, or Edom when it came up out of Egypt --- and yet those nations attempted to invade Israel at every opportunity.

4. Edom had called for the destruction of Jerusalem.

a) (Psalm 137:7) Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem, who said, "Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation!"

5. Amos tells us that the Edomites bought Hebrew slaves from the men of Tyre (Amos 1:9).

F. In verse 13, Ezekiel prophesies that the whole country would be laid waste.

1. Teman was in the extreme north of Edom, and Dedan was in the extreme south.

2. Both Isaiah (34:5-17) and Jeremiah (49:7-22) have lengthy denunciations of Edom that describe it as becoming a desolate and empty place.

3. The entire book of Obadiah predicts the doom of Edom for conspiring against their kinsmen, the Hebrews.

a) (Obadiah 11-12) "In the day that you [Edom] stood on the other side-In the day that strangers carried captive his forces, when foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem-Even you were as one of them.¹² But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother in the day of his captivity; Nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; Nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress."

G. Verse 14 tells us that God's judgment against Edom would be

by the hand of His own people.

1. This prophecy was fulfilled when Edom was defeated by the Maccabees and became part of the Jewish state.
2. The Hasmoneans compelled the Edomites to be circumcised, which had the adverse effect of allowing Herod (an Edomite) to later become the king of the Jews.

7. Prophecy Against Philistia (25:15-17)

A. Ezekiel is moving geographically clockwise as he announces judgment on Israel's closest neighbors. Next in line are the Philistines, who "fought Israel at the drop of a hat and threw the hat down themselves." (McGuiggan)

B. The Philistines were a seafaring people who came to the coast of Israel from the area around the Aegean Sea. They formed a confederation of five city-states: Gath, Gaza, Ekron, Ashdod, and Askelon.

C. A strong Jewish state was a threat to their control over the coastal area, so they opposed Israel even before the monarchy. (The judges Shamgar, Jephthah, and Samsom faced threats from the Philistines.)

D. Early defeats and capture of the ark by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4-5) led the Hebrews to ask for a king who could be a military leader (1 Sam. 8).

1. They asked for a king so they could be like all of the surrounding nations. By Ezekiel's time we see that their wish had come true! Not only were they like all of the surrounding nations, but they were all about to share the same fate!

E. *Saul was the first king, but it was David who finally subdued the Philistines (2 Sam. 5). Hostilities continued until the Philistines were confronted by Hezekiah (2 Kings 18), Jehoram (2 Chron. 21), and Ahaz (2 Chron. 28), after which they were no longer a threat.*

F. *Ezekiel's prophecy summarizes all of these years of hatred and opposition.*

1. Verse 15 says that the Philistines "took revenge with malice in their hearts."
2. A literal translation of the Hebrew reads: "The Philistines acted with vengeance and have committed vengeful vengeance [great vengeance] with malice in some to destroy with hatred forever."
 - a) "The emphatic nature of this text states the depth of hatred and vengeance that the Philistines manifested toward the Hebrews."

G. *So God promises to act for Israel and execute a great vengeance of His own against Philistia (verse 17).*

1. Verse 16 tells us that God would cut off the Kerethites. Who were they? They were a fierce Philistine fighting force who had once been employed by David as his personal bodyguards (2 Sam. 8:18).
2. God promises to cut off their best fighting forces and then destroy the remnant of the sea coast, which was their homeland.

H. *Verse 15 tells us that the Philistines were motivated by the "old hatred." How little has changed in the Middle East!*

8. Prophecy Against Tyre (26:1 - 28:19)

A. While Tyre was also condemned by Isaiah (23:1-18), Zechariah (9:3-4), and Amos (1:9-10), none had as much to say against Tyre as Ezekiel did, who devoted three chapters to its judgment.

B. Why did Ezekiel say so much about Tyre?

1. Other than Babylon, Tyre and Egypt were the most formidable enemies of Israel at this time. (Ezekiel will take four chapters to deal with Egypt --- Ezekiel 29-32.)
2. Also, as we will see, Tyre's sin was pride, and, as we know, God hates a proud look. (Prov. 6:17)
3. Another possible explanation for why Ezekiel devotes so much space to Tyre is that perhaps God is not just talking about Tyre in these three chapters.
 - a) **Perhaps part of this prophecy is directed to someone else -- perhaps the power behind Tyre; that is, toward someone who was pulling Tyre's strings. But who could that be?**
 - b) **We will consider this question in our next lesson. As a homework assignment, read Ezekiel 27-28 (and especially chapter 28) and see if you think God is just talking about Tyre or is He perhaps also talking about someone else --- and if so, who is He talking about?**

C. Much of the language used here by Ezekiel to describe the judgment of Tyre is also used by John in the book of Revelation to describe the judgment of Rome.

1. Compare Rev. 18:9, 13, 18-19, 22 with Ezekiel 26:16; 27:13,

30; 26:13.

2. Egypt was byword for immorality and idolatry. Babylon was a byword for godless government. Tyre was a byword for pride and self sufficiency. Rome was all three of these things!

D. *Tyre's Sin Identified (26:1-6)*

1. Tyre was a principal city of Phoenicia. The name "Tyre" means "rock" and referred to the main fortress that was located on a rock outcropping a half mile off shore. The city was built in two parts -- one on the shore and the other on the offshore island.

2. Tyre left no literature, statues, monuments, or anything else of permanent value. She is known as a panderer to the vices of the ancient nations that surrounded her. "If you wanted it, she could get it if she didn't already have it."

a) Tyre was very influential. Because of her financial power and her connections in all the courts of the lands, she was able to manipulate and influence the other nations. Her fall would be a shock to all the kingdoms of the world.

b) (Isaiah 23:8) "Who has taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning city [the bestower of crowns], whose merchants are princes, whose traders are the honorable of the earth?"

3. The Egyptians and the Assyrians sought control over Tyre because of its strategic importance as a port city and a military outpost.

a) The Assyrians conquered the land portion of the city in 722 BC after a five year siege, but were not able to take the offshore portion. Tyre paid tribute to Assyria, but as

Assyrian power declined Tyre declared its complete independence. Tyre was in this condition when these oracles were delivered.

b) Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city for 13 years (586-573), but again the offshore island was not conquered. Tyre paid tribute to Babylon for awhile, but when Babylonian power declined, Tyre yet again declared its independence.

c) Alexander the Great finally took the island by constructing a half-mile long causeway from the shore and then using his fleet to attack from the sea as well. Alexander's army killed 8000 initially, they then crucified 2000 others, and enslaved the remaining 30,000.

d) Until that time, Tyre was ranked as a great commercial power whose wealth knew no bounds. Their ability to withstand some of the greatest armies in history gave the people of Tyre great pride and arrogance. They (like the Ammonites) experienced a malicious joy when the city of Jerusalem fell. Jerusalem was unable to withstand the same army that had never been able to conquer Tyre.

e) Jesus visited the region around Tyre and was welcomed (Matt.15:21; Mark 7:24-31). People from everywhere, including Tyre and Sidon, flocked to listen to him (Mark 3:8; Lk.6:17). He said that it would be more tolerable for Tyre on the day of judgment than for the cities that had rejected His own message (Matt.11:21-22; Lk.10:13-14).

4. Verse 1 of Chapter 26 contains the sixth dated prophecy in the book of Ezekiel. The year is 587 or 586 BC -- very shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem. The siege against the city was already underway.

a) Verse 2 appears to indicate that Jerusalem had already fallen. Most likely, that reference is simply an example of the "prophetic perfect" tense. When God announces a judgment, he often then speaks as if that judgment has already occurred -- even before it has actually occurred. Why? Such language emphasizes that the judgment is sure and certain.

b) In the book of Revelation God announces a judgment against Rome. In Rev. 18:2, we hear that "Babylon the great is fallen." (Babylon here refers to Rome.) This announcement was made when Rome was still very powerful. Yet its judgment had been announced --- as far as God was concerned, Rome was already fallen.

5. In verses 3-6, God promises to bring six judgments upon Tyre.

a) First, military opponents would come against Tyre as unrelenting waves pounding the city.

b) Second, God himself would come against Tyre. (Verse 3 -- "Behold, I am coming against you.")

c) Third, the walls of Tyre would be destroyed.

d) Fourth, the island fortress would become a pile of rubble that would be scraped away. There would be no trace of the proud and invincible city. Fishermen would dry their nets on the bare rock that remained. (Remember that "Tyre" meant "rock." God is telling them that they will soon be a bare rock!)

e) Fifth, Tyre's great wealth would be plundered by all the nations.

f) Sixth, the mainland city would also be destroyed and would be ravaged by the sword.

E. *Details of the Immediate Destruction of Tyre (26:7-14)*

1. These verses focus on Nebuchadnezzar's attack against Tyre, which lasted 13 years from 586 until 573 BC.

2. Nebuchadnezzar is named in verse 7 and the pronouns "he" and "his" occur 9 times in verses 8-12 to describe his activities.

a) The process of the Babylonian siege is fully described in verses 8-10. It would have included siege works, ramps, shields, and battering rams.

3. Verses 13-14 refer to something that Nebuchadnezzar did not accomplish, but that instead occurred later under Alexander the Great.

a) Is this a mistake? Isaac Asimov's Guide to the Bible says that it is. But what did Ezekiel really say here?

b) First, notice that the pronouns change in these last two verses to refer not to what Nebuchadnezzar would do, but rather to what God would do in a future destruction at the hands of Alexander the Great.

(1) (Verses 11-14) The hoofs of his horses will trample all your streets; he will kill your people with the sword, and your strong pillars will fall to the ground. 12 They will plunder your wealth and loot your merchandise; they will break down your walls and demolish your fine houses and throw your stones, timber and rubble into the sea. 13 I will put an end to your noisy songs, and the music of your harps will be heard no more. 14 I will make you a bare rock, and you will become a place to spread fishnets. You will never be rebuilt, for I the LORD have spoken, declares the Sovereign LORD.

c) All these verses tell us about Nebuchadnezzar is that he would sack the mainland city, destroy the walls and towers, and kill some of the people --- all of which history confirms that he did. The Bible never says that he would do anything to the island. Instead, God says that He would destroy the island --- which He did later using Alexander the Great.

d) Also, God had told us in verse 4 that he would would cause many nations to come up against Tyre, "as the sea causes its waves to come up." Thus, we have already been told that Babylon will not destroy Tyre all by itself.

e) Also, later in Ezekiel 29:18, we read: "Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon caused his army to labor strenuously against Tyre; every head was made bald, and every shoulder rubbed raw; yet neither he nor his army received wages from Tyre, for the labor which they expended on it." Thus, Ezekiel was NOT mistaken at all about the destruction of Tyre.

4. But Ezekiel also tells us that Tyre would never be rebuilt. Wasn't that a mistake? No.

a) Over the years, silt built up along Alexander's causeway, and today there is no island, but only a peninsula. The southern harbor of the island city is today filled up with sand. The ancient city of Tyre is today an uninhabited bare rock located east of the modern city of Sur.

b) Also, the prophecy that the city would never be rebuilt is more likely simply a prophecy that the city would never again have the riches, power, and influence that it once had.

5. The reference to Nebuchadnezzar in verse 7 as "king of kings"

refers to the many vassal kings that he would bring to fight along with him.

6. The reference to "strong pillars" in verse 11 may refer to two famous pillars mentioned by Herodotus, who wrote that the temple of Melkart at Tyre had two pillars -- one of gold and one of silver.

F. *Effect of Judgment on Tyre's Neighbors (26:15-18)*

1. The "coastlands" in verse 15 refers to the neighboring states that were vassals of Tyre and depended on Tyre for their security.

a) **The lament in verse 18 is preceded by a brief prophetic section that describes the shock and fright of these neighbors when they learn about the fall of Tyre.**

b) **The conduct depicted here is the typical reaction that would be expected when news arrived regarding the death of someone important. The leaders removed their royal garments and adopted signs of mourning.**

2. The lament in verses 17-18 is set in a special poetic meter known as a funeral dirge.

a) **The poetic form is three beats followed by two beats. This same poetic form was used in Ezekiel 19:1, 14 to describe a funeral lament over the loss of the Jerusalem leaders.**

b) **The lament here depicts the fear and uncertainty of those who depended on Tyre.**

G. *Tyre's Descent into the Pit (26:19-21)*

1. Having completed the funeral, Ezekiel next describes the

interment of the body of Tyre into the pit.

a) The term "pit" is used elsewhere in Ezekiel to refer to the grave. (31:16; 32:18, 23-25, 29-30)

2. God had promised Tyre that it would become a desolate uninhabited place. He tells them here that the depths of the ocean would cover the spot where the city once stood (verse 19).

3. The city would be brought down to the pit and would never return to the land of the living -- that is, it would never be rebuilt.

4. Tyre's trip to the pit will not lead to peace and rest, but instead will lead to a "horrible end" (verse 21).

a) The absence of the once great city would produce fear, dismay, and uncertainty.

9. Preview of Chapters 27-28

A. *Lament Over the Loss of Tyre (27:1-36)*

B. *Prophecy Against the King of Tyre (28:1-10)*

C. *Final Lament for the King of Tyre (28:11-19)*

D. *Prophecy Against Sidon (28:20-26)*

Lesson 15: Ezekiel 27-28

1. Lament Over the Loss of Tyre -- Introduction (27:1-36)

A. Chapters 27 and 28 continue the oracle against Tyre that began in Chapter 26. The last few verses of chapter 28 contain an oracle against Sidon, Tyre's sister city.

B. We see in chapter 27 a second funeral dirge for the destruction of Tyre. The first was found in 26:15-18. (See Lesson 14 and recall also the background information about Tyre that we discussed in that lesson.)

1. The dirge in chapter 26 was sung by the neighboring kings. The dirge in this chapter is sung by Ezekiel himself.

C. This funeral dirge is in two parts (3b-9 and 25-36) with a prose introduction (1-3a) and a prose interlude (10-24).

D. The message has three parts:

1. The presentation of Tyre (1-9).
2. The significance of the Tyre (10-24).
3. The destruction of Tyre (25-36).

2. The Presentation of Tyre (27:1-9)

A. The message of this section is that Tyre would be lamented as would the wreck of a magnificent merchant ship.

1. Verse 4 tells us that the builders perfected the beauty of the ship and that the domain of the ship was the high seas.

2. Verses 5-6 tells us that only the best wood was used for this ship, and the deck of the ship was inlaid with ivory.
3. Verse 7 tells us that woven linen from Egypt was used for the sail and also served as a flag or banner.
4. Also in verse 7, we read that fabrics of royal colors from Elishah were used for the awnings. Elishah is mentioned in Genesis 10:4 as a son of Javan, who founded the maritime nations.
5. Verses 8-9 tell us that this ship had only the best oarsmen, seamen, and craftsmen aboard. All the other ships came along side her to trade their wares.

B. Tyre was one of the great maritime leaders of her day. Her sea traffic extended throughout the ancient Near East. The imagery in these verses shows us how Tyre became such a great power. Some commentators suggest that the imagery here may have been based on the likeness of one of the city's actual trading ships.

C. What we have here is a city that had the best of everything. As a result the city became full of self-conceit and pride, enjoying total self-sufficiency -- but without a thought for God.

1. The sin of Tyre was pride, and God hates pride (Proverbs 8:13).
 2. Pride comes before destruction (Proverbs 16:18).
 3. Pride keeps one from seeking God (Psalm 10:4).
- a) "The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts."**

D. As verse 3 tells us, Tyre proclaimed that it was "perfect in

beauty." (We will see that phrase again in chapter 28.)

1. To the world, Tyre was no doubt right. All of the other nations longed to have Tyre's riches, power, and influence. But to God, Tyre was far from perfect and far from beautiful.
2. We must see ourselves as God sees us -- and not as the world sees us.
 - a) (Revelation 3:17) **"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'-and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."**
 - b) (Luke 6:26) **"Woe to you when all men speak well of you."**
 - c) (2 Cor. 10:18) **"For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends."**
 - d) (Luke 16:14-15) **"for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."**

3. The Significance of Tyre (27:10-24)

A. Mercenaries were hired to defend the city of Tyre.

1. By hanging their shield and helmets on the wall, they indicated that they were on the job and ready to protect the city.
2. Their protection brought the beauty of the city to perfection. (verse 11)

B. The scope of the commerce of Tyre was extensive.

1. These verses give historians an invaluable glimpse at the geography, natural resources, and trade relations of the Near East

during this historical period.

2. Twenty nations are mentioned as having direct trade relations with Tyre. Three others in verses 17-18 have indirect trade relations.

3. Thirty-seven different products are named as the trade merchandise of Tyre.

a) These products include metals, horses, ivory, ebony, fabric, coral, precious stones, food, wool, saddle blankets, cattle, garments, and rugs.

4. Some of the nations that traded with Tyre still exist today and are known by the same name that was used here in Ezekiel.

a) These nations include Greece, Rhodes, Israel, Damascus, Syria, and Arabia.

5. Other nations have changed their name or no longer exist. These include:

a) Tarshish in verse 12 is listed as one of the sons of Javan in Genesis 10:4. An ancient inscription locates it at the west of end of Mediterranean Sea, probably in southern Spain.

b) Tubal and Meschech in verse 13 (Genesis 10:2), are thought to have been located in the eastern part of Asia Minor in present day Turkey.

c) Togarmah in verse 14 (Genesis 10:3), is normally identified as ancient Armenia.

d) This section is a gold mine of information about the geography and politics of that time, and there is enough

information to have spent the entire class discussing just these verses --- but alas we must move on.

e) Notice the mention of Eden in verse 23. This Eden is not the Eden of Genesis 2, but we will see the Genesis 2 Eden later in chapter 28.

4. The Destruction of Tyre (27:25-36)

A. *The perfect ship described in verses 3-9 and laden with merchandise for the many nations described in verses 10-24 is headed for a tragic shipwreck.*

B. *This ship was overloaded with "heavy cargo" (verse 25).*

1. The sea becomes too much for the oarsmen, and the east wind breaks the ship in pieces. The cargo (Tyre's wealth and merchandise) and all on board are lost.

C. *All of the other seamen and mariners of the world stand on the shore and mourn.*

1. They are overtaken with grief at the sinking of Tyre (verse 29) --- because if mighty Tyre could fall, then all could fall.
2. These men of the sea display all of the outward signs of mourning for Tyre -- bitter wailing, dust and ashes on their heads, shaving their heads, wearing sackcloth, weeping, and singing a funeral dirge. (verses 30-32)
3. Revelation 18 uses similar language to describe the great merchant cities of the earth mourning and sorrowing over the destruction of Rome.

D. *The closing lines of the funeral lament review the splendor of*

Tyre.

1. Who was like Tyre? No other city or nation could compare with the wealth, power, commerce, and beauty of Tyre.
2. Tyre satisfied the nations and made many kings rich. (verse 33)
3. Yet now Tyre is gone forever. The kings shudder with horror and the merchants hiss (a sign of amazement and dismay) at the end of the once great city. (verses 35-36)

5. Lesson for Today

A. A recurring theme in Ezekiel's description of Tyre is its great material wealth, and the pride and self-sufficiency that accompanied that great wealth.

1. We should always be aware of the power of money --- and the potential it has for great destruction. (See Lesson 4 on Ecclesiastes at www.thywordistruth.com.)
2. (Proverbs 30:8) "Give me neither poverty nor riches...lest I be full and deny you...or lest I be poor and steal."
 - a) **People who sit around praying they will win the lottery should probably instead thank God that they have not!**
3. Tyre was like the rich fool in Luke 12:19-21 ('And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." ' 20"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21"So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.")
4. A common attitude today in the church is that we treat money

too seriously - that money is part of the “business world” rather than the “religious world.” I submit that in reality we do not treat money seriously enough! The Bible takes money and material possessions very seriously.

a) There are more than 2000 passages in the Bible regarding money and material possessions.

b) Jesus spent a great deal of time talking about our attitudes toward money and possessions. Indeed, one in ten verses in the gospels deals with that subject. In 17 of his 37 parables, Jesus dealt with property and man’s responsibility for using it wisely.

c) The only two of the 10 commandments that deal with inner attitudes rather than outer actions are the last two - and they both forbid covetousness.

d) The only incident in scripture where Jesus was moved to violence involved money. Interestingly, Jesus’ actions with the moneychangers were not impulsive as they are sometimes portrayed. John tells us in John 2:15 that Jesus himself made the whip of cords that he used to drive out the money changers.

e) The Bible treats money very seriously, and we should treat it seriously as well.

f) “Most Americans today are frantically engaged in fighting for first-class cabin space on the Titanic.” (Hazel Henderson)

g) “Material wealth is either a window through which we see God or a mirror in which we see ourselves.” (Warren Wiersbe)

B. Another important present day lesson for us and for our nation is that the empires and creations of man are not eternal.

1. Tyre thought it was eternal, but it found out otherwise.

a) The people who witnessed the destruction of Tyre were amazed --- they had never seen anyone collapse as quickly as Tyre. She had been a supreme power, and now nothing was left.

2. The U.S. recently received a harsh reminder that it is not indestructible and is just as subject to a quick collapse as any other nation. As hard as that lesson is to receive, we should be thankful at least for the reminder, because the consequence of forgetting God is much worse --- as Tyre found out.

3. The most dangerous things in the world are those things that tend to make us forget about God and think that we are self-sufficient. Money, power, and technology can all have that effect in our lives. We should be thankful when we are reminded that these things are temporary.

4. "When the century was still young, and the monster that would become 'the media' was still in its infancy, the disaster of the day on which all eyes were fixed was the sinking of a new ocean liner that the great god News had said was unsinkable. The world was both stunned and fascinated, but here and there a few souls were exhilarated. They realized that the trivial, the forgettable, the grotesque sensations of the day, the best-laid plans of men that were supposed to be oh-so-revolutionary ... all were still subject to forces that could be forgotten only for a time. 'The sinking of the Titanic,' the Russian writer Alexander Blok wrote a friend, 'has made me indescribably happy; there is, despite everything, an ocean.'" (Houston Chronicle, Jan. 1, 1998, 46A)

C. *The good news is that we can have permanence. There is a solid foundation on which we can build -- but it is not man-made.*

1. Isaiah 40:8 (The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.)
2. Matthew 7:24 (Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.) --- and that house will never collapse!

6. Indictment of the King of Tyre (28:1-5)

A. *Rulers are responsible for the character of their kingdom. Ungodly nations are led by ungodly rulers. In the case of Tyre, the arrogance and pride of the nation was a reflection of the personal pride and arrogance of its ruler.*

B. *Although he is not mentioned by name (which is probably the worst insult that Ezekiel could have inflicted!), the king of Tyre during this period was Ethbaal II (585-573 BC).*

C. *Verse 2 tells us that Tyre's ruler was guilty of the same sins of pride and greed as his people.*

1. The king's pride led him to proclaim that he was a god.
2. Verse 2 gives us the process that led to that proclamation. He sat on the throne of a god and was as wise as a god --- so he must be a god!
3. But the king was wrong --- he was a man and not a god.

a) Here is another important lesson for today. As advanced as we think we are, we are still men and not God.

b) "Though we may not blatantly exalt ourselves in this manner today, we actually do deify ourselves whenever we think we know better than God how things ought to be done."

D. Verse 3 contains two rhetorical questions, both of which presuppose a negative answer.

1. First, the king was not wiser than Daniel, and second, the king did not possess all knowledge.
2. And who is this Daniel? Modern critics deny the authenticity of the book of Daniel and so they deny that this reference is to the author of the book of Daniel. Instead, they say Ezekiel must have had in mind a character named Dan'el from Ugaritic mythology. Ridiculous? Yes. Unexpected? No. (If they don't discredit the book of Daniel, then they must believe in the divine origin of the Scriptures.) (See notes on Daniel at www.thywordistruth.com.)
3. The Daniel in this verse is the Daniel who was a contemporary of Ezekiel and who we read about in the book of Daniel. He is the same Daniel that Ezekiel mentioned in 14:12-14. Daniel was the exact opposite of the prideful and arrogant king of Tyre --- which is exactly Ezekiel's point!

E. Verses 4-5 tell us that the king of Tyre did possess wisdom --- but it was wisdom related to making money.

1. The king's wealth had caused him to become proud and self-sufficient.
2. God had warned the Israelites about this same problem in Deut. 8:17-18. ("My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.")

3. Interestingly, Tyre's great wealth and influence began under a king who was a contemporary of David and Solomon.

a) "Hiram I, son of Abibaal, was nineteen years old when he ascended the throne, and he reigned thirty-four years. Under Hiram's rule Tyre became the leading city of Phoenicia, which launched a colonial empire that spread over the whole of the Mediterranean. He enlarged the island city of Tyre by uniting it with a smaller island and undertook extensive building programs."

b) David traded with Hiram for materials and craftsmen to build his royal palace in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Chron. 14:1).

c) David established a treaty with Hiram, which was renewed by Solomon who also traded with him for materials and craftsmen, particularly in the building of the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 5:12-18; 2 Chron. 2:3-12).

d) Hiram supplied cedar and other building materials, along with craftsmen, in exchange for wheat and olive oil. Some years later Hiram gave Solomon gold and another larger shipment of cedar and other woods and received in exchange twenty towns in Galilee known collectively as Cabul (1 Kings 9:10-13).

e) Hiram also aided Solomon in his commercial ventures by supplying both ships and sailors for a merchant fleet that operated out of the port of Ezion-geber (1 Kings 9:26-28).

f) God had blessed Tyre in its dealings with Israel, but Tyre forgot the source of those blessings.

7. Punishment of the King of Tyre (28:6-10)

A. *The last line of verse 2 also begins verse 6 -- "Because you think you are wise, as wise as a god..."*

B. *Verse 7 tells us that God would bring foreigners down upon Tyre.*

1. As we discussed in Lesson 14, these foreigners included the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar and then later also included Alexander the Great.

C. *Another rhetorical question follows in verse 9 --- "Will you then say 'I am a god' in the presence of those who kill you?"*

1. This is a great question for people today who are filled with pride and self-sufficiency --- and live in denial of death.
2. When the king came to ruin, the absurdity of his divine claims would be clear even to him.
3. Verse 10 tells us the king would die like the uncircumcised --- a statement of contempt for someone whose corpse was treated with disrespect and left unburied.

8. Prelude to 28:11-19

A. *"This is one of the more difficult passages in the Book of Ezekiel -- if not in the whole Bible!"*

B. *Numerous interpretations have been proposed for the verses that follow, differing in the way the figurative language is construed and the source for the imagery.*

1. Some see the figures as simply metaphorical --- describing the king of Tyre with various images using bold and exaggerated terms.

a) In support of this view is the fact that some of the symbols used in Chapter 28 have already been used regarding Tyre in the previous chapters.

2. Others identify the form as allegory --- in which another real character is addressed where that other character has some connection to the king of Tyre.

C. Although we will not have time today to examine Isaiah 14:12-17 in detail, you should read those verses about a Babylonian king and compare it with Ezekiel 28. Those who believe that Ezekiel 28 is about more than just the king of Tyre generally make the same point regarding Isaiah 14.

D. A final point is that we really can't be dogmatic about whether these verses apply just to the king of Tyre or also apply to someone else. We just don't have enough information to know for sure.

9. Final Lament for the King of Tyre (28:11-19)

A. The context of chapters 26-28 and the stated subject ("concerning the king of Tyre") make it clear that the primary message here is about the literal king of Tyre.

1. This of course does not mean that there could not also be a secondary message here. But the focus of this section is Tyre and we should keep that in mind.

B. Two different words are used in chapter 28 to describe the king of Tyre.

1. Verse 1 refers to the ruler or prince (nagid) of Tyre. Verse 12 refers to the king (melek) of Tyre.

2. Some point to this as proof that a different character is being addressed starting in verse 12.
3. Others note that Ezekiel used the term "melek" throughout his book to refer to earthly kings --- Babylonian kings in 17:12, 19:9, 21:19, 24:2, 26:7, 29:18, 30:10, and 32:11 and Egyptian pharaohs in 29:2, 30:21, 31:2, and 32:2.
4. Others suggest that Ezekiel is addressing the patron god of Tyre whose name "Malkart" means "king of the city."

C. We have two choices --- either the king of Tyre and only the king of Tyre is under discussion here, or the king of Tyre AND another character is under discussion here. To help us determine which choice is correct, let's begin with a summary of what these verses say about this character or these characters:

1. He claimed to be the model of perfection (verse 12).
2. He was known for his beauty (verse 12).
3. He was in Eden (verse 13).
4. He was a guardian cherub (verse 14).
5. He was on the holy mount of God (verse 14).

a) The phrase "holy mount of God" is used here and nowhere else in the Bible.

6. He considered himself blameless (verse 15).
7. He chose the way of evil (verse 15).
8. He was expelled from his position (verse 16).

9. He was corrupted by pride (verse 17).
10. He was thrown down to earth (verses 17-18).

D. *Who do these verses describe?*

1. If it is just the king of Tyre, then the exaggeration is extreme! The king was a guardian cherub on the holy mount of God? The king was in Eden? Even figuratively?
2. Many see in these verses not just a description of the earthly king of Tyre, but also a description of Satan --- the power behind the king of Tyre.
3. What better tool for Satan than Tyre --- a rich and influential city with ties to all the surrounding nations. How better for Satan to do his work in attempting to thwart the plans of God?
4. Perhaps God in these verses is at times looking behind the king of Tyre to the real source of the pride and evil in that city.
 - a) **In Matthew 16:23, Jesus turned to Peter and said "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." Was Jesus calling Peter Satan, or was he instead looking behind Peter to the one who was tempting Peter to mind only the things of men? To the one who was trying to use Peter as a tool to hinder the plans of God.**
 - b) **We see this from the opposite direction in some of the Psalms where both King David and the coming Messiah are in view.**
 - c) **Remember my earlier mention of Isaiah 14? Of the twenty descriptions of the King of Tyre in Ezekiel 28, fourteen are**

also found in Isaiah 14.

d) Isaiah 14 describes a judgment against the king of Babylon, but when we get to verse 12 we read "“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!"

e) Doesn't the use of the name "Lucifer" in Isaiah 14 prove that Satan is being addressed? No. Why? Because the only reason we associate the name "Lucifer" with Satan in the first place is its use here in Isaiah 14.

(1) Lucifer means 'light bringer' or 'shining one.' (Recall 2 Cor. 11:14 -- "For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.")

(2) Satan is pictured in Rev. 9:1 as a star fallen from heaven. In Luke 10:18, Jesus said "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

5. But the earthly king of Tyre is also still under discussion here (as we would expect from the context). Notice, for example, the reference to widespread trade in verse 16. That trade was also a source of the king's pride, and it is hard to apply that description to Satan.

E. So what is the conclusion? Is Satan being discussed in Ezekiel 28 or not?

1. Two commentators who do not believe Satan is in view write:

a) "All the hyperbolic language employed in the verses discussed above can best be understood as the flattering self-delusion of the Tyrian millionaires and their money-loving leaders, whose concept of heaven rose no higher than their treasuries of rubies and gold, and whose yardstick for virtue consisted of material wealth."

b) "It is concluded that Tyre's king is best understood as the literal human contemporary king of that city in Ezekiel's day. Each characteristic given about him in these verses can be explained in light of the cultural and religious context of that day. Contrarily, the identification of the king as Satan must be done to a large extent on a presupposition that the descriptions here refer to Satan. Most of these descriptions -- if they do in fact relate to Satan -- are revealed nowhere else in Scripture."

2. But what do we know about Satan from elsewhere in the Scripture?

a) From 1 Timothy 3:6 we know that Satan was condemned for his pride. ("not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.")

b) From 2 Corinthians 11:14 we know that Satan can appear very beautiful. ("For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.")

c) From Rev. 9:1 and Luke 10:18 we see Satan pictured as having fallen from heaven.

d) From Genesis 3 we know that Satan was in the garden of Eden.

e) From Job 1 we know that Satan has appeared before God - perhaps on the "holy mount of God."

f) From Zechariah 3:1 and 1 Thess. 2:18 we know that Satan opposes and hinders the work of God.

g) From John 16:11, Ephesians 2:2, and 2 Cor. 4:4 we know that Satan is the ruler or prince of this world and the god of

this age who has been judged.

h) From 1 Chronicles 21:1 we know that Satan incites kings to sin.

i) From 2 Timothy 2:26 we know that Satan takes men captive to do his will.

j) From Ephesians 2:2 we know that Satan uses the disobedient to accomplish his work.

k) From 1 Peter 5:8 we know that Satan walks about like a roaring lion seeking men to devour.

3. I don't know about you, but I see some striking parallels with Ezekiel 28.

a) Consider again the list of attributes from Ezekiel 28:12-18 that we discussed above.

b) My opinion (for what it's worth) is that God is not just addressing the king of Tyre in these verses but is looking behind the king of Tyre to Satan who was using the king of Tyre to oppose God's plans.

c) Tyre was an example of pride preceding a fall, but Tyre was not the ultimate example! Satan was created perfect, yet he fell. Why?

d) 1 Timothy 3:6 tells us that Satan was condemned because of his pride. Paul mentions the condemnation of Satan because of his pride like we should already know all about it, but where else is it mentioned in the Bible if not in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14?

10. **Prophecy Against Sidon (28:20-26)**

A. *Sidon was a sister Phoenician city to Tyre, and they are often mentioned together. (Jer. 27:3; 47:4; Joel 3:4).*

1. Sidon was located about 23 miles north of Tyre and was much more exposed to military assault.

B. *One of the most infamous Sidonians was Jezebel, who married Ahab, king of Israel. She was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon (1 Kings 16:31-34).*

1. As you recall, she reinstituted Baal worship and hastened the fall of the Northern Kingdom by contributing to its moral and spiritual decay.

C. *God promises to execute judgment against Sidon by means of plague, blood, and sword. (verses 22-23)*

1. This three pronged judgment was used by Ezekiel also in 6:11-12 and 14:21.
2. Because of God's judgment, the fall of Sidon would be acknowledged as more than merely a chance occurrence. It would be viewed as a fulfillment of God's promise of judgment (verse 23).

D. *Verse 24 applies to all of the nations that have been considered in chapters 25-28.*

1. Judgment on all of the nations that have opposed Israel would provide the needed security to insure the success of their return to the land of promise described in Ezra and Nehemiah.
2. Verses 25-26 point to this return. The nation would dwell in safety and once again enjoy divine protection. Only in times of

security would the people build houses and plant vineyards.

3. The context of these verses suggests that this restoration is one or all of the literal returns from exile that occurred in 539 BC (decree of Cyrus), 458 BC (Ezra), and 445 BC (Nehemiah) rather than the spiritual restoration that would occur in Christ (and which Ezekiel talks about elsewhere).

Ezekiel -- Lesson Sixteen

Chapters 29 - 30 -- Prophecies Against Egypt

1. Introductory comments.

1. Chapters 29-32 round out the collection of oracles against foreign nations and are devoted entirely to the proclamation of judgment against Egypt.

1. There are seven prophecies against Egypt; six of them are explicitly identified by date, and it is clear that they were delivered at various different times in Ezekiel's ministry.

2. While the oracles may seem tedious and repetitive to us, we must remember that they were delivered at various different times.

3. When we remember that each oracle was delivered on a separate occasion in history, the force of the various oracles may be perceived.

2. The general background of the oracles is provided by a knowledge of the long history of the relationships between the chosen people and Egypt.

1. The relationship began in the days of slavery before the Exodus.

2. After the Exodus, when the Israelites formed their own state, Egypt was always too close and too powerful a neighbor to be ignored.

3. From Egypt's standpoint, Israel was of vital geopolitical significance.

1. The principal threat to Egypt's existence always lay to the

north, not in Palestine as such, but in Syria and Mesopotamia.

2. It was from the north that the successive empires of Assyrians and Babylonians threatened Egypt; Israel's land was the buffer zone, part of Egypt's defense against northern aggression.

3. Thus, when Egypt was friendly towards Israel, it was always out of self-interest and towards the goal of self-protection.

4. Equally, Egypt's enmity was rooted in the same political purpose, namely that of securing the northern approach to the nation against the encroachment of dangerous foreign powers.

4. Israel was small compared to its neighbors -- Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Persia.

1. It was they who determined whether the little country was allowed to retain her independence, like a little Switzerland, or whether she should become a political settlement or a military staging-post or an international bargaining point.

2. They could no more be ignored than can the United States, Russia, and China in the policies of a state in Europe or South-east Asia today.

5. What Ezekiel was at pains to point out was that the final say in Israel's destiny was not their's, but God's -- and God was Israel's God.

1. More than that he said that even the destiny of the great powers, such as Egypt was in the hands of Israel's God.

2. Jehovah controlled everything!

2. Egypt's Sins Exposed and Judged. (Jan. 7, 588,587 B.C., a few months before the siege and eventual destruction of Jerusalem. 29:1-16.

1. *The Introduction of the Monster. 29:1-6a.*

1. This message against Pharaoh was directed at Pharaoh Hophra (588-596 B.C.), whose grandfather, Pharaoh Neco killed Josiah at Megiddo in 609 B.C.

2. Pharaoh is described as a monster lying among the streams, which claimed the Nile as his domain.

1. "Monster" has been translated "crocodile," "jackal," "monster," "serpent," "dragon," and obviously refers to a feared creature.

2. The "monster of the Nile was the crocodile.

3. The monster is described as arrogant -- My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself. v. 3.

4. As with so many causes of arrogance, the reverse was true: Egypt was the product of the Nile, not vice versa.

1. Egypt's greatness throughout history was the fruit of the Nile.

1. The Nile made possible the habitation of the valley.

2. It provided the rich soil in which to plant crops, water to irrigate them, transportation, and water to drink.

3. Without the Nile there would have been no Egypt.

2. As an act of judgment, the monster would be dragged from the river and left to die on dry land, there to become food for the birds of the air.

1. The "hooks" in the jaws to render the monster helpless described the standard method for capture and destruction of a crocodile. v. 4.

2. The monster of the stream will be left in the desert, which would mean certain death for a crocodile as well as the fish that were his food. v. 5.

5. When the destruction of Egypt becomes a reality, everyone will know that God did it. v. 6a.

2. *The Judgment that will befall Egypt. 29:6b-16.*

1. Ezekiel portrayed Egypt as a crumpled reed used as a staff for support, that splintered when weight was applied.

1. The same figure is applied to Egypt in 2 Kings 18:21.

2. When the reed broke, the shoulders of those nations, including Israel that leaned on it, were dislocated.

3. Those who relied on Egypt were not strengthened, but crippled.

4. Those who leaned on Egypt would be forced to stand on their own or perish. vv. 6-7.

2. Egypt was judged by the sword and desolation for two reasons.

1. Pride.

1. Egypt said that the Nile was theirs. v. 9.
2. Pharaoh Hophra was known for his arrogance and inflated self-image.
 1. *He felt that no one could defeat him.*
 2. *He felt so secure that he believed that not even the gods of Egypt could dislodge him from his position as king.*
 3. *Such self-sufficient pride was punished in Tyre (28:2), and will be in Egypt as well.*

2. Egypt has seduced Israel.

1. Pharaoh Hophra promised to help them confront Nebuchadnezzar, but when the battle came, he abandoned them like the brittle staff (v. 7).
2. Therefore God promised to ruin the streams (v. 9) and made the land uninhabitable for 40 years (v. 11: related to the 40 years of wandering after the Exodus). v. 12.
3. The oracle against Egypt illustrates two flaws in character that are as commonly the characteristics of individuals as well as nations.

1. The first is delusion, an offshoot of pride and arrogance.

1. So self-centered had Egypt become in its power that it persuaded itself that both the nation and the river on which it was based were its own creations.
2. This delusion of grandeur, spoken of as a form of national omnipotence, was dangerous in the extreme; it could only be shattered by the truly omnipotent God, whose words the prophet declares.

3. The most dangerous lies are those that delude the liar.

1. *Egypt really believed its own lie, that its strength was its own creation.*
2. *In this self-delusion, it typified not only all great nations that express a similar conviction, but also all individuals who think that they are self-made and that their achievements are entirely the consequence of their own abilities and efforts.*
3. *It is incumbent on all those who achieve a degree of preeminence in this world to recognize that ultimately such preeminence is the gift of God.*

2. The second flaw is selfishness.

1. From time to time Egypt offered friendship to its neighbor, but it was only a tool to engineer its own benefit.
2. False friendship offered for selfish reasons and hastily withdrawn at the least sign of cost, undermined the entire fabric of human and national relationships and invited judgment.
3. Friendship is fundamental to all human relationships, holding individuals and societies together.
 1. *It can only be strong if it is engendered in the spirit of self-sacrifice; the friendship that is willing to take but is not willing to give is not true friendship at all.*
 2. *There is no greater insight into the nature of true friendship that that taught by Jesus. John 15:13.*
 3. *True friendship must eliminate the power of selfishness and replace it with the power of true selflessness.*

3. Egypt to Suffer the Fate of Tyre. (New Year's Day,

April 26, 571 B.C., some sixteen years later than the first oracle.) 29:17-21.

1. *Nebuchadnezzar campaigned against Tyre for 13 years and came away without a final victory.*

1. All they got for their trouble was bald heads and shoulders rubbed bare (v. 18), a graphic description of chafing helmets and shoulders bearing the load of siege works.
2. In this message God promised to give him a consolation prize -- Egypt.
3. The loot and plunder that his armies would take was much needed pay for his men, who came away from Tyre unrewarded. vv. 17-19.

2. *Nebuchadnezzar's campaign against Egypt was divinely motivated "because they wrought for me." v. 20.*

1. God gave Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar as repayment to his men for their opposition to Tyre.
2. Even though the city became a vassal of Babylon and paid tribute, the 13 year siege of Tyre ended with the island fortress still unconquered.
3. Whether the treasure of Tyre escaped by water from the island fortress or was expended in the cost of defense, the Babylonians certainly never captured the treasure of Tyre.
4. As a consequence of the disappointment over Tyre, the prophet declares that Nebuchadnezzar would be given the opportunity of plundering Egypt and carrying off its wealth, compensatory wages for the fruitless work in the long siege of Tyre.

5. Though little is known of the event from historical sources, it occurred a few years later (568, 567 B.C.), at which time it is presumed that Pharaoh, Amasis II, came to terms with the invading army by paying massive tribute.

3. *The oracle concludes with an element of hope: a "horn" would spring forth in Israel, indicating new life and thus new hope.*

1. This may be a Messianic statement (cf. Ps. 132:17), but the language does not demand it.

2. It may be a general reference to Israel's future restoration.

3. Some suggest that Nebuchadnezzar may himself be the "horn to bud forth unto the house of Israel," in that he would now work for Israel against her enemy Egypt, as he had worked for God against Tyre.

4. At the same time Ezekiel's mouth will be opened to speak with greater confidence.

1. To take this in relation to Ezekiel's ritual dumbness is to take it in isolation from its context; by this time his ritual dumbness was a thing of the past (cf. 33:22).

2. It seems better to take it simply as a reference to the authentication of Ezekiel's prophecy through fulfillment.

4. *The oracle ends with the refrain, "then shall they know that I am the Lord," which has punctuated this chapter three times already (vv. 6, 9, and 16); it is Ezekiel's overriding desire.*

4. Egypt and Allies Devastated (the only undated oracle

in the prophecies against Egypt). 30:1-19.

1. *This message has four parts, each introduced with "This is what the Sovereign Lord says" (vv. 2, 6, 10, 13), and each concluded with a final word, "declares the Sovereign Lord" (v. 6), "they will know that I am the Lord" (vv. 8, 19), and "I the Lord have spoken" (v. 12).*
2. *Some have concluded from the absence of the date that these verses do not belong to Ezekiel, but the absence of the date is not compelling evidence.*
3. *A Cry of Distress at the Nearness of the Day of the Lord. 30:1-9.*

1. This was not a funeral lament such as the lament for Tyre in 27:1-36, but a cry of distress at the nearness of the day of the Lord. v. 2.
2. Ezekiel anticipates the coming judgment and defeat of the mighty nation; the forces of history and nature would combine to bring Egypt to ruin.
3. The prophecy begins with a reference to the coming "day" of the Lord. vv. 2-3.

1. That "day" is sometimes used in a general sense to mean a day of judgment.
2. Sometimes it is used to refer to God's judgment on the nations at the end of human history.
3. Sometimes it refers to a day of blessing and deliverance for Israel (29:21).

4. It is used in v. 3 in the first sense of a general approaching day of judgment called the "time of the doom of the nations" (NAS).

5. Ezekiel's prophecies are similar in impact to Joel who shook a spiritually apathetic people awake with the theme of the day of the Lord (Joel 1:15 - 2:11).

6. Ezekiel utilized the same theme as Joel in announcing judgment on the former ally of Judah.

4. Earlier Ezekiel had anticipated the great day of judgment when the "end" would come for the land of Israel (7:1-13).

1. In this oracle he makes it clear that God's judgment would be universal and international in character.

2. A sword of judgment would devastate Egypt and its southern neighbor, Ethiopia, just as a sword of devastation had already been declared for the land of the chosen people (ch. 21).

1. Judgment for Egypt and its allies was symbolized by the sword. v. 4.

2. It would bring judgment on Egypt, Ethiopia, and even the covenant people (NIV, perhaps a reference to those who had fled to Egypt from Judah, seeking protection); all would fall by the sword. vv. 5-6.

3. When Egypt was on fire and its allies were crushed, all would know that Jehovah is God. vv. 7-8.

4. On that day messengers would tell of the plight of Egypt and bring fear of doom on the allies. v. 9.

4. *Nebuchadnezzar, the Sword of Destruction.* 30:10-19.

1. Two sources are specified as the instruments of God's coming judgment, one in the sphere of history and the other in the sphere of nature.

1. The Babylonian emperor, Nebuchadnezzar, would invade the land and cover its soil with the corpses of the slain.

2. But God would also dry up the River Nile, upon whose waters the nation was totally dependent (v. 12), and thus would mock the hollow boast that even the Nile was controlled by Egypt (29:9).

2. God's coming judgment would be complete.

1. The catalog of the coming destruction for all the great Egyptian cities indicates the comprehensiveness of the prophet's vision. vv. 13-19.

2. The cities of Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt, from the north-eastern reaches of the Delta area to the southern reaches of the River Nile, all would succumb to the divine devastation.

3. The archeological remains that may still be seen indicate just how splendid the ancient cities of Egypt were.

1. They embodied extraordinary human achievement in their fine architecture and massive structures.

2. But the cities, symbols of human strength and progress, would be unable to withstand the onset of judgment.

4. No human structure can withstand the might of God.

1. Ezekiel penetrates the facade of strength and continuity upon which so much of the false confidence of the human race is based.

1. Egypt represented a truly extraordinary civilization in the 6th century B.C.

2. It had been strong for some 2,500 years, an achievement without parallel in any modern civilization.

3. Its architectural achievements embodied this same sense of continuity.

4. Its pyramids must have seemed to be as ancient as the Nile itself.

5. Yet this ancient and seemingly perpetual civilization was as vulnerable to the judgment of God as any other nation or people.

6. It's confidence and pride could be and would be shattered when the foundations upon which it was built were summoned to judgment.

2. The oracle against Egypt stands as a perpetual reminder of the omnipotence of God, over and against the temporary potency of mankind.

1. What was true of Egypt is equally true of modern nations and empires.

2. The most enduring of man's creations are indelibly marked with the signs of temporality.

3. The durability of a nation or civilization does not depend on the singular achievements of its various members; it is subject to the sovereignty of God.

4. The qualities that permit survival are not greatness and strength, rather they are the fruits of humility and morality that

emerge from the recognition of the ultimate sovereignty of God in all human affairs.

5. Egypt Helpless in the Day of the Lord (dated April 29, 587 B. C., just a few months before the final siege and defeat of Jerusalem). 30:20-26.

1. When Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem in 588 B.C., Pharaoh Hophra initially came to Zedekiah's assistance.

1. Hophra's army was defeated and he returned to Egypt.
2. When Jerusalem fell, Hophra, whose strength was broken, was defeated by Ahmose in a civil war.
3. Nebuchadnezzar invaded and easily conquered Egypt, which subsequently was never a prominent world power.
4. The fall of Egypt was a prelude to the complete destruction God would bring on both Egypt and Babylon.
5. Like the Hebrews, the Egyptians would be dispersed as exiles among the nations. vv. 23, 26.

2. The prophecy bears sober testimony in graphic detail to the events associated with the fall of Egypt.

1. Ezekiel said that Pharaoh's arm would be broken, vv. 21-22, 24, and that his arms would fall limp. v. 25.
2. This passage presents Pharaoh as helpless and unable to hold a weapon, and therefore unable to defend against invading armies. v. 21.

1. In the traditional metaphor of the ancient world, the might

of a king and his army was symbolized by the arm.

2. A royal arm, successfully wielding a sword, was a symbol of strength.

3. Pharaoh's arm had been fractured once, Ezekiel declared, referring back to the fruitless campaign of Hophra; that arm had never healed and the other would be broken in the future.

4. Ezekiel was in effect fracturing the false hopes of those in exile, who still believed that salvation might be found in Egypt.

5. Ezekiel's message is further strengthened by the announcement that the Babylonian king's arm would be strengthened; the one from whom deliverance was sought was the one who would destroy a false hope of deliverance.

3. Additional references to the defeat of Egypt may be found in Isaiah 30:1-14 and 2 Kings 24:7.

4. The repetition of the ideas in the last four verses was for emphasis. vv. 23-25.

5. Egypt's devastation and its loss of standing in the family of nations is a constant testimony to the truth of God's word; the great civilization would exist only in ruins and in historical records.

3. *In this short oracle, Ezekiel illuminates several significant themes.*

1. It is folly to seek human deliverance from the instrument of God's judgment.

1. Those in Jerusalem and those in exile were terrified by the Babylonians.

2. They thought that salvation might be found with Pharaoh.

3. They were blind, unable to perceive the truth that God was using the Babylonians as the executor of his will and judgment.

4. To seek a human or political solution to a national and spiritual problem was an exercise in folly.

5. When human actions have precipitated external crisis, it is the internal roots of corruption that must be dealt with more urgently than the external danger.

**2. The arm of flesh will fail you, you dare not trust your own.
(Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus.)**

1. The oracle is addressed to Egypt, yet its impact is felt by the Israelites who looked to Egypt for strength.

2. Lying behind this false hope was their failure to remember a fundamental of Hebrew theology -- ultimately it was only the arm of God that was strong. (Ps. 98:1 -- O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.)

3. The chosen people had once been a mighty nation, but only because of the strength of God's "holy arm."

4. Having forgotten the strength of God's arm, they would fall victim to the arms of human enemies strengthened by God for judgment.

Ezekiel -- Lesson 17

Chapters 31 - 32 -- Prophecies Against Egypt, Continued

1. Fall of Pharaoh, the "Cedar" of Egypt. 31:1-18.

1. *The Fall of Egypt Is Like the Fall of Assyria. 31:1-9.*

1. This message has been dated June 21, 587 B.C. to the time of the final siege before the fall of Jerusalem (the city was under siege at least three times from Jan. 15, 588. B. C. (ch. 24:1).
2. The siege of June 21, 587 B.C. was probably the second, and the final stage of destruction came in early 586 B.C.
3. In the historical context Jerusalem was in the final weeks of its struggle for survival when this oracle was delivered.
4. Although the prophetic words do not directly address the fate of Jerusalem, they do elaborate upon the international crises among which the holy city's fate must be seen.
5. Ezekiel prophesied against the king of Egypt. v. 2.

1. The Song of the Cedar in 17:1-24 was about the king of Assyria and recounted the pride and fall of that nation (Prov. 16:18).

1. Depicting rulers as trees was a common literary device in the ancient Near East (Ezekiel used the same idea in 17:1-10, 22-24; cf. Judg. 9:7-21; Dan. 4:1-18.)
2. Similar use of trees for people in biblical passages may be seen as early as the Jotham story in Judg. 9:7-21.

3. Jotham compared his brother to other trees in a story that exposed Abimelech's weaknesses as a ruler.
4. Daniel also used this device to characterize Nebuchadnezzar. Dan. 4:10-37.

2. The poem of vv. 1-9 has similarities to Isa. 14:1-8, a portion of the prophecy against the king of Babylon, as well as to Daniel's poem about Nebuchadnezzar. Dan. 4:1-37.

3. This poem begins with recounting the fall of the king of Assyria, who is compared to a cedar of Lebanon.

1. The cedars of Lebanon were known for their height (they were the tallest trees known in the Near East) and durability.
2. They grew taller than all of the other trees (vv. 3, 5), a symbolic reference to Assyria's former world dominance.
3. All the birds nested in the cedar (v. 6), a reference to the small nations that became dependant on Assyria.
4. This tree was a model of beauty and majesty for all to see (v. 7).
5. None of the cedars in the garden of God could rival it (v. 8).
6. "Garden of God" is a reference to Eden (v. 9), but also represents the whole world order as initially created by God.
7. Assyrian was the greatest nation in world history during its dominance as a world power.

4. The point of the image of the tree (v. 3-9) is to present the matchless splendor and power of Egypt.

1. The adulation should not be taken too far unless it is taken to represent the praise that Egypt received from its satellites, Zedekiah

included.

2. Its effect, however, is to heighten the sense of downfall when it eventually takes place.

2. *The Reasons for the Fall of Assyria and Egypt. 31:10-18.*

1. The prophetic rhetoric lulls the reader into a state of indifference before the door of hope slammed with a resounding "therefore" (v. 10); judgment, not hope, is the message for Egypt.

2. It is at this point that Ezekiel moves to the declaration of judgment and demonstrates that its greatness was also a source of weakness.

1. Precisely because of Assyria's pride and perversion of powers, God determined to bring judgment on it (vv. 10-11), the most ruthless nation in history.

2. Inevitably, once pride has been identified, it is intimated that the tree will be cut down (v. 12); the once mighty tree would cause deep anxiety among other strong trees with aspirations for altitude.

3. God raised the most "ruthless," literally, "brutal" (v. 12), nations against it, and it fell.

4. All nations abandoned Assyria and left it to fall (vv. 12-13).

5. No other trees would ever reach such height, but God would consign them all to the "pit" v. 14).

6. On the day that Assyria went into the grave, God assisted its burial v. 15).

1. Nations trembled and mourned at the sound of its fall and descent into Sheol.
2. The allies went down with the "cedar," and all the nations were consoled (vv. 16-17).

7. All that has been said to this point laid the foundation for the conclusion in verse 18.

1. If Assyria with its splendor, power, and majesty could not escape the judgment of God, neither would Egypt.
2. The same fate that befell Assyria would befall Pharaoh, who would be Egypt's fallen "cedar" (v. 18).
3. Death is the great equalizer and the surest antidote to an excess of ambition.
4. Even the Egypt's of this world, who have success stories despite their godlessness, need to be taught the lesson in v. 9 -- God made the tree beautiful.
5. The prosperity of the wicked is, in the last analysis, all due to the mercy and goodness of God.

8. The story of the cedar revisits several themes that occurred in the prophecies against foreign nations.

1. First, God hates pride because it leads people and nations to ruin (Ezek. 27:3; 28:1-2; Prov. 16:18).

1. *There is nothing wrong with a tall strong tree.*
2. *It is the attitude to strength and greatness that is crucial.*
3. *True greatness comes to only a few people in this world, though some may come to minor forms of greatness.*

4. Greatness is neither something to be ashamed of nor to be proud of.

5. If it leads to pride, both in the form of self-conceit and the despising of others, then greatness cannot be retained.

2. Second, the fall of the mighty fall is a loss to the weak (cf. 27:27-36).

1. When the great tree was cut down, all those who had benefited from its strength and shade were among the losers.

2. One of the reasons that those privileged with greatness must guard their positions with humility and care is that the lives of so many others are dependent on them.

3. Third, the fall of the tree was a reminder of the mortality of human beings and individual accountability to God (cf. 2:16-21; 18:1-32).

9. The pride and perversion of Egypt were its downfall.

1. This example warns that the same characteristics will bring the downfall of any individual or nation.

2. For Judah the message was equally devastating.

1. If they had any hope that Egypt would save them from the hands of the Babylonians, Ezekiel had just pronounced that their "deliverer" (Pharaoh) would fall.

2. Not only would Egypt be judged, but also Israel's last (false) hope had failed.

2. Lament for the Fall of Pharaoh. 32:1-16.

1. *Introduction. 32:1-2.*

1. This message has been dated March 3, 585 B.C., sometime after those in exile would have received news of the downfall of Jerusalem.
2. It is a lament, a style used by Ezekiel several times in the prophecies against the nations; he used the dirge more than any other O.T. writer (19:1, 14; 27:2, 32; 28:12; 32:2, 16).
3. As is often the case with prophetic laments, it is in part an anticipation and warning of a coming disaster which, when it came to pass, would be followed by lamentation.
4. Egypt is compared to a lion among the nations.

1. This was the view that Egypt had of itself.

2. But the "lion" was really a sea monster or "crocodile," the same designation used in 29:3 to describe Pharaoh Hophra (vv. 1-2).

2. *The Description of the Judgment of the Sea Monster. 32:3-8.*

1. Ezekiel announced the judgment of Pharaoh beginning with v. 3, "I will cast my net over you."

1. This was not the net of the fowler, but of the seaman.

2. The crocodile would be dragged onto dry land and left for the beasts of the field (v. 4).

2. Egypt would meet a violent end in a foreign land; its flesh and blood would fill the mountains and the valleys (vv. 5-6).

3. Pharaoh's judgment would be part of the Day of the Lord -- he would be snuffed out and extinguished like a shining star (vv. 7-8).

3. *The Reaction of the Nations.* 32:9-10.

1. Egypt's destruction would bring distress among the nations who saw it.

2. God would brandish the "sword," which was Babylon, and the nations would tremble ((vv. 9-10).

4. *The Identity of the Sword of Judgment.* 32:11-14.

1. So that there would be no doubt about the identity of the "sword," Ezekiel specifically made it clear (v. 11).

2. The ruthless mighty men of Babylon would shatter the pride of Egypt (v. 12).

3. The cattle would also be destroyed, and the water (v. 13) would no longer be available (the Nile or irrigation or both).

4. With neither human nor animal to disturb the water, it would flow smoothly like oil. (v. 14).

5. *A Proof Saying. When the land is made a desolation then all will know that God is the one true God (32:15).*

6. *Conclusion. Everyone will chant Egypt's funeral dirge (32:16).*

3. Pharaoh Condemned to the Pit. 32:17-32.

1. *Ezekiel's final message against Egypt has been dated April 1, 585 B.C. (v. 17); it was not technically a funeral dirge, but a*

wailing song as evidenced by the meter.

1. The mourners were to bewail the descent of Egypt into the "pit" (v. 18), which represents the grave (see vv. 23-25, 29-30).
2. Egypt would go into the grave and join the "uncircumcised" nations that represent all others who have suffered the judgment of God.
3. These nations would recognize Egypt's arrival as a fulfillment of God's judgment against those who "killed by the sword" (vv. 19-21).

2. Already in the pit to receive Egypt was Assyria, which had been overthrown by the Babylonians (vv. 22-23), and Elam, located east of Babylon.

1. Elam had its capital at Susa and was destroyed by Ashurbanipal ca. 650 B.C.
2. Jeremiah still recognized Elam as a power to be destroyed, but for all practical purposes the nation was already dead (vv. 24-25).

3. Another two groups, Meshech and Tubal, also were in the "pit."

1. These two groups were older nations in Asia Minor (see 27:13) known for their terror and ruthlessness (v. 26).
2. These mighty warriors who had "fallen" are an allusion to the mighty men of old described in Gen. 6:4 as Nephilim.
3. They were the ancient warriors of renown who had fallen into sinful life-style that made necessary the flood judgment.
4. Like these people and nations, Pharaoh also would descend

into the "pit" as a result of divine judgment (v. 28).

4. *Edom was also in the "pit" (v. 29).*

1. The appearance of Edom confirmed the earlier message of judgment in 25:12-14.
2. With Edom were the princes of the north and Sidonians (v. 30).
 1. **This is a reference to the the Phoenician coastal towns of which Tyre and Sidon were the chief cities.**
 2. **All the nations in the pit were those who had killed by the sword, a reference to their cruelty (vv. 22-23, 25-26, 28-30).**
 3. **Pharaoh joined them because he, too, had killed by the sword (vv. 30-31).**
 4. **God therefore consigned him to the pit to dwell with the uncircumcised who killed ruthlessly and indiscriminately (v. 32).**

4. Concluding thoughts.

1. ***The oracles against the nations in Ezekiel 25-32 were originally delivered to the people of Judah.***
2. ***Although the words written seem to be solely for those particular nations, they are foremost for the people of Judah in Jerusalem and Babylon and serve at least three purposes.***
 1. The oracles in Ezekiel 25-32 reveal God's judgment against the nations that either mocked or aided in Jerusalem's fall.
 2. As with both the king of Tyre and the Pharaoh of Egypt, God

would throw them down from their self-elevated positions of power -- there is no room for such arrogance and pride in God's creation.

3. The oracles are essentially a dismantling of the gods of the nations, which is in turn a dismantling of the gods Judah had begun to rely wrongly upon, and the proclamation that Jehovah is the one and only true God for all the nations.

3. *As mentioned in the introduction to this section, the phrase "know I am the Lord" occurs nineteen times -- the primary purpose is that everyone should come to know the Lord.*

4. *They are also written for us. Rom. 15:4.*

Lesson 18: Ezekiel 33

1. Introduction to Chapter 33

- A. Chapter 33 marks a big change in the book of Ezekiel. The book has so far been building toward the event that will be announced in verses 21-22 of this chapter -- the fall of Jerusalem.***
- B. The first 24 chapters of the book (prior to chapters 25-32, which dealt with foreign nations) were concerned with Jerusalem as it was and as it had been.***
- C. From chapter 33 on, Ezekiel tells us about what Jerusalem will be like.***
- D. Before we get to verses 21-22, however, Ezekiel reminds us of two things: the prophet's responsibility to warn people of approaching danger, and the people's responsibility to heed that warning and repent.***

2. A Warning to Heed the Watchman (33:1-9)

- A. This message parallels 3:16-21, where Ezekiel was first appointed watchman over Israel. (Compare 3:17 with 33:7.)***
 - 1. (3:17) "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me."***
 - 2. (33:7) "So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me."***
- B. Verses 1-6 rehearse the principle of the watchman, and verses 7-9 identify Ezekiel as Israel's watchman.***

C. *Why return to this theme?*

1. Ezekiel is just about to be confirmed as a true prophet according to the test that is found in Deut. 18:22 ("when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.").
2. Ezekiel's warnings are about to come true. The purpose of the reminder here is to show that Ezekiel has been faithful to his assignment and his warnings have been from God. The people have a responsibility to heed his warnings and his call to repentance.

D. *The death of those who hear the watchman's alarm but refuse to listen is their own fault.*

1. Verses 5-6 remind us that a watchman was guiltless if the alarm sounded but no one responded. But he was guilty if an attack came and the people were not warned.
2. Cities were constructed with towers on the walls where the watchmen kept vigil. See Isaiah 21:5 ("Set a watchman in the tower").
3. The trumpet in verse 3 was a ram's horn (a shofar) that was used to sound the warning. Ezekiel has been figuratively blowing this trumpet throughout the first 32 chapters.
 - a) **The shofar was a long horn that curved upwards at the end. It was used extensively in Israel on both religious and military occasions. It is still used in Jewish synagogues, especially at the New Year.**

4. Verse 7 reminds us that Ezekiel was not just using his own powers of observation, as would an ordinary watchman. Ezekiel's warnings were divinely inspired. They were warnings from God.

E. *Lesson for Today*

1. One commentator noted: "Warning others of the consequences of judgment inherent in sin is never a popular assignment. Believers have a duty to be 'watchmen' who warn those who are in the world and are without God of the destructive nature of sin and its final irrevocable result -- death and hell."

2. Never popular? He's right, of course. But wouldn't you think that a watchman's message would be extremely popular? Don't most people want to receive a warning of impending danger so they can avoid it? Why then is our message of warning so unpopular?

3. We often hear warnings that one day a giant asteroid will obliterate the earth. We hear warnings that our sun will not last forever. We hear warnings about global warming. Lately we have heard many warnings about additional terrorist attacks. What is your first reaction when you hear those warnings? "Not that again... We hear that all the time, and nothing ever happens..."

4. Our message of warning gets the same reaction for the same reason. People do not believe that judgment could come at any time. We are very different from people shouting "Fire!" and warning people to flee a burning building. Why? Because they can see the fire!

5. Our job is to convince people of the truth of Hebrews 9:27 ("And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.") The message of the watchman today is that death and judgment are coming for all of us -- but we can be ready for it.

3. An Exhortation to Turn from Evil (33:10-20)

A. *This section is similar to 18:21-32 in that it also focuses on the responsibility of those who hear the messages of the watchman.*

B. *Ezekiel deals with three attitudes among his listeners:*

1. Some trusted in their own righteousness. (verse 13)
 - a) **The answer? None of it will be remembered if they are sinning now.**
2. Some despaired and became fatalistic. (verse 10)
 - a) **The answer? There is hope if they will repent and turn to God and live.**
3. Some blamed their misfortune on the injustice of God. (verse 17)
 - a) **The answer? God has been fair. It is the people who have not been fair.**

C. *The people in verse 10 say "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How can we live?" God's answer? Repent!*

1. Compare Acts 2:37-38.
 - a) **Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the**

Holy Spirit.

b) Repentance is always the first answer to the question "What shall I do?" Other things must follow as well, but without repentance whatever else we might do is all in vain.

c) Some people approach God saying "I want to be saved, but I still want to do X or I still want to continue living in situation Y even though I know that X and Y are against your will." God has one answer -- Repent! Turn and live!

2. Verse 10 of chapter 33 is the first indication we have had that the exiles are aware of their own sins. Yet as we will soon see they do not think they are entirely at fault here.

a) Earlier expressions of guilt also laid the blame on others. See 18:2 ('The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge').

D. Verse 11 tells us that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

1. "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?"

2. Verse 11 is an extremely important verse in properly understanding the rest of the Bible. A basic principle of Biblical interpretation is that scriptures that are hard to understand should be interpreted in light of scriptures that are easy to understand. Well, here is one that is easy to understand. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

a) Another easy passage is found in 2 Peter 3:9 ("The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count

slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.")

b) Does God create some people just to fuel the fires of Hell? These verses tell us no. But John Calvin determined otherwise, and the Protestant world has for the most part followed John Calvin. (The church, of course, is not Protestant since the church was around before the Catholics. Protestants, by definition, came into existence after the Catholics. Some people today are pushing the idea that the church of Christ has a recent, man-made origin. While that may be true of the group they belong to, it is not true of the Lord's church --- which is the one body I belong to.)

3. Calvinism permeates most of the Protestant denominations. Although most Protestants today don't have a clue as to who John Calvin is or what he taught, this false doctrine is taught from their pulpits and in their seminaries. Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion has had a devastating effect on Christendom (using that term in its widest sense) by teaching the so-called TULIP doctrines: (1) Total depravity, (2) Unconditional election, (3) Limited atonement, (4) Irresistible grace, and (5) Perseverance of the Saints. The book of Ezekiel (as well as the rest of the Bible) is an obstacle for Calvinists.

4. Here is what John Calvin said about predestination:

a) "By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has

been predestinated to life or to death."

5. And what does God say? He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9) His will is that all will turn and live. (verse 11)

E. The people may have thought that their past history was so sinful there was no hope of overcoming it with future good works.

1. God's answer was "Why will you die, O house of Israel? Turn!" The choice was their choice -- not God's! God's will was that they would turn and live, but he left the choice up to them.
2. It is a wonderful message that even at this point God still gave them this choice. He had not given up on them. God is a God of second chances.
3. Look at the apostle Paul. After persecuting the church of Christ and being the chief of sinners, he was given a second chance.
4. God does not act on the past accumulation of evil (or even the past accumulation of good). It is the present attitude and action that are important.

F. As with chapter 18, verses 12-16 contain some examples to illustrate the principle of individual responsibility.

G. Verse 16 raises an interesting question. ("None of his sins which he has committed shall be remembered against him.")

1. Was there forgiveness of sin under the Old Covenant?
2. We often hear that sins under the Old Covenant were "rolled forward" each year. But here it says that the sins would not be

remembered if the people repented? Were they rolled forward or were they forgiven?

3. Again, we need to check the easy verses to understand the hard verses. An easy verse to understand is found in Hebrews 10:4. ("For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.") Another is found in Hebrews 9:22. ("without shedding of blood there is no remission")

4. The idea of "rolling forward" sins comes from Hebrews 10:3 ("But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.")

5. So was there forgiveness under the Old Covenant? Yes and no. Faithful people who died under the Old Covenant (prior to the New Covenant) received forgiveness --- but they did not receive that forgiveness until Jesus's perfect sacrifice.

6. Hebrews 10:10 ("By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.") See also Hebrews 9:15; 10:11; 10:18.

H. *Verse 17 raises another interesting question: Is God being fair?*

1. The people complain that God is not fair.

a) The phrase "the way of the Lord is not equal" in verse 17 uses an unusual metaphor taken from weighing in scales. The verb literally means "is not adjusted to the right standard," which is the action of a dishonest salesman.

b) The people are complaining that God is a dishonest salesman!

c) See Proverbs 11:1. ("A false balance is abomination to the

LORD: but a just weight is his delight.")

2. God responds by saying that it is they who are not fair. It is they who are not adjusted to the right standard.

a) Men today continue to set themselves up as the standard and expect God to fit into their man-made mold. God is the standard. His word is the mold into which we must fit.

b) We must change ourselves to fit the word of God --- not change the word of God to fit ourselves.

3. God does not blame one person for another person's sin. God holds each man personally accountable for the sin in his life. (This theme was also in dealt with in chapter 18:25-29.)

4. Jerusalem's Fall and the People's Failure to Heed (33:21-33)

A. On January 8, 585 BC, an eyewitness arrived with the news that Jerusalem had fallen.

1. Ezekiel had closed chapter 24 (verses 26-27) by prophesying that a fugitive would escape Jerusalem's destruction and come and report the city's fall the exiles.

a) (24:26-27) "on that day one who escapes will come to you to let you hear it with your ears; 27'on that day your mouth will be opened to him who has escaped; you shall speak and no longer be mute. Thus you will be a sign to them, and they shall know that I am the Lord."

b) The fulfillment of that prophecy is here in these verses.

2. The siege of Jerusalem had begun in December/January

589/588 BC. (2 Kings 25:1) Two years and seven months later, Jerusalem fell (Sept. 586 BC) (2 Kings 25:8).

3. This eyewitness arrived four or five months later (January 8, 585 BC).

a) Travel time from Jerusalem to Babylon was about four or five months. (Ezra 7:9 gives the time as approximately four months.)

b) Comparing the dates in Ezekiel with the dates in 2 Kings appears on the surface to give a travel time of 18 months. However, Ezekiel was most likely using the Babylonian calendar (which begins the year in the spring) rather than the Hebrew calendar (which begins the year in the fall). It makes sense that Ezekiel would use the calendar of the place where he was living --- just like we adjust our watches when we travel to a different time zone.

c) Another possible explanation is that a copyist's error caused the eleventh year to become the twelfth year in the text that we now have. I don't much favor this explanation, but it is possible. The Hebrew words for 11 and 12 differ by only one consonant in written Hebrew and differ hardly at all in speech.

B. Verse 22 tells us that Ezekiel's muteness came to an end at this point.

1. We were first introduced to Ezekiel's muteness in 3:26 ("I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and not be one to rebuke them, for they are a rebellious house.")

2. We are told in 24:27 when that muteness would be removed.

("on that day your mouth will be opened to him who has escaped; you shall speak and no longer be mute.")

3. Here in verse 22 we see the muteness removed. ("And He had opened my mouth; so when he came to me in the morning, my mouth was opened, and I was no longer mute.")

4. What type of muteness was this?

a) **First, we know that it was not a complete muteness because Ezekiel has been talking throughout the book. People have been coming to him for messages from God, and he has been delivering those messages. Indeed, back in chapter 3, God told Ezekiel that "when I speak with you, I will open your mouth." (verse 27)**

b) **Thus, we know that this muteness (which lasted over 7 years) was not total speechlessness. One commentator explains it as follows:**

c) **"Ezekiel was restrained from speaking publicly among the people in contrast to the normal vocal ministry of the prophets. The prophets usually moved among their people, speaking God's message as they observed the contemporary situation. But Ezekiel was told to remain in his home, except to dramatize God's message. He would remain mute, except when God opened his mouth to deliver a divine message. Instead of Ezekiel going to the people, the people had to come to him."**

d) **His release from muteness may explain his increased popularity in the closing verses of this chapter.**

C. At last the prophet was vindicated. His messages of doom had been proved true.

1. Ezekiel had passed the test in Deut. 18:22. Against all the expectations of the people, the word that Ezekiel had spoken had come to pass.
2. Would the people left in Judah now repent? Would the exiles now have an obedient heart? If Ezekiel thought so, God warns him that he will be disappointed.
3. First, God tells Ezekiel that those left in the ruins of Judah would continue in their sin.

a) Jeremiah described those left behind in Jer. 52:16. ("But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left certain of the poor of the land for vinedressers and for husbandmen.")

(1) There was a very wide chasm between the people in exile and the people who had been left behind. Those in exile had been chosen because they were at the top of society. Those left behind had been spared because they were at the bottom of society.

b) These poorest of the land apparently began to claim the property of those who had been exiled or killed. They justified their land grabbing by reference to the promises to Abraham.

c) This reaction was not new. Those who were spared exile in 597 BC had made similar claims.

(1) (Ezekiel 11:15) "Son of man, your brethren, your relatives, your countrymen, and all the house of Israel in its entirety, are those about whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'Get far away from the Lord; this land has been given to us as a possession.'"

(2) In Chapter 11 the people had claimed that those taken into exile were no longer entitled to the privilege of land ownership in Judah.

Now they argued that if one man (Abraham) had inherited the land, then they (a much greater number) had a much greater right to the land. ("Abraham was only one man, but we are many!")

d) One commentator notes: "This passage illustrates with remarkable aptness the overwhelming arrogance of the minority who wake up one morning and find themselves in the majority. Moreover, like so many in the minority, they live in the past and endeavour to draw on ancient precedents to buttress insubstantial claims for the present."

e) God reminded them that they still sacrificed to idols, still ate meat with the blood, and still committed acts of violence and sexual immorality. Their sins were the very same as those who had been killed or exiled. They had no greater claim to the land than did those from whom the land had just been taken.

(1) As one commentator noted: "Abraham's title to the land was his righteousness." The people here had no such claim on the land.

(2) The phrase "you stand upon your sword" in verse 26 means that they lived by violence. Recall from Lesson 2 that those left behind in Judah (led by Ishmael) murdered the governor (Gedaliah) that had been left behind by the Babylonians. Read Jeremiah 40-41 and 2 Kings 25:25-26.

f) They may have thought they had escaped judgment, but God promises that they too will be visited by the sword, by wild beasts, and by plague.

g) If the people did not know God through repentance and faith, they would ultimately know Him through judgment.

h) After the governor was murdered, those left behind fled to Egypt --- and we know from Lessons 16 and 17 what God had

planned for Egypt!

4. The people refer to both Abraham and the land in verse 24.

a) The land of Judah was promised land. If they lost it, wouldn't that mean that God had broken his promise to Abraham?

b) Ezekiel's response is that the people had a basic misunderstanding about God's covenant with Abraham. The promise of land was a conditional promise. The people had been told that if they violated the Mosaic covenant, they could lose the land that had been given to Abraham under the Abrahamic covenant.

(1) Deut. 28:62-63 ("You shall be left few in number, whereas you were as the stars of heaven in multitude, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God. 63" And it shall be, that just as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess.")

c) In verses 25-27, Ezekiel shows how the people had violated that covenant, thus forfeiting the promised land. The judgments of the Mosaic covenant were being executed. The people had no claim on the land of promise.

d) Even today, many teach that the Jews continue to possess land under an unconditional promise from God. That has NEVER been the case.

e) The only unconditional promise to Israel was that she would one day be a blessing to the entire world. That promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. All men today (Jew or Gentile) have hope only in Jesus Christ -- no man comes to

the Father except by Him. (John 14:6)

f) In the church, there is no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile. They have become one in Jesus Christ. (Galatians 3:28)

(1) See also Isaiah 2:1-4 and Ephesians 2:13-18. A major focus of Old Testament is the peace that Christ would bring between the Jews and the rest of the world.

(2) (Isaiah 2:4) "He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore."

(3) (Ephesians 2:13-18) "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father."

(4) And, reading ahead just a bit... (Ezekiel 34:20-26) "'Therefore thus says the Lord God to them: "Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. 21"Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, 22"therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. 23"I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them- My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24"And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken. 25"I will make a covenant of peace

with them, and cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. 26 "I will make them and the places all around My hill a blessing; and I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing."

g) Is there one church or many churches? Ephesians 1:22-23 and 4:4 tells us there is one church. If God had wanted two churches, he would have had one church for the Jews and one for the Gentiles.

5. How about Ezekiel's fellow exiles? How did they respond?

a) On the surface things looked good. They turned Ezekiel into a celebrity!

b) But God tells Ezekiel that his popularity was only superficial. The people listened to him out of curiosity, but they had no intention of changing their way of life. They found his words entertaining, but they neglected to put the principles he proclaimed into practice.

(1) James 1:23-24 ("For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.")

(2) They no doubt praised his eloquence, his style, and his delivery -- but they disregarded his message.

c) Is there a lesson here for those today who make it their primary goal to entertain the people?

(1) An entertainer demands no response. Thus, the people did not feel any need to respond to Ezekiel's message.

(2) We may be moved by a movie or a song, but our emotional response lasts only a very short time. As soon as we reach the parking lot at the movie theater, we find ourselves back in the real world with real world problems and the movie is quickly forgotten. Is the modern denominational world any different? They offer dramatic performances and musical extravaganzas to bring people in, but when the music stops what is left? (There's not much there even when the music is playing!)

(3) Have you seen the audio versions of the Bible that are available for purchase on cassette or CD? Some of them are advertised as "dramatized" versions! Apparently today the word of God is not dramatic enough for us, but an instrumental background is needed to bring about the proper emotional response. How ridiculous!

(4) According to the April 5, 1993 issue of Time magazine, the "church" will never be the same because the baby boomers, the generation that forgot God, are going back to church. But it's not going to be business as usual. These returnees are described as "traveling from church to church, shopping for a custom-made God." In an effort to attract these shoppers, more and more churches are becoming "customer oriented." As an example, the article cited one church as having songs one Sunday morning ranging from "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning" to "Danny Boy." (Before we get too judgmental on this point, we should first check to see if these songs are in our own song book!) The meeting climaxed in hugging with the preacher raising his arms high and booming "Hey, God, make my day! Go for it!"

(5) The church is not in the entertainment business. We cannot even begin to compete in that arena. People get bored very quickly, and what is entertaining today is not very exciting tomorrow --- which explains why the "entertainment" churches are constantly having to come up with bigger and louder extravaganzas to keep the people and their money rolling in. The best way to stay off this treadmill is to never get on it in the first place.

d) While a preacher hates to be ignored, there is also a danger when a preacher becomes a very popular figure.

(1) (Luke 6:26) "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets."

(2) McGuiggan: "This section makes it very clear that the popular preacher is not necessarily the effective preacher. It does not immediately follow that he who has the crowds is the one through whom God is doing his effective work."

6. Verse 31 tells us what the people real goal was --- "but their heart goeth after their covetousness."

a) Compare Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8:18-19.

b) Also, recall Colossians 3:5. ("Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.")

7. The good news is that God was not through making himself known to his people.

a) "When all this comes true" in verse 33 refers to the prophecies of restoration that Ezekiel had already proclaimed and was about to proclaim.

b) Ezekiel's prophecies of restoration that the people were about to hear would be just as sure and certain as the prophecies of doom that had just been confirmed by the news of the city's fall.

c) God's closing words in chapter 33 are similar to those given in his call in 2:5. ("As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse-for they are a rebellious house-yet they will know that a prophet has been among them.")

d) Whether or not the people would hear and respond, Ezekiel was to continue to proclaim God's word. By his faithful ministry, they would know that a prophet had been among them.

e) Faithfulness to God may mean that we are not taken seriously by the world. But faithfulness to God will one day be vindicated. (Gal. 6:9 -- "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.")

5. The Change of Theme in Ezekiel

A. After the fall of Jerusalem is announced, the theme of Ezekiel's message undergoes a radical change. There is no longer any need to announce the impending doom of Jerusalem because that doom has now come.

B. Instead, Ezekiel begins to preach restoration.

- 1. Physical restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah.**
- 2. Spiritual restoration under Jesus Christ.**

C. So far Ezekiel has been all doom and gloom, but his message is about to change.

Ezekiel -- Lesson Nineteen

Chapters 34 - 35

1. Condemnation and Fate of Corrupt and Delinquent Shepherds. 34:1-10.

1. Any examination of the history of the Northern Kingdom begins with Jereboam. 1 Kings 12:25-33.

1. His leadership and apostasy proved to be Israel's ruin.

2. He immediately introduced idolatry by erecting two golden calves at Dan and Bethel.

3. From this beginning Israel sank lower and lower in idolatry and immorality until it was destroyed in 722 B.C. 2 Kings 17:5-7.

2. Ezekiel has already announced that Judah failed to learn from her older harlotrous sister (23:1-49).

1. After Josiah, all the kings of Judah were corrupt.

2. They led the nation in spiritual and political ruin.

3. A prophetic preview of the monarchy's effects on the life of the nation found in 1 Samuel 8:11-18 is a sobering prediction of these events.

4. The indictment against Judah's leaders is three-fold:

1. They did not seek to meet the needs of the people but only used the people for their own selfish ends (vv. 2-3).

2. They did not take special care of those in need, the helpless members of society; rather, they met weakness and injury with callous cruelty (v. 4).

3. For lack of positive moral or spiritual leadership the people wandered from the Lord and became a prey to idolatry and immorality (vv. 5-6).

5. For their irresponsible and selfish lack of leadership the Lord counted them guilty of violating his trust and announced their removal; the Lord himself would come to the aid of his flock and rescue them out of the mouths of their corrupt leaders (cf. Matt. 20:25-28). 34:7-10.

1. The condemnation of the shepherds for failure in their duty is comprehensive and devastating in its scope.

1. They fed themselves well, but not their sheep.

2. Indeed, though they did not lift a finger in fulfilling their pastoral duties, they knew how to profit from their position, dining on roast lamb and dressed in sheepskin jackets.

3. As they relaxed in their privileged position, the state of their flocks steadily declined.

4. The sick and crippled sheep were not attended to, strays were left to wander, vulnerable to every beast of prey that sought a meal.

2. This denunciation of the shepherds is sobering in that it evokes from all who have such responsibilities an act of self-examination.

1. To be a pastor is to have responsibilities for other people; the responsibilities bring both certain rights and privileges.

2. The pastoral role involves caring for others, not striving for oneself.

3. The prophetic denunciation reveals the capacity within each of us to fail as a pastor.

4. It is a failure when one accepts the rights and privileges, but ignores the responsibilities.

5. It is a failure when one cares for one's self, but ignores the welfare of those entrusted to his care.

6. As was true with the watchman (ch. 33), failure as a shepherd leads not only to personal disaster, but results in terrible grief among the members of the flock.

3. Worst of all is the divine declaration addressed to the delinquent pastors, "I am against the shepherds" (v. 10).

2. The Action of a New Shepherd. 34:11-16.

1. Ezekiel contrasted the exploitation of the corrupt shepherds with the diligent care God would exercise on behalf of his flock.

1. The role of Jehovah as a shepherd was a familiar one in the O.T.

1. The title "shepherd" was one of the oldest designations used for God and appeared in Gen. 49:24.

2. The best known example of God's shepherd image is that of David in Psalm 23.

2. But Ezekiel is saying something new despite the familiarity of the O.T. with the concept of God as a shepherd.

1. Throughout Israel's history God had delegated the role of shepherd to prophets, judges, and kings.

2. They had been privileged to serve as under shepherds (cf. 1 Pet. 5:4 describing Christ as "chief shepherd."), responsible to the Good Shepherd.

3. In the failure of the under-shepherds, Ezekiel declares that God would act once again directly as Israel's shepherd.

3. Ezekiel 34:11-16 abounds in first person promises.

1. God repeatedly promised "I will."

2. While there is some overlap and repetition, there are twenty-five such promises in this and the following paragraphs of the chapter.

3. These promises include elements of judgment as well as

deliverance.

1. Jehovah promised to hold the shepherds accountable for the sheep, remove them from tending the flock, rescue his flock from their mouths, search for and look after his sheep, look after and gather them, rescue them from clouds and darkness, and gather them from among the nations.
2. He would bring them to their own land, place them on the mountains of Israel, tend the flock in good pasture so that they could lie down in safety, search out the lost and the strayed of the flock, bind up the injured, and destroy the strong who oppose the flock.
3. He would shepherd the flock with justice, judge between one sheep and another, judge between the fat and the lean sheep, save the flock, place over them one shepherd, be their God, make a covenant of peace with them, bless them, shed showers in season, and provide for them (vv. 10-29).
4. The verses describing the Good Shepherd also contain the promise of a new future for the sheep.
 1. They had been exploited, deserted, and exposed to terrible dangers under their former shepherds.
 2. In the new situation there would be a total change of circumstances: "I will feed them in justice," God declares (v. 16).
 3. Indeed, when all is said and done, it is the sheep that matter more than the shepherds.
 1. If there were no sheep, there would be no shepherds; if there were no people, there could be no rulers.
 2. God's most fundamental concern, as expressed by the

prophet, was for the people themselves.

3. The words contain the terrors of judgment (v. 10), but the judgment of the shepherds is rooted in profound pastoral concern for the sheep.

4. Thus, the prophet's anticipation of a better future for his people is not simply a conviction that eventually justice would be done; it was also an insight into the love of God.

5. The entire pastoral metaphor presupposed God's care and love.

6. No shepherd can function without participating in that love; no sheep can live without experiencing that love.

7. The positive elements in Ezekiel's teaching are beginning to predominate.

3. The Flock and Its Future. 34:17-31.

1. The Judgment of the Sheep. 34:17-22.

1. Although chapter 34 is dominated by the pastoral metaphor of the shepherd, Ezekiel's focus swings back and forth like a pendulum between the immediate crisis through which he lived, and the more distant future for which he hoped.

1. Ezekiel began with a declaration of judgment against the shepherds, or rulers (vv. 1-10), but then turned to a time when God would act as the Good Shepherd directly (vv. 11-16).

2. Now he turns back to the present, and describes the judgment of the sheep (vv. 17-22), but then in turn moves his attention forward to the future and the full restoration of God's people (vv. 23-31).

2. Here the Lord ceased addressing the corrupt shepherds and began speaking to his flock.

3. Not only would he rescue and tend, but the coming divine

Shepherd also would be a righteous judge.

1. Former "shepherds" allowed and even participated in the oppression of the weak of the flock. 34:17-19.

1. The strong animals not only pushed forward to graze on the best grass but, when they had eaten their fill, they trampled on the rest to render it inedible for the weaker sheep.

2. They pushed forward to drink the fresh water, but then stirred up the mud to make it undrinkable for their companions.

2. The Lord would oppose those who were "greedy for unjust gain" (33:31) and who took advantage of the weak.

3. Like a shepherd who must judge between sheep to be bred or sold or butchered, the Lord will judge between people who need his care and those who deserve his judgment.

4. Jehovah has promised to be a righteous judge who would save his flock and distinguish between those who were truly his and those who were not (v. 22; cf. Rom 2:28-29; 9:6-8).

4. Ezekiel brings out starkly the latent perversity of human nature.

1. First, there is greed -- we push and shove, using all our strength to thrust aside our fellow human beings in order to achieve our goal.

2. Having achieved our first goal, the discovery of power leads to a peculiar twist.

1. We got what we wanted because we were strong, but the same strength could stop the weak from getting what they want.

2. So having partaken to the full, we destroy what remains

to deny it to others.

3. However, well cloaked, our greed and perversity cannot remain hidden forever: "I myself will judge," God says (v. 20).

2. The Future and Full Restoration of God's People. 34:23-31.

1. Vv. 23-24 are transitional to the final section on the covenant of peace (vv. 25-31).

1. They are clearly unified by the repetition of "my servant David" in both verses and by the parallelism between the last clause of v. 23 and the first clause of v. 24 (literally): "And he will be to them for a shepherd and I Yahweh will be to them for a God."

2. Nevertheless, v. 23 continues the figure of shepherd/flock, whereas v. 24 abandons it for the literal "prince/people" in anticipation of the literal message in vv. 25-31 (which reverts to the figure in v. 31).

2. The coming shepherd will be known as "my servant David" (v. 23; see 37:22-26 for a parallel passage).

1. He was one from the line of David who was a fulfillment of the promise made in the Davidic covenant in 2 Sam. 7:16.

2. He will establish an everlasting throne of David.

3. Unlike the corrupt former Davidic rulers who only served themselves, this new king will be a servant of the Lord (cf. Matt. 4:10; 6:24; 12:18; 20:28; Luke 1:69; Acts 3:13, 26; 4:25-30).

4. He will also be God's personal representative, who will reconfirm the Davidic covenant of 2 Sam. 7:12-16.

5. He will tend the Lord's flock, be Jehovah's shepherd (Ezek. 34:23), and a prince among them (34:24).

3. The promise of a covenant of peace. 34:25-31.

1. Ezekiel concluded this series of messages with the Lord's promise of a "covenant of peace" with his people (v. 25), referring to what Jeremiah called a "new covenant" (Jer. 31:31).

1. The designation here indicates that this new covenant relationship will provide his people with peace (cf. Num. 25:12; Josh. 9:15; 10:1; Psa. 29:11; 85:8; Isa. 54:10).

2. It was peace and rest which humanity lost through sin (Gen. 3:15; 4:8), and which the Mosaic covenant promised as a result of obedience (Lev. 26:6).

3. But in spite of Israel's disobedience, the prophets envisioned a coming restoration of peace and all the other characteristics of life before the fall (Isa. 9:6-7; 52:7; 53:5; 66:12; Jer. 30:10; 33:6, 9; Hag. 2:9).

4. This will come to pass in the Messianic Age with the restoration of the ideals of life as it was lived in Eden.

2. This covenant is the same one promised in Ezek. 16:60 which will establish an unbreakable bond between God and his people.

1. By it he will assure their well-being and personally act as covenant mediator (v. 25).

2. "I will bless them" (v. 26) begins a list of the benefits of the covenant of peace.

1. There will be showers at the right season (v. 27a) that produce bountiful crops.

2. The people will dwell in security and freedom (vv. 27b-28).

3. There will be no famine or threats from enemies (v.

29).

4. The people will know that God, their Shepherd, is with them and that Israel his flock is his people (v. 30).

4. The central figure of chapter 34 is God's ideal Shepherd-King who was the antithesis of the corrupt leadership that resulted in the exile; eight characteristics of this Shepherd-King may be gleaned from 34:11-31.

1. He has a special relationship with Jehovah.

1. In vv. 11-16 the shepherd is God (v. 16), but in vv. 23-24 he is "my servant David."

2. The use of the personal pronouns "I" more than 30 times and "my" more than 15 times suggests that this shepherd would be God in a personal form.

3. The same concept may be found in the good Shepherd passage in John 10:30 (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5) in which Jesus said that He and the Father were one.

2. He will feed his sheep (34:13, 26-27, 29).

1. Like the shepherd of Psa. 23, his sheep will not want.

2. Jesus is the Bread of life (John 6:31-35) and the Water of life (John 4), satisfying the needs of his sheep.

3. He will gather his sheep together (34:12-13).

1. No longer were they to be a scattered flock.

2. In the N.T. the church was unified through Christ (Matt. 12:30; Eph. 4:3-7).

3. Ezekiel envisioned the day when the Messiah would gather all his sheep in a wonderful union (see Matt. 13:30-31).

4. He will reestablish his people peacefully in their land (34:14-15).

1. This echoes Psa. 23, which tells of the shepherd's care for his flock.
2. Under his rule the flock has no want (23:1), no worry (23:2), no weakness (23:3), no wickedness (23:4), no death (23:4), no fear (23:4), no defeat (23:5), no deficit (23:5), no judgment (23:6), and no end (23:6), all qualities that promote peace and security (see John 1:1-42; 14:27).
5. He will rule with justice and compassion (34:16).
 1. Jesus began his public ministry by claiming the role of the servant of the Lord.
 2. (Isa. 61:1,2 -- The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me; because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening *of the prison* to them that are bound; ²to proclaim the year of Jehovah's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; cp. Luke 4:16-21-- And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. ¹⁷And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor: He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovering of sight to the blind, To set at liberty them that are bruised, ¹⁹To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. ²⁰And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down: and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on him.

2¹ And he began to say unto them, To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears.).

6. He will personally judge his people (34:17, 20, 22).

1. Unlike the ruthless kings of Israel and Judah, he will judge with equity and righteousness.

2. Jesus was presented as a righteous judge of his people who rendered to each a just reward (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10-11; 1 Cor. 3:11-15).

7. He will be the only true shepherd (34:23).

1. There will be no rivals to his ministry.

2. Jesus is *the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life (John 10:9, 11-12; 14:6; Acts 4:12).

8. He will mediate a covenant of peace (34:25).

1. When people enter a covenant of peace with the Shepherd, they also make peace with God (John 10:27-28).

2. This covenant of peace is an everlasting covenant (Ezek. 16:60; Isa 54:10; John 10:29).

5. Perhaps this passage is one of those where the prophets spoke more than they knew.

1. We can see more than Ezekiel saw.

2. He only saw the promises as a future hope of redemption to be realized.

3. On the other hand, we can see them both in their historical setting and in their fulfillment in Christ.

4. Ezekiel 34 is closely related to both Psa. 23 and the Good Shepherd passage of John 10:1-42

5. The hope of the Messiah soared with God's promise of one shepherd (v. 23) who would gather the people and reinstate the line of David to bring people to a knowledge of God.

4. The Desolation of Mount Seir. 35:1-15.

1. The judgment of Edom in 35:1-15 was the basis for the salvation of the "mountains" of Judah in 36:1-15.

1. These two passages have strong contrasts and comparisons between Edom and Israel, making the judgement of Edom a foil for Israel's salvation.

2. For the desolation Edom brought upon Israel, God would bring desolation upon Edom and fruitfulness to Israel.

2. The message begins with an instruction to Ezekiel to set his face against Mount Seir. 35:1-2.

3. Two factors suggest the appropriateness and validity of this message of judgment.

1. The malicious joy of the Edomites over the fall of Jerusalem marked them for a double portion of judgment; the message of judgment is given twice to suggest certainty.

2. Edom had taken territorial possession of portions of Judah, especially in the south; the promise or restoration would raise the question of the territory taken over by the Edomites.

4. The message against Edom has two parts.

1. The declaration of judgment against Edom. 35:1-4.

1. The Edomites were descendants of Esau (Gen. 25:25).

2. Genesis chs. 27 and 32 reveal the enmity that existed between Jacob and Esau.

3. That animosity was perpetuated among their progeny in spite of their personal reconciliation (Gen. 33:1-20).

4. The Edomites inhabited the region southeast of the Dead Sea and south of Moab around Mount Seir.

5. Esau's descendants were known as a cruel (Amos 1:11-12), vengeful (Ezek. 25:12-14), warring (Gen. 27:40), idolatrous

(2 Chron. 25:14, 20), and proud people (Isa. 49:16-17).

6. God was against them because they consistently took sides with the enemies of his people and even helped them in attacks against Israel (2 Chron. 20:10).

7. Therefore God promised that Edom would one day be desolate (see Isa. 34:5-17; Jer. 49:7-22; Obadiah) because of their implacable thirst for revenge against the Hebrews.

2. The reasons for the judgment of Edom. 35:5-15.

1. Edom was to be judged for its "ancient" enmity against the Hebrews, still harbored after hundreds of years following the deception of Esau by Jacob. (v. 5).

2. The Edomites had encouraged Israel's enemies to execute the Jews by the sword; they missed no opportunities to endorse and even to participate in attacks against Israel (v. 5; Obadiah 10-14).

3. Their desire to possess the land of Israel was fueled by their feelings that the land still belonged to them because Jacob had obtained it by deception (v. 10; Gen. 27:1-40).

1. Because of these feelings, God said they would be victims of bloodshed since they perpetrated bloodshed and violence against Israel (v. 6).

2. So Edom was destroyed (v. 7), and the land, filled with the slain, would remain a perpetual desolation (v. 8).

3. The cities of Edom would vanish, never to return (v. 9).

4. The accuracy of this prophecy is confirmed by the absence of Edom from the family of nations and the desolation of the region they formerly inhabited.

4. The Edomites blasphemed the mountains of Israel by saying that they had been laid waste and given over to the

Edomites to devour (v. 12); their words were blasphemous because they disregarded Jehovah's desire for the allotment of the land to Israel.

5. They had spoken against God without restraint (v. 13).

1. This spirit of defiance was the subject of Malachi's message and insight into the bitterness of the descendants of Esau (Mal. 1:1-5).

2. They exhibited an attitude of defiance that ignored God's will for themselves as well as for the Israelites.

3. God promised judgment for Edom and announced that since the Edomites rejoiced over Israel's calamity the whole world would rejoice over its destruction (v. 14).

4. Gloating over Israel and trying to confiscate their territory caused the the destruction, desolation, and loss of their land and national identity (v. 15).

5. As is so often the case in the O.T., the description of evil in the ancient world seems to mirror accurately the modern world.

1. Mount Seir was a land that had cultivated hatred from one generation to the next; no doubt it was in part justified, based on the memories of acts of injustice done against it in former centuries by its neighbor, Judah.

2. But whatever the reasons, a nation that stores hatred for another, cultivating it from one generation to another, is harboring a rot within its soul.

3. Edom has its modern counterparts; there are still nations whose history is one of hatred for a neighbor.

1. There are always justifications for the hatred, well-founded on injustices, imagined or real, done to it by its neighbor.

2. But a history of hatred, taught to children so that it might

flourish in a coming generation, is ultimately a curse on any nation; like a cancer it spreads through the body of the nation as a whole, bringing closer the day of its demise.

3. Nations, no less than individuals, need to learn the art of forgiveness.

4. There can be no full human life when the forces of evil remain rampant.

1. At the heart of human living must be the recognition that we are loved by God and are required to love; we cannot love if hate abounds.

2. As we learn of the love of God, we discover above all that it is a self-giving love; love and greed cannot flourish together.

3. Hatred and love can only be destroyed if love abounds.

4. If they are not destroyed then, like Mount Seir, we shall hear the terrible divine words: "I am against you" (v. 3).

Lesson 20: Ezekiel 36-37

1. **Repossession of the Mountains of Israel (36:1-15)**

A. *This chapter contains a prophecy of encouragement, and yet "this prophecy of encouragement interestingly took the form of a judgment speech."*

B. *Verses 1-15 contain three accusations against Edom and the surrounding nations (verses 1-7) and three promises of restoration for Israel (verses 8-15).*

C. *The restoration message is a counterpart to the judgment message in 6:1-14, which was also addressed to the mountains and hills. The mountains of Israel are contrasted with Mount Seir (the home of Edom) that we saw in Chapter 35.*

D. *In 6:3 we saw that Israel's idolatry occurred at the "high places." That same word is translated "heights" in 36:2.*

E. *It was because of this idolatry that in Chapter 6 God said he would destroy the pagan shrines and would bring the sword to slay the people "because of all the wicked and detestable practices of the house of Israel." (6:11)*

F. *Through Edom and the rest of the nations (36:3-5) God had fulfilled His word. They had wielded the sword and made desolate "the inheritance of the house of Israel." (35:15; 36:4)*

G. *Nevertheless, God would not leave these other nations unpunished for their "malicious talk and slander" (36:3), their scorn (36:6), or for their glee and the malice in their hearts with which they acted (36:5).*

H. *Most importantly, God would not allow these other nations to*

retain possession of the land, but he would return it to "the whole house of Israel." (36:10).

I. The three accusations brought against these other nations expands on the ideas in Chapter 35.

1. First, the nations and Edom had taken possession of the mountains of Israel. (36:2-3, 5)

a) In verse 2 they said "Aha, the ancient high places have become our possession." These high places for pagan worship were thought to have special powers and were considered a prize possession.

2. Second, they had plundered Judah and left the land desolate. (36:3-4)

3. Third, they had ridiculed and scorned Judah. (36:3-4, 6, 15)

4. Edom is mentioned specifically only in verse 5, but the accusations are comparable to those in Chapter 35.

5. The "nations" in verse 4 refers to the Gentile nations of which the most recent was Babylon. But Edom is especially significant in these verses as "the epitome of nations that sought to overrun and acquire Israel's land for themselves."

J. Verses 8-12 contain three promises to Israel regarding the land.

1. First, the land will again be fruitful (36:8-9). Compare 6:8-10.

2. Second, the house of Israel will return and multiply in the land (36:10-11).

3. Third, the Israelites will once again possess the land (36:12-14).

K. *Ownership of the land was by divine commission.*

1. Every family was entrusted with a portion of land protected by the law of the Jubilee Year (Lev. 25:8-24) when all property was restored to the original owner or surviving family.

2. Thus, the land was viewed as a divine stewardship. It was for this reason that Naboth refused to sell his portion of the land to King Ahab (1 Kings 21:3; Lev. 25:23).

3. "When the enemy claimed possession of the land, they claimed ownership of what was not theirs to take. It was God's land."

4. The use of "my land" in 36:5 called attention to the fact that the land was God's -- as were the people ("my people" in verse 12).

L. *When the spies described the land in Numbers 13:32, they said it was a land that "devours those living in it."*

1. God promises that in this restoration the land would no longer "devour" the people (36:14). No longer will people taunt Israel in it; no longer will they scorn them or cause them to fall (36:15).

2. The people would enjoy a special protection by God. This is a theme that Ezekiel will develop more fully later in the book.

2. Reasons for the Coming Restoration (36:16-23)

A. *Verses 16-18 describe how the land had been defiled by the Israelites' disobedience to the Mosaic covenant.*

B. *These acts of disobedience centered in two areas: (verse 18)*

1. Bloodshed and violence.
2. Idolatry.

C. Verse 19 tells us that God judged them by dispersing them -- a reference to both the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.

D. But by their punishment, they became a reproach to God's holy name because they made it appear to others that God was not able to keep them safe. "These are the people of the LORD, and yet they have gone out of His land." (verse 20)

1. Recall from Ezekiel 20:39 that the Israelites' idolatry not only defiled the land, but it profaned God's name.
2. The revelation of God's name or character was a major aspect of God's dealings with Israel from the beginning.
3. The Jews were God's representatives, and their sin brought reproach upon God. There is a real lesson here for us. The church is God's representative today.

E. Thus, God intended to restore them, not because they deserved restoration, but for the sake of His own holy name and His reputation. (verses 20-23).

F. Not only would the people be restored, but God's name and reputation would be restored among the surrounding nations.

3. Seven Elements of the Coming Restoration (36:24-32)

A. Seven elements of the coming restoration are presented in these verses. They expand ideas that were first presented in 11:14-21.

B. *First, God promises to return his people to their land. (verse 24)*

1. God would gather them "out of all countries" in verse 24. Which countries?
2. The Northern Kingdom went into Assyrian captivity in 722 BC. Babylon took captives from Judah in 605, 597, and 587 BC. Babylon was overthrown by Medo-Persia in 539 BC, after which the Hebrews began to return to the land under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.
3. Premillennialists say that "all" must mean many more than just these three (and really just one -- Medo-Persia). They look for a future regathering following the dispersion of AD 70. But, as we will see below, this view conflicts with some very clear teachings in the Bible regarding the church and its role in God's plan.
4. What then does this refer to? While the coming physical restoration involved a return from one nation, the coming spiritual restoration would indeed involve all nations. Read Acts 2:5 ("And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.")
 - a) Read also Isaiah 2:2 ("And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.") --- and read Acts 2:16-17 and Joel 2 to see when the "last days" occurred.

C. *Second, God will cleanse the people from their impurities and especially their idolatry, which had defiled the land. (verse 25) ("I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I*

will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.")

1. Ezekiel used his favorite mocking word (gillulim) for "idols" in verse 18. It may be derived from the Hebrew word for dung (gel) -- gillulim thus meaning "dung things" or "dung idols."
2. Cleansing and forgiveness were symbolized by sprinkling with clean water to wash away their impurities. See Numbers 19: 13, 20.
3. Some have pointed to this passage to support baptism by sprinkling.
 - a) **The pattern for proper baptism is found in the examples we read in the New Testament, not in Ezekiel or Numbers. The word "baptism" means immersion and Paul tells us that baptism represents a burial and resurrection.**
 - b) **Even one Catholic scholar wrote that early church baptism was "by immersion of the whole person, which is the only meaning of the New Testament word. A mere pouring or sprinkling was never thought of." (J. J. Ignatius Dollinger)**
 - c) **A more interesting comparison with baptism is that water is used here to denote cleansing, and that cleansing follows repentance. Where else do we see repentance followed by a cleansing with water? (Acts 2:38)**
 - d) **In most of the denominational world (and sadly among a growing number of people in the church itself), baptism is thought to occur after cleansing -- which makes no sense at all.**

e) Recall Acts 22:16 ("And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.") Could that be any more clear? You really need expert help to misunderstand that passage.

D. Third, the people will be given a new heart and a new spirit. (verse 26)

1. Their hearts of stone will be replaced by hearts of flesh. No longer would they be stubborn and unresponsive to God's word.

2. One premillennial commentator writes:

a) "The temptation to find the fulfillment of the "new heart" and "new spirit" ... exclusively in Christian conversion in this age should be resisted. New Testament conversion is only a preview of the massive spiritual revival that God has in store for all true Israel[ites] and Gentiles who believe. ... When Israel did not fulfill its role, God used the New Testament church as a means of presenting the message of redemption."

3. And there is the central thesis of premillennialism -- the church is the result of a mistake by God.

a) God had a plan for Israel, but Israel surprised him and rejected Jesus, so God came up with "Plan B" --- the church. We could say so many things here, but time will permit only three points.

b) First, this attitude may explain why many denominations have no concerns about departing from the pattern for the church we find in Acts. If God considers the church to be just "Plan B" then how important could it really be? He won't mind if we change it to suit our own tastes and our own

desires.

c) Second, NO ONE (God included!) reading the Old Testament could have possibly expected the Jews to do have done anything other than what they did -- reject and murder the son of God. Isaiah seemed to have known all about it in Isaiah 53; as did David in Psalm 22. The rejection of Jesus was certainly not a surprise to God, and it shouldn't have been a surprise to anyone else.

d) Third, the church of Christ is not a mistake. It is the eternal kingdom of Daniel 2 that was to be set up during the days of the Roman empire and was to outlast all of the kingdoms of men. The church is the body of Jesus Christ to which the saved are added by God. It is the New Jerusalem prepared as a bride for Jesus Christ. Does that sound like a mistake or a "Plan B"? Hardly.

E. Fourth, God's spirit would move the people to follow his laws. (verse 27)

F. Fifth, the people will live in the land that God gave their forefathers. (verse 28)

G. Sixth, God promises a new level of productivity. He instructs the grain to produce and the trees and crops to yield bountifully. (verses 29-30) No longer would famine drive God's people from the land.

H. Seventh, the people will remember their former vile practices and they will loathe themselves. (verse 31)

1. This terminology was used in 6:9 to describe Israel's repentance in exile. Here and in 20:43 is describes their feelings of

revulsion after their return from exile.

I. *We will see these seven elements of the restoration again in the next chapter, where we will have more to say about them.*

J. *Verse 32 ends with another reminder that none of these restoration promises was provided because the people deserved them. The primary motive was to demonstrate God's greatness and holiness.*

4. The Benefits of the Restoration (36:33-38)

A. *These verses review the benefits that would be provided by God's restoration of His people.*

B. *The benefits listed in verses 33-34 include cleansing from sin, resettlement, rebuilding, replanting, and productivity in the land.*

C. *Mention of the "Garden of Eden" in verse 35 points to a theme that we discussed in Lesson 19. God's plan from the start has been to recover the relationship with man that He had in the Garden and that was lost when man rebelled and sinned against God.*

D. *It is important to note that the Bible often describes spiritual blessings as physical blessings.*

1. Example: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5)

2. Read Isaiah 11 (e.g., "the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb" in verse 6) and then read Romans 15:8,12 to see when the prophecies in Isaiah 11 came to pass -- in the first century with the coming of Jesus Christ.

E. It is impossible to interpret all of these blessings literally and remain consistent with the remainder of Scripture -- or even the remainder of Ezekiel.

1. In verse 35 of this chapter we see that Israel will dwell in fortified cities. However, in 38:11, we find Gog coming against a people who dwell, not in fortified cities, but in unwalled villages with neither bars nor gates.
2. The Northern and Southern Kingdoms are reunited in 37:22. Yet, back in 16:53-59 we saw the Northern Kingdom brought back in the future as an independent nation.
3. It may sound good when some people proudly proclaim that they take all of scripture literally, but they don't (they take David to refer to Christ in these chapters, for example). Also, taking figurative language literally quickly leads to contradictions and inconsistencies.

F. When was or when will that "Garden of Eden" relationship be restored?

1. It has already been restored! In Exodus 25:8 God said "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." In many ways the rest of the Bible is simply a variation on that theme.
2. John 1:14 tells us that "the word became flesh and dwelt among us." A literal translation of this passage is that the word became flesh and tabernacled among us.
3. In Revelation 21:3 (speaking of the triumphant church after the judgment of Rome) God says "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."

4. 1 Corinthians 3:16 ("Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?")
5. Paul (describing the church) writes in Ephesians 2:22 ("in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.")
6. When will that perfect relationship that God had with man in the Garden be restored? It was restored when God established his church. We who have been added to that church presently enjoy that restored relationship. God dwells with us, and we may boldly approach his throne of grace.
7. Do we then have anything to look forward to? Of course! Colossians 3:2-4 ("Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. ³ For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.")

5. Restoration of Life for Israel (37:1-14) -- The Valley of Dry Bones

- A. Chapter 37 begins with one of the most amazing and well known prophecies in the entire Bible.**
- B. "The hand of the Lord was upon me" is Ezekiel's usual expression for a visionary experience (verse 1). Compare 1:3 and 8:1.**
- C. He is taken in a vision to a valley filled with human bones that had been dried, bleached, and scattered. The bones are said to be "very dry" in verse 2, indicating they had been there for some time.**

D. Ezekiel walked "back and forth" (literally "around") in the valley taking care not to touch any of the bones. As a priest he would have to take these precautions because touching a dead body was forbidden (Lev 21:11). (He was careful to obey God even in a vision!)

E. In verse 3 he hears a question that must have seemed preposterous to him: "Son of man, can these bones live?"

F. Ezekiel's answer in verse 3 indicated both his appreciation for God's power and his recognition of man's helplessness in the face of death. "O Lord GOD, thou knowest." (Recall that his own wife had died in chapter 24.)

G. God tells him to preach to these dead, dry bones, and he obeys despite the apparent absurdity. He tells the bones to hear the word of the Lord!

1. Lesson for Today: Whenever we are tempted not to proclaim God's word because we think we already know our audience's response --- remember Ezekiel! Did any preacher ever have a deader audience?

H. Ezekiel's obedience produces immediate results. Even before he finishes, he hears the noise of the bones coming together and being covered by flesh, yet they are still not alive.

I. God commands Ezekiel to preach to the "ruah" (breath, wind, or spirit) to fill the corpses. As in Genesis 2:7, the people here are filled with breath and life, and they then stand up as a vast, living, reconstituted army. (verse 10)

J. In verses 11-14, God interprets the vision for Ezekiel. This vision was God's response to the people's feeling of

hopelessness. "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off." (verse 11)

K. Can these bones live? Can a dead and powerless nation in exile and under the control of a godless nation be resurrected and become a living, thriving kingdom once again?

L. Sin had caused the death of the nation of Israel. (Rom. 6:23) These people needed a spiritual resurrection.

M. God's message is that the nation would live again; the people would settle again in their own land; and, the people would know that it was God who had brought them back to life.

N. When did this resurrection occur? Or is it yet to occur?

1. There was a national resurrection when the people returned from exile. Their neighbors no doubt thought they were all dead and gone, but they returned and the nation came back to life.

2. But there was a later spiritual resurrection as well.

a) Daniel 12:2 speaks of a resurrection of Israel that (from the context of chapter 11 and 12:1) must have occurred in the first century. See my notes on Daniel 12 at www.thywordistruth.com.

b) (John 5:25) Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

c) (Ephesians 5:14) Therefore it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light."

d) (Luke 2:34) and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary

his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel..."

6. Reunification of Israel (37:15-28)

A. *These verses present a new vision that was a sequel to the vision of the dry bones.*

B. *Ezekiel was commanded to perform a symbolic action as he had several times before. He took two sticks and identified them with inscriptions denoting the two former kingdoms of Israel and Judah.*

C. *Ezekiel made one stick of the two by holding them together (verses 15-17). Through this symbolic action he portrayed the reunification of the revived nation.*

D. *Aside: The Mormons cite this section of Ezekiel as proof that the book of Mormon is from God.*

1. According to the Mormons, these sticks are scrolls. The stick of Judah is the Bible, and the stick of Joseph is --- guess what! --- the book of Mormon. The two sticks become one to symbolize these two books coming together as complimentary scriptures.

2. See www.thywordistruth.com for an interesting article about the origin of the book of Mormon. (It definitely did NOT come from God.)

3. McGuigan: The man who can get the book of Mormon and the Bible out of this section marches to a different drummer than Ezekiel.

E. *Ezekiel used "Joseph" and "Ephraim" to denote the Northern kingdom.*

1. Jereboam I was an Ephraimite (1 Kings 12:25). Ephraim was a popular designation of the northern tribes under his leadership (Hosea 4:16-17). (Manasseh and Ephraim were sons of Joseph.)

F. In verse 18 he is asked what this all means. Ezekiel explains that God was going to join (literally "give") Joseph to Judah (verse 19). Why "give"? Perhaps because David (the new king in verse 24) was of the tribe of Judah.

G. Thus, God was going to restore and reunite the nation under one king (verses 18-22). Further, the nation would never again be divided (verse 22) and never again would the people serve idols (verse 23).

H. The restored nation would have David as its king. Thus, they would be united under one shepherd.

1. Even the most avowed premillennial literalist takes the reference to David here to be a reference to Jesus. If God was using King David to symbolize the coming Messiah, couldn't he have been using other symbols as well?

I. They would live under a covenant of peace.

1. In the previous lesson we saw that this covenant of peace refers to the reconciliation and peace with God that was part of the New Covenant.
2. There is an additional aspect of the covenant of peace -- peace between the Jews and the Gentiles.
3. This is the peace that Paul wrote about in Ephesians 2:13-18 ("But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace,

who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.")

4. See Isaiah 2:1-5 ("and they shall beat their swords into plowshares"). Although the UN displays this phrase on its building as if it something yet future, the Bible makes it clear that those swords were beaten into plowshares nearly 2000 years ago! See also Micah 4:1-5; Acts 2; Joel 2.

J. *Two new elements of the promise are given here: (1) the people would be restored to the land forever (verse 25), and (2) a sanctuary would be constructed among them that would remain forever (verse 26).*

1. The word "olam" meaning forever or everlasting is used five times in verses 25-28. It is the same word used to describe the everlasting kingdom in Daniel 2:44 --- the kingdom that was set up in the first century.

2. Mention of the sanctuary here is a prelude to the temple vision of 40:1-44:31.

K. *There were 13 promises made to Israel in verses 15-28. "It is clear from our vantage point that all of these promises were not fulfilled after the first return from Babylon. Prophecy often had an immediate, limited fulfillment but also a long-range, more complete fulfillment."*

- 1.** God will personally find Israel and gather the people from among the nations (verse 21a).
- 2.** God will bring them into their land that will be restored to them (verse 21b).
- 3.** God will make one nation of the two that had been in the land (verse 22a).
- 4.** God will set one king over the nation (verses 22b and 24a).
- 5.** God will insure the unity of the restored kingdom that will never again be divided (verse 22c).
- 6.** The people will never again serve idols (verse 23a).
- 7.** God will save them, cleanse them, and establish an intimate personal relationship with them (verse 23b).
- 8.** The people will walk in obedience to his law (verse 24b).
- 9.** God will establish them in their land forever (verse 25).
- 10.** God will establish his new covenant of peace with them (verse 26a).
- 11.** God will multiply them in the land and they will enjoy prosperity with peace (verse 26b).
- 12.** God will establish his sanctuary among them and personally dwell there forever (verses 26c and 27).
- 13.** God will make Israel a testimony to the nations of his saving grace (verse 28).

L. Do these verses speak of a future restored Jewish nation or the present day church? It can only be the church!

1. God made three promises to the Jews. All have been fulfilled or forfeited.

a) There was the promise of land in Genesis 15:18-21.

(1) The promise of land was fulfilled.

(a) Joshua 21:43-45 (And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. ... There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.)

(2) Continued possession of the land was conditioned on the people's faithfulness to the covenant.

(a) Deuteronomy 28:58-63 (If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, ... ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it.)

b) There was the promise of worldwide blessing through Abraham's seed in Genesis 22:15-18.

(1) This promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

(2) See Galatians 3:8 ("And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.")

c) There was the promise of an eternal kingdom in II Samuel 7:12-16.

(1) This promise was fulfilled in the establishment of the church.

(2) Mark 9:1 ("there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.") According to some, Jesus was mistaken when he said this. Somebody is mistaken, but it certainly is NOT Jesus!

(3) Colossians 1:13 ("For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.")

(4) Acts 1:6 (and compare Luke 24:27 and Luke 24:45) ("And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, 'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?'")

(5) John 18:36 ("Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.")

(6) 1 Cor. 15:24 ("Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.") Jesus is not coming again to set up a kingdom; he is coming again to deliver an existing kingdom to God.

2. Christians are the true offspring of Abraham.

a) Galatians 3:27-29 ("For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.")

3. The Jews were given the opportunity for salvation BEFORE (not AFTER) the Gentiles.

a) Romans 1:16 ("For I am not ashamed of the gospel of

Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.")

4. Faithful Jews are saved the same way as faithful Gentiles.

a) Acts 15:11 ("But we [Jewish apostles and elders] believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they [the Gentiles].")

b) Romans 10:12-13 ("For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. ¹³ For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.")

5. The Church is the new Israel and the new Jerusalem.

a) Galatians 6:15-16 ("For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. ¹⁶ And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.")

b) Revelation 21:2 ("And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.")

c) Hebrews 12:22-24 ("But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, ²³ To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴ And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.")

6. The temple need not be rebuilt because the church of Christ is God's temple.

a) 1 Cor. 3:16-17 ("Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.")

b) Ephesians 2:20-22 ("having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.")

7. All of the promises to the Jews were fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ. No promises that are peculiar to the Jews remain to be fulfilled.

a) Jeremiah 33:14-16 ("Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. ¹⁵ In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶ In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.")

Ezekiel -- Lesson Twenty-One

Chapters 38 - 39

1. God's Call to Arms. 38:1-9.

1. *The identity of Gog. 38:1-3.*

1. The identity of Gog is uncertain.

1. The name appears only here and in 1 Chron. 5:4 in the O.T., where it identifies one of the sons of Reuben; in the N.T. it appears only in Rev. 20:8.

2. The associated name, Magog, appears in the table of nations in Gen. 10:2 with Gomer, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras, all sons of Japheth; it also appears in Rev. 20:8.

2. Many suggestions have been made for the identity of Gog: 1) Gugu or Gyges, a ruthless leader of Lydia; 2) Gagu, a ruler of the land of Sakhi, an area north of Assyria; 3) an unidentified ruler whose name is from a Sumerian loan word, gug, which means "darkness"; 4) an official title for a ruler comparable to pharaoh or king; 5) and a general term for any enemy of God's people.

3. He is called the "chief prince" of Meshech and Tubal.

1. Meshech and Tubal were provinces of Asia Minor in an area associated with the Scythians.

2. The geographical area today includes parts of Iran, Turkey, and southern provinces of Russia.

3. These were the locations of Gog's allies, but still furnish

no conclusive evidence of Gog's identity.

2. *The announcement of the invasion. 38:4-9.*

1. Some of these prophecies referred to a battle in the immediate purview of the prophet, such as the destruction of Jerusalem or Babylon (e.g., Isa. 13:1-22; Jer. 4:5-6:30; Zeph. 1:1-13).
2. Some seem to blend immediate and long-range fulfillment, e.g., Jer. 50 and 51.
3. Ezekiel 38 and 39 is such a prophecy -- it references both present (Ezekiel's day) and some future time.

2. Gog's Evil Scheme. 38:10-13.

1. *These verses disclose the plan of the invasion.*

1. Vv. 10-11 give further insight into the occasion for the battle.
2. Vv. 4, 16 show that the battle will take place according to the plan and purpose of God.
3. V. 10 explains only the human experience that "thoughts will come into your mind."
4. This is one of several cases in Scripture where several causes that seem to conflict are given for an event that is contrary to the revealed will of God.

1. Pharaoh's refusal to allow Israel to leave Egypt (cp. Exod. 7:3 and 8:15).

2. The crucifixion of Christ (cp. Matt. 26:20-25; John 6:70-71; 10:18; 13:2; 14:27; Acts 2:23).

5. The viewpoint of Scripture is that neither human wickedness nor the powers of darkness can thwart God's purpose.

1. God's sovereign power and infinite wisdom enable him to use even the schemes of the devil and of wicked individuals to achieve his ends.

2. These chapters promise a day when God's people will no longer need walled villages to be secure.

3. In order to demonstrate the greatness of his power and of his faithfulness, and the powerlessness of evil to thwart his plans to bless his redeemed people, God will lure Gog to his doom.

6. Gog will notice that Israel is a land of unwalled and therefore unprotected villages (cf. Zech. 2:4, 8), and he will think that the people are easy prey for a swift, formidable attack.

7. God will allow this attack in order to bring swift and decisive judgment against Gog (v. 16) so that he may once and for all correct the damage his people have done to his name and may proclaim the greatness of his holy character to all the world.

3. Gog's Advance. 38:14-16.

1. *Although Gog's intention would be the elimination of Israel for the sake of greed, God would use this desire as an opportunity to confront evil.*

2. *Gog was not a mindless pawn of Jehovah, but one who imagined personal glory in defeating God.*

3. *However, the judgment of Gog was an act of God turned to*

this glory.

4. *Divine purpose overrides human motive.*

5. *The same lesson was given in Habakkuk's message about the Babylonian invasion (Hab. 1:5-11).*

4. God's Wrath Against Gog. 38:17-23.

1. *These verses reveal the purpose and outcome of the invasion.*

2. *There are many interpretations of the prophecies of "former days" (v.17).*

1. Such prophecies as Isa. 14:24-25; 26:20-21; Jer. 4:5; 6:26; 30:18-24; Joel 3:9-21; Zeph. 1:14-18; 3:8 have all been suggested.

2. The Gog-Magog message is very similar to Zech. 12:3-9; 14:1-8, but these do not come from "former days."

3. Some argue that none of these prophecies fit Ezekiel 38:17.

4. The literal Hebrew is "Are you he of whom the prophets spoke?"

5. It is frequently emended to a statement, "You are he of whom the prophets spoke."

1. This translation assumes an introductory particle which is not in the text.

2. But there is a similarity between Ezek. 38:17 and 2 Sam. 7:5, "Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?"

3. This expects a negative reply, confirmed by the parallel in 1Chron. 17:4, where it is a statement, "You are not the one."

6. The point of the Lord's question in Ezek. 38:17, then, may be that Gog is not a divinely commissioned agent of judgment like Jeremiah's "foe from the north," (though Gog may have thought so), but strictly an enemy of God and his people to be dealt with in "My zeal and in my blazing wrath" (v. 19).

3. *When God allows Gog to come against Israel, several events will take place.*

- 1.** The hot blazing wrath of God will be released (v. 18).
- 2.** There will be an earthquake of major force (vv. 19-20).
- 3.** The sword will be summoned against Gog; the attack is a picture of confusion and demoralization in which the army of Gog attacks itself (v. 21).
- 4.** Other signs of divine judgment follow, including rain, hailstones, blood, and burning sulfur that will descend on Gog and the many nations who fight with him (v.22).

4. *These obvious signs of a supernatural divine judgment will result in two things.*

- 1.** The deliverance of Israel from the invading forces of Gog.
- 2.** The universal recognition of the sovereignty of Jehovah.

5. The Magnitude of Gog's Defeat. 39:1-16.

1. *An elaboration upon the fall of Gog and the statement of God's purposes. 39:1-8.*

1. Chapter 39 is a continuation and expansion of details concerning the destruction of Gog.

1. The details given in chapter 39 are more vivid and numerous, and they reiterate the same purposes presented in chapter 38.

2. Verses 1-8 restate the divine initiative in the invasions and elaborate upon the fall of Gog and God's purposes.

3. The parallel nature of the two chapters is suggested by the repetition in vv. 1-2 from 38:2-4.

2. Gog came from the mountains of the "far north," a designation associated with Meshech and Tubal.

3. God promised that the weapons of Gog would be taken from him (v. 3).

4. He would lose his power and fall on the mountains of Israel (v. 4).

5. The defeat will be so awesome that bodies of the soldiers will become food for the birds of prey and the wild animals of the land (v. 4).

6. Gog will be destroyed, and destruction will come on his homeland and surrounding coast lands so that they too will know that Jehovah is God (v. 6).

7. Recognition of the holiness of God's name and character (v. 7) is an echo of 36:20-23 that mentioned Israel's profaning the name of Jehovah (see also 20:39; 39:25; 43:7ff.).

8. The certainty of these events is confirmed -- "It is coming and it shall be done" (v. 8).

2. *The magnitude of Gog's defeat and the disposal of Gog's army. 39:9-16.*

1. Gog's weapons will supply Israel with fuel for seven years, and Israel will plunder those who came to plunder it. (vv. 9-10).

2. Gog's defeat will be such that a valley will be required to bury the dead; the name will be changed to Hamon Gog, meaning "hordes of Gog."

3. It will take seven months to bury them all (vv. 12-15).

4. The name of a city in the valley will be named Hamonah, Hebrew for "multitude," a reference to the scope of the destruction (v. 16).

6. The Feast of Gog and the Glory of the Lord. 39:17-24.

1. *Vv. 17-20 develop the "birds of prey" theme from v. 4.*

1. God speaks through Ezekiel to the birds and animals inviting them to a sacrificial meal at which Gog will be the only item on the menu (vv. 17-20).

2. The idea of the Lord's sacrifice as a divine judgment is also found in Isa. 34:6-17; Jer. 46:10; Zeph. 1:7-18; Rev. 19:17-21).

2. *All the nations of the world will see and learn as all the pretense of human glory is extinguished before the pure and ineffable glory of the Holy God of Israel (vv. 21-24).*

1. No longer will the accusation be heard that Israel's God had

abandoned them in unfaithfulness or proved unable to defend them against the nations and their gods.

2. It will be clear to all that it was Israel's sin and unfaithfulness that led to their exile, that their troubles had been recompense for their uncleanness and their offenses.

7. The Epitaph of Gog's defeat. 39:25-29.

1. *These verses are similar to the concluding verses of the preceding section (vv. 21-24).*

2. *Ezekiel lists seven purposes that God would achieve by ending the exile.*

1. God would initiate a new era in relationship with Israel (v. 25).

2. God had demonstrated the discipline of love by chastening his people (Pro. 3:11-12; Heb. 12:5-8); He would show the compassion of love by restoring their former place (v. 25).

3. God would be zealous for his holy name name's sake; He would reverse the profaning of his name (36:20-23) and promote the sanctification of his name among the heathen (36:23; v. 25).

4. Israel would forget their shame and unfaithfulness in that their time of disgrace would be past (36:30-31; v. 26).

5. God would demonstrate his holiness through regathering Israel from the countries of their enemies and reestablishing them in their land (v. 27).

6. Israel would know that Jehovah is their God, for he would leave none in exile but return everyone to the land (v. 28).

7. God would pour out his spirit on the house of Israel as he promised (36:27; Joel 2:29), a promise associated with the Messianic age (v. 29).

8. Questions and Application.

1. Questions.

1. Who is Gog?

1. We have already considered the source of the name.

2. The real issue is whether it represents a literal or figurative person.

1. None of the sources of the name were still alive at the time of Ezekiel; thus its use would seem to be figurative.

2. What does it represent?

1. *Babylon.*

1. Apocalyptic writing by its nature has symbols that have meaning to its intended readers while being hidden from its unintended readers; put another way, persecution has a striking influence on the art of writing.

2. Unless here, Ezekiel's book is striking for the absence of reference to a judgment on Babylon.

3. If Ezekiel, a captive, had wanted to write about Babylon, would he have named it openly, or written what might be called subversive in opaque

style?

4. However, Babylon never had an army as large as Gog's, nor was it ultimately defeated in the manner described by Ezekiel.

5. Even if it did apply to Babylon to some extent, its meaning certainly was not exhausted there.

2. *Russia (Rosh), Moscow (Meshech) and Tobolsk (Tubal).*

1. Some premillennial commentators place these events in the "end times" which they define as related to eschatology rather than the Christian dispensation, and to a literal battle between Israel and some modern nation.

2. While Russia, Moscow, and Tobolsk were the most popular before the fall of the Iron Curtain, Germany, Iran, and Iraq received honorable mention.

3. Iraq may come to the fore given the present war against terrorism.

1. Some might have chosen Afghanistan when it defeated Russia, but recent events belie the suggestion.

2. Certainly Afghanistan's weapons, though still modern, are more similar to horses (38:4, 15),

arrows, bows, swords, spears, bucklers shields, etc. (38:4; 39:3), than to those that they faced.

3. *Commentators who espouse the premillennial view struggle with interpreting this literally as they urge with the battle itself.*

1. One just gave up and took the description as figurative terms representing up-to-date (state-of-the-art?) armaments.

2. Another tried to stay with the literal interpretation of the passage and suggested that perhaps the energy crisis would lead the Russians and their allies to go to these kinds of weapons.

4. The truth is that whatever evil nation(s) exist at the time commentator is writing (and, of course, oppose the nation of the commentator) usually receive the nomination.

3. *Rabbinic writers identify Gog and Magog as the final enemy who will attack Israel in the messianic age.*

4. *Gog in Ezekiel 38 and Revelation 20.*

1. The setting in Ezekiel is the restoration of the kingdom to Israel.

1. Jews might take little comfort from that; there was Egypt, then the Philistines, then Assyria, and now Babylon.

2. Who is next; what guarantee do we have of the future?

2. To convince the Jews that under the Messiah their glory will be secure, Ezekiel uses a symbolic battle with the fictitious Gog of the land of Magog to show that they will be able to defeat any enemy with the Messiah on their side.

3. There, as in Revelation 20, Gog and Magog represent anybody and yet nobody in particular; note the similarities between the battle in Ezekiel and Revelation.

1. The army is called from the four points of the compass with Gog as their leader.

2. The defeat of Gog and his army is total and complete.

3. God appears on the scene after the vindication of God's people.

4. The size of Gog's army is huge.

5. The defeat takes place without God's people having to do anything.

4. The symbol in Ezekiel and Revelation.

1. God's people have just been saved from a terrible oppressor.

2. A huge army gathers from all over the world

to make war against them.

3. *God defeats that army without his people having to lift even a finger.*

5. God's message.

1. *I have already defended and vindicated you in the present crisis and I will do so again anytime and anywhere the need arises no matter who rises against you.*

2. *This is a beautiful message for the church today.*

3. *The church today has developed an inferiority complex (some urge such a complex as an excuse for change urging reliance on the arm of flesh instead of the almighty arm of God).*

4. *If ever the church should have felt an inferiority complex, if ever it should have felt inferior and powerless, it was during the Roman persecution.*

5. *Recall and remember Eph. 3:20-21.*

2. What does this prophecy predict? (Discussed above, but a few additional comments on the premillennial theories.)

- 1. Last week it was made clear that the church was not an afterthought, that it was and is in fact the eternal kingdom in view in Ezekiel's and all other O.T. prophecy related to a future kingdom.**
 - 2. Christ equated the two. Matt. 16:13-20.**
 - 3. Christ is now reigning, he is not coming to reign. 1 Cor. 15:25.**
 - 4. When Christ returns, he will deliver up the kingdom, not establish one. 1 Cor. 15:24.**
- 3. When is the prophecy fulfilled? (Discussed above, but a few additional comments on the purported premillennial fulfillment.)**

1. There is disagreement over where the battle fits into the premillennial scheme.

1. Definition of premillennial terms.

1. *Different views of the millennium.*

1. Premillennialism.

1. *The return of Christ will be preceded by certain signs, including wars, famines, earthquakes, the preaching of the gospel to all nations, a great apostasy, the appearance of Antichrist, and the great tribulation.*

2. *These events culminate in the second coming, which will result in a period of peace and righteousness when Christ and his saints*

control the world.

3. *This rule is established suddenly through supernatural methods rather than gradually over a long period of time by means of the conversion of individuals.*

4. *The Jews will figure prominently in the future age because they will be converted in large numbers and will again have a prominent place in God's work.*

5. *Nature will have the curse removed from it, and even the desert will produce abundant crops.*

6. *Christ will restrain evil during the age by the use of authoritarian power.*

7. *Despite the idyllic conditions of this golden age, there is a final rebellion of wicked people against Christ and his saints.*

8. *This exposure of evil is crushed by God, the non-Christian dead are resurrected, the last judgment conducted, and the eternal states of heaven and hell established.*

9. *Many premillennialists have taught that during the 1000 years dead or martyred*

believers will be resurrected with glorified bodies to intermingle with the other inhabitants of the earth.

2. Postmillennialism.

1. The group emphasizes the present aspects of God's kingdom, which will reach fruition in the future.

2. They believe that the millennium will come through Christian preaching and teaching.

3. Such activity will result in a more godly, peaceful and prosperous world.

4. The new age will not be essentially different from the present, and it will come about as more people are converted to Christ.

5. Evil will not be totally eliminated during the millennium, but it will be reduced to a minimum as the moral and spiritual influence of Christians is increased.

6. During the new age the church will assume greater importance, and many economic, social, and educational problems will be solved.

7. This period is not necessarily limited to 1000 years because the number can be used

symbolically.

8. *The millennium closes with the second coming Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the last judgment.*

3. Amillennialism.

1. *Amillennialists teach that the Bible does not predict a period of the rule of Christ on earth before the last judgment.*

2. *According to this view there will be a continuous development of good and evil in the world until the second coming of Christ, when the dead will be raised and the judgment conducted.*

3. *They believe that the kingdom of God is now present in the world as the victorious Christ rules his church through the Word and the Spirit.*

4. *They feel that the future, glorious and perfect kingdom refers to the new earth and life in heaven.*

5. *Thus, Rev. 20 is a description of the souls of dead believers reigning with Christ in heaven.*

2. *Rapture -- used to refer to the church's being united with*

Christ at his second coming.

1. Pretribulationists teach that the church will be removed before this seven year period and the revelation of the Antichrist.

2. Midtribulationists contend that the church will be raptured during the tribulation after the Antichrist's rise to power but before the severe judgments that prepare the way for Christ's return to establish his rule on earth.

3. Post-tribulationists hold that the church will continue to exist in the world throughout the entire tribulation and will be removed at the end of the period when Christ returns in power.

3. *Tribulation -- Millennialists use the term to refer to the suffering of the church at the end of the world just before the coming of Christ.*

1. Adherents of the major millennial views place the great tribulation at different points in relation to the millennium.

2. Post millennialists regard it as a brief, indefinite period of time at the end of the millennium, usually identifying it with the revolt of God and Magog of Rev. 20:8-9.

3. Both postmillennialists and premillennialists

view history as moving toward the Christianization of the world by the church and a future millennium of undetermined length on earth culminating in the great tribulation and final return of Christ.

(Note: While they assure us that Christ will establish his kingdom, what assurance is there that God will be able to accomplish at Christ's second coming what he could not accomplish at Christ's first coming? If the church was a "stop gap" measure until God could accomplish his original purpose of establishing a kingdom on the earth, can not the same failure occur at the second coming? If not, why not?)

4. In contrast, amillennialists consider the millennium to be a purely spiritual reality from the first advent to the second, a period lasting already 2,000 years and to culminate in the great tribulation -- a somewhat less optimistic view of history and the progress of the gospel witness.

5. To premillennialists the millennium is a future, literal 1000 years on earth, and the great tribulation a chaotic period toward which history is even now moving, a decline, that is, to be terminated by the return of Christ before the millennium.

6. One group, which described itself as "historic"

premillennialists, understands the great tribulation to be a brief but undetermined period of trouble.

7. Another group, dispensational premillennialists, connects it with the 70th week of Daniel 9:27, a period of seven years whose latter half pertains strictly to the tribulation.

2. Some place it before the tribulation either just prior to or at the time of the rapture of the church.

3. Some place it in the middle of the tribulation and is associated with Rev. 14:14-20 and Dan. 11:40-41.

4. Some place it at the end of the tribulation and equate it with the battle of Rev. 19:11-21.

5. Some place it during a transitional period that is between the end of the tribulation and the beginning of the millennium to destroy the weapons of Babylon and cleanse the land prior to the advent of the millennium.

6. Some place it at the end of the millennium and equate it with Rev. 20:7-8.

7. A final view combines the third and fifth views and considers that the battle will occur at the end of the tribulation (Rev. 19:17-21), but it will be held in pause for one thousand years, after which it will resume and be concluded as the battle of Rev. 20:7-8.

2. Since the scripture knows nothing of a tribulation, a rapture, or a millennial period, one can easily place it anywhere he wishes -- an imagination with a fantasy.

4. Where does the battle occur? (Discussed above)

5. Why do these events occur? (Discussed above.)

2. *Application -- This great section of hope and restoration beginning in 33:1 presents three significant themes that are crystalized in chapters 38 and 39.*

1. God will triumph in the end of things.

1. Whenever individuals set themselves against God, they always fail.

2. He may grant the temporary illusion of success, but ultimately judgment will come.

3. In the end God will be the victor who will establish his name, his glory, and his people at the end of human history. Rom. 8:31.

2. God offers salvation to individuals.

1. He offers salvation for those who will approach him in faith, repentance, and obedience.

2. He will provide a new heart and a new spirit.

3. This offer is an ever-present possibility, which he offers to the human predicament of sin.

4. This offer will last as long as people are lost and human history continues.

3. Even the evil of those who oppose him will ultimately bring glory to God.

1. Whenever the judgment of God comes upon ungodliness

and unrighteousness, his holiness and righteousness are established (39:7).

2. Phil. 2:9-11.

3. Long ago Habakkuk wrestled with the question of why God would use the wicked Babylonians as an instrument of judgment on Israel; he discovered that even the wicked will bring glory to God whether by receiving the life-transforming gift of a new heart and new spirit or by receiving judgment to establish his holiness, righteousness, and name (Hab. 1:1 - 2:20).

Lesson 22: Ezekiel 40-43:12

1. Introduction

A. Chapter 40 begins a puzzling section in the book of Ezekiel. After all that we have seen, one would not at this point expect an architectural blueprint -- and yet that is exactly what we get in these chapters. What is God trying to tell us?

B. Before we launch into an explanation of what God is (and is not!) trying to tell us, it will be helpful to keep in mind two primary themes from these chapters:

1. The truth that is now being trampled underfoot by the heathen will one day be vindicated.
2. In connection with all of the blessings that were promised in chapters 34-39, a holiness will be demanded of Israel that it has not previously known.

C. These themes will help us date the fulfillment of this prophecy.

1. Do these chapters describe something yet to be, or have these prophecies been fulfilled? And if so, where exactly is this temple?
2. Has the truth been vindicated, or is that yet to come? Has this new level of holiness come about, or is that yet to be? Jumping ahead to chapter 43, has God returned to his holy temple, or is that yet to be?

2. Literal or Figurative

A. The timing issue can be considered in terms of another issue -- does the prophecy in these chapters contemplate a literal fulfillment or a figurative fulfillment?

B. If literal, then the timing issue is answered because the temple described in these chapters has NEVER been constructed. If it is to be literally constructed in Palestine (as some suggest) then these chapters MUST point to some still future time.

C. If we are to take these prophecies of Ezekiel literally, then here is a list of what will one day occur:

1. The nation of Israel will be restored by God in the land of Palestine.

2. The nation of Israel will be ruled over by only one king -- King David.

a) I said in an earlier lesson that even the most rabid premillennialists took the reference to David here to be a reference to Christ. I was mistaken. Walvoord takes the reference literally. He says that David will be resurrected during the Millennium to share with Christ as prince some of the governmental duties of the millennial kingdom.

b) Yet is that what the text says (even literally)? No. (Ezekiel 34:23) "And I will set up **one shepherd** over them, and he shall feed them, *even* my servant David; he shall feed them, and he

shall be their shepherd." One shepherd -- not co-shepherds.

3. The nation of Israel will dwell on this earth for eternity.

4. A temple will be built on this earth and God will dwell there for eternity.

5. The land promise to Israel will NOT be fulfilled even in the millennium.

a) Why? Because the boundaries given later in 47:13-23 do not include all of the land mentioned in Genesis 15:18-21 and Exodus 23:28-31.

b) The literalists teach that God's promise of land to the Jews was never fulfilled as to either duration or area. They teach that the area described in Genesis 15:18-21 was never given to them, and they have so far never received any land as an everlasting possession.

c) This view is contradicted by Joshua 21:43-45 as to area and by Deut. 28:58-63 as to duration.

(1) Joshua 21:43-45 (And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. ... There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.)

(2) Deuteronomy 28:58-63 (If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, ... ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it.)

6. The Levitical priesthood is to be restored forever with

the Zadokites officiating.

a) As you recall, Zadok and Abiathar acted as high priests together for a time, but when Adonijah tried to grab the throne, Abiathar went with him, and therefore Solomon "thrust him out from being high priest," and Zadok, remaining faithful to David, became high priest alone.

7. Animal sacrifices as an atonement for sin will be eternally restored.

8. Circumcision is to be restored as essential to communion with God in worship.

D. Before we deal with the not-so-obvious difficulties of a literal interpretation, let's say a few words about the **obvious** difficulties with these views.

1. Doesn't the book of Hebrews plainly oppose the idea of a resurrected Aaronic priesthood in 7:11-28? Doesn't it also reject the return of animal sacrifices in 10:17-18?

2. Also, do you remember what Paul had to say to those who wanted to reimpose circumcision as essential to communion with God? (Galatians 5:12) "As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!" (NIV)

a) I wonder what Paul would have to say to those today who teach that circumcision will be a requirement in the millennial dispensation? I think we know exactly what he would say!

- b)** Paul taught that declaring circumcision is essential to communion with God bound the whole law on the people. (Galatians 5) To bind the Mosaic law on people is to bring them under a curse. (Galatians 3:10, 13)
- c)** "Grace and law are not dispensational issues -- they are eternal. Men are not saved by the works of law in any age."
- d)** It is interesting that the same denominations who complain that baptism is a work are perfectly willing to bind the entire Law of Moses on people in the next dispensation.

3. What about the restoration of the Aaronic priesthood?

- a)** Hebrews 7:11-12 tells us that the priesthood of Aaron is inseparably connected to the Mosaic law. To have one means that we must have the other.
- b)** Under the millennial theories, the Jews in the millennium will be under two laws at the same time. Yet Paul in Romans 7 declared that to be spiritual adultery.

4. How do the literalists respond to this?

- a)** Some suppose that the animal sacrifices are merely memorials similar presumably to the Lord's Supper. But the text itself contradicts this view -- it says these animal sacrifices are to make atonement for sin.
- b)** Some suggest that the book of Hebrews (and much of the rest of the New Testament) is true for the "Church Age" but not true for the Millennium. Yet doesn't Hebrews say that Christ's sacrifice was "once for all"?

(1) *Also, what about the Jews in the early church who thought*

they had to practice both systems at the same time? Were they told that the difference was between the church age and the millennial age? No. They were told that the difference was between law and grace.

- c) Some tell us that the two sacrificial systems and the two priesthoods will coexist, yet isn't the whole point of Hebrews that the two systems cannot coexist? And what does that tell us about Christ's sacrifice if we need another one to go along with it?

E. Hermeneutics -- The Science of Interpretation

1. Hermeneutics is the process by which one interprets the Bible.

- a) You may have heard about the "New Hermeneutics," which generally describes a system promoted by some in which the reader (rather than the writer) is the source of truth. We are going to look at a *different* hermeneutical controversy here.

2. The hermeneutical principle at issue here is whether these chapters in Ezekiel convey truth in *literal* terms or in *figurative* terms.

3. It is undeniable that the Scripture sometimes conveys truth in figurative terms.

- a) Sometimes the figures are obvious. ("a shoot out of the root of Jesse")
- b) Sometimes the figures are not obvious, but they are clearly explained.

(1) (Malachi 4:5) "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet

before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD."

(2) (Matthew 17:10-13) ¹⁰ And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" ¹¹ Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. ¹² "But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." ¹³ Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

4. The general rule is that language in the Bible should be taken literally unless:

a) It would result in an absurd conclusion.

(1) (Luke 13:31-32) The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for **Herod** will kill thee. ³² And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that **fox**, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third *day* I shall be perfected.

b) It would promote immoral or insane behavior.

(1) Luke 14:26 If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

(2) Matthew 5:29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee:

c) It would contradict an interpretation given elsewhere in the Bible.

(1) Recall the example given above about Elijah and John the Baptist.

d) It would contradict clearly taught Bible doctrines.

(1) Hebrews tells us that the days of animal sacrifices are over now that the perfect sacrifice has been made by Jesus Christ once for all. Thus, Ezekiel cannot properly be interpreted to teach that animal sacrifices for atonement of sin will one day be restored.

e) It would cause the Bible to be guilty of scientific or historical error.

(1) We have to be careful with that one since -- unlike the Bible -- science and history have a way of changing on us. We must never interpret scripture simply out of a desire to make peace with secular scientists and historians -- yet neither can we ignore the evidence of history and science. Truth is truth, and if properly interpreted the Bible will be in perfect agreement with all scientific truth and all historical truth.

(2) Scientists used to laugh at Bible believers who believed that the universe had a beginning. Now there is not a scientist alive who doesn't believe that the universe had a beginning. (The only disagreement now is over the timing and cause of that beginning.)

5. Here are some examples in which God uses speech that could be interpreted literally, but which cannot without violating the above rules.

a) In Hosea 7:16, 8:13, and 9:3, God said that the northern kingdom would go into Egyptian captivity. Egypt was used as a

figure for Assyria.

b) In Micah 5:5 God speaks of Jesus delivering his people from Assyria. Assyria was used as a figure for any enemy who attacks God's people.

c) In Ezekiel 16:53-59, God says that Samaria and Sodom will be restored, yet Jude 7 tells us that Sodom will never rise again.

d) In Isaiah 19:18-25, God says that Egypt and Assyria will be his people, with Israel falling into third place. God was telling Israel that one day these great enemies would acknowledge Him and no longer be a threat to Israel.

6. Why does God use figurative language?

a) It may be used to hide messages from those who aren't really interested in God or who would react violently to the message.

(1) (Matthew 13:10-11) "And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? ¹¹ He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given."

(2) John had a message for Rome in the book of Revelation, but that message was written in symbols drawn largely from the Jewish Old Testament. So if you were a first century you could understand the message, but if you were a Roman it would all be Greek!

b) It may be used to describe a **future** judgment or blessing in terms of a **past** judgment or blessing.

(1) Jewish prosperity under the Messiah is described in terms

of Jewish prosperity in former days.

(2) The judgment of Rome in the book of Revelation is described in terms of God's judgments against Assyria and Babylon.

(3) The use of past events to describe future events is common in the Bible. There are two important principles in interpreting such figurative sections of the Bible.

(a) Similarity of symbol does not necessarily imply similarity of subject. That is, the same symbol may be used to describes two different subjects.

(b) Dissimilarity of symbol does not necessarily imply dissimilarity of subject. That is, different symbols may be used to describe the same subject.

(4) Failure to understand these principles can lead to big problems. Every time I have taught Revelation I have been approached by people who are from or who know people who are from churches that have been divided over a false doctrine called "Max Kingism" or the "70 AD Theory" or "realized eschatology." In short, that false doctrine is that ALL of the prophecies in the Bible (including the "second coming" of Christ, the final judgment, and the bodily resurrection of the dead!) were all fulfilled by the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

(5) The nonsense taught by Max King and his followers all traces back to their failure to understand that God often uses the same language and symbols to describe different judgments. (Israel, Judah, Assyria, Babylon, Tyre, Egypt, Jerusalem, Rome, World)

(6) Some immediate problems with Max Kingism are:

(a) 1 Corinthians 11:26 "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." (Max Kingites continue to observe the Lord's Supper. I wonder why if the Lord has already come again.)

(b) Matthew 22:30 "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." (The Kingites for some reason continue to get married even though this verse suggests they should be like the angels now that the resurrection is past.)

(7) 2 Timothy 2:16-18 "But shun profane *and* vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. ¹⁷ And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; ¹⁸ Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some."

(a) In the first century there were some who said the resurrection was past, and their false doctrine overthrew the faith of some. Max King is teaching the same false doctrine today. Paul said such teaching was a "profane and vain babbling" -- it hasn't improved in the intervening 2000 years!

c) Returning to our discussion of why God uses figurative language, another reason is that it may be used because the readers have a slowness in spiritual perception or an immaturity in their spiritual lives that makes it difficult to grasp some truths.

(1) Isaiah 11:6-10 speaks of peace and prosperity in physical terms, yet Paul applies the passage to the joys shared by Jew and Gentile alike in Christ in Romans 15:8,12.

(2) In Ezekiel 16:3, 45, God told Judah that her ancestors were the Caananites, Hittites, and Amorites. God used tough language to break Judah out of its stupor.

d) Sometimes figures are used because the vivid language causes the lesson to be remembered longer.

(1) Jesus' parables fall into this category.

(2) See also Genesis 49:11 ("he washed his garments in wine") The people would be so prosperous they would wash their clothes in wine rather than in water.

(3) Jerusalem's judgment in Matthew 24 is described as the sun being darkened, the moon not giving her light, the stars falling from heaven, and the powers of the heavens being shaken.

F. If we then take these chapters in Ezekiel to be figurative, what do they represent? There are at least two views:

- 1.** Ezekiel is giving us an allegory in which David represents Christ, the Temple represents the church, the Priests represent Christians, etc.
- 2.** Ezekiel is painting a beautiful picture of glory and blessings for the Jews under their coming Messiah, without intending each specific detail to be allegorical. Under this second view, the details are brush strokes. The message is in the overall picture.
- 3.** A good case can be made for either of these figurative interpretations, but as discussed above the literal

interpretation must be rejected.

3. The Return of God to His Temple (43:1-5)

A. We are going to jump ahead and study the first twelve verses of Chapter 43 before we look at Chapters 40-42. Why? Because in Chapter 43 God tells us **why** he goes into such detail in Chapters 40-42. He tells us what the vision means.

B. In Chapter 8, Ezekiel in a vision saw the glory of God depart from the temple in Jerusalem. (8:6)

1. Ezekiel expressly tells us here in Chapter 43 that this vision is like the one he had back in Chapter 8.

C. Here in 43:1-5, Ezekiel sees God return to his temple --- BUT THINGS ARE GOING TO HAVE TO BE DIFFERENT THAN THEY WERE BEFORE! THE PEOPLE WILL HAVE TO BE DIFFERENT ... AND THAT (AS VERSES 6-12 WILL TELL US) IS THE WHOLE POINT OF THE VISION IN CHAPTERS 40-42.

D. God did *not* have some future millennial kingdom in mind --- indeed, he nowhere mentions a 1000 reign of Christ. (In fact, neither does Revelation! Revelation 20:6 speaks of a 1000 reign *with* Christ. The reign of Christ is not some future event that we are looking forward to. Christ is reigning now!)

1. Revelation 20:6 ("and shall reign with him a thousand years") --

Those 8 words are the basis on which the entire premillennial theory is built.

4. The Dedication of the Temple (43:6-12)

A. Solomon made a dedication speech at the opening of the first temple, and God makes a dedication speech at the opening of this temple.

B. God tells Ezekiel that this sanctuary is where he will abide forever. (verse 7)

1. If we want to know where this temple was (or is) going to be constructed, we can work at the problem backwards by asking where God is going to abide forever.

2. In Exodus 25:8 God said "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." In many ways the rest of the Bible is simply a variation on that theme.

3. John 1:14 tells us that "the word became flesh and dwelt among us." A literal translation of this passage is that the word became flesh and tabernacled among us.

4. In Revelation 21:3 (speaking of the triumphant church after the judgment of Rome) God says "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."

5. 1 Corinthians 3:16 ("Know ye not that ye are the

temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?")

6. Paul (describing the church) writes in Ephesians 2:22 ("in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.")

7. We as Christians are looking forward to many blessings -- but God dwelling among us is not one of them! That is already true in the church! We are the dwelling of God in the Spirit!

C. The temple is constructed so that there is complete separation between God and his servants. (verses 7-8, 12)

1. Separation stresses the holiness of that which is separated.

a) (Ezekiel 42:20) "to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place."

b) (Revelation 11:1-2) "And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. ² But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty *and* two months."

c) The detailed measurements in these chapters stress this separation and this holiness.

2. "Some may rule in pomp and splendor, but God rules

from a place of maximum holiness because that befits his character."

3. The people here are being called to a standard of holiness that they had never before practiced. The very structure of this temple is calling them to holiness.

4. Chapters 40-42 will show this holiness in terms of separation, with the holy of holies being the most separated area of all.

5. And what is the significance of the Holy of Holies to a Christian?

a) (Hebrews 9:7-8) "But into the second *went* the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and *for* the errors of the people: ⁸ The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing."

b) (Hebrews 9:11-12) "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; ¹² Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*."

c) (Hebrews 9:24) "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, *which are* the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

(1) Jesus Christ entered the Holy of Holies on our behalf --- but NOT a Holy of Holies on earth. Jesus entered God's presence

in Heaven. Why in the world would anyone think that God would construct another earthly Holy of Holies in a dusty building somewhere in the middle of Palestine? Hebrews 9:24 expressly tells us that the true Holy of Holies into which Christ entered was **not** made with human hands.

d) (Hebrews 4:16) "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

D. Verses 10-12 tell us why God provides the blueprint in Chapters 40-42.

1. God gave them this blueprint so that they would be ashamed. He urges them to "measure the pattern" so that they may be ashamed.

2. THE DETAILS IN CHAPTERS 40-42 WERE INTENDED TO TEACH THE PEOPLE A LESSON ABOUT THEIR UNGODLINESS.

3. This temple is intended to teach a lesson about the wickedness of Israel. They had never really been holy, and this temple and its regulations were a call to holiness.

4. A primary theme in Chapters 40-42 is measurement. The word "measure" is used 48 times in those three chapters! What does it mean?

5. Revelation 11:1-2 gives us a clue. In those verses John was told to measure something but NOT to measure something else. What was he told NOT to measure? The

area being trampled by the Gentiles -- that is, the area that was not holy. To measure something is to set it off as separate and holy.

6. Holiness is the message of Chapters 40-46. Yet isn't that a simple message for such a long section of the book? Why spend seven chapters on that one topic? Surely God would not have gone in to all of this detail just to deliver a message on holiness. Right? Wrong! Holiness is how we gain access to God! We should be surprised he spent **only** seven chapters on that topic!

5. The Temple: Its Structure and Measurements (40-42)

A. Now that we know *why* God gave us such a detailed blueprint, let's take a look at the details in Chapters 40-42.

B. Before we begin, we need to look at some small issues over which there have been big disagreements:

- 1.** There is disagreement as to the size of the cubit that Ezekiel used. The most popular choices are 18 inches, 21 inches, and 24 inches. If we take the 21 inch value, then a "rod" (which is 6 cubits) would be 10.5 feet. (McGuiggan uses the 21 inch value.)

- 2.** There are some textual variations in these chapters between the Massoretic text and the Septuagint in that in a few places the former has "rods" where the latter has "cubits." If you stick with the Massoretic, then the temple

seemingly becomes much too big. Most commentators go with the "cubit" text for that reason, but it is only a problem if you think God has a literal building in mind here.

3. Ezekiel neglects to give us a few of the details. For example, he says nothing about the height of the temple. He also does not tell us very much about the 30 chambers in the outer court (40:17). Commentators have arranged them in various configurations.

C. This vision is dated in the 25th year of exile and the 14th year after the fall of Jerusalem. This would be around 573 BC.

D. Everyone agrees that the angel takes Ezekiel in through the east gate, so we will begin there as well.

E. Ezekiel sees a city-like structure standing on the southern slope of a high mountain. A wall runs around the building, which is a square with sides of 875 feet. (We are using a 21 inch cubit.) The wall is 10.5 feet high and 10.5 feet thick.

F. There are three gates in the wall on the north, south, and east sides. You climb up 7 steps to enter the east gate. The entrance to the east gateway is 17.5 feet wide. Inside are six guardrooms with a porch at the end of the corridor. Moving west out of the porch, you enter the outer court.

G. Around the north, south, and east walls are 30 chambers, which may be living quarters for the temple workers. In the four corners are kitchens where the sacrifices are prepared.

H. From the outer east gate we now walk northwest to the inner north gate. There are rooms for those who help get the sacrifices ready and rooms for the singers or priests who officiate at the altar. There are washing chambers for washing and readying the sacrifices for slaughter. There are tables set up near the washing chambers.

I. We walk up 8 steps to this north gate and enter the inner court. We are now in the inner court standing by the north gate. The inner court is a square with 100 cubits for each side. In the center of the inner court is the altar of burnt offering.

J. Moving west we come to a set of 10 steps that lead up to the temple sanctuary itself with the holy place and the holy of holies. The wall that encloses the temple sanctuary is six cubits thick. Outside that wall on the north, west, and south are another set of 30 chambers.

K. The holy place is 40 cubits long by 20 wide and contains an altar-like table. It may be the table of shewbread or the incense altar. There are double doors leading into the holy of holies.

L. The holy of holies was a square 20 cubits by 20 cubits.

The entrance into the holy of holies is 10.5 wide. (The entry into the holy place is 17.5 wide, and the entry into the temple sanctuary is 24.5 wide. The gates get narrower as the rooms get holier.) There is nothing mentioned as being in the holy of holies.

M. Around the temple sanctuary are buildings providing living quarters for priests and another building whose purpose is not revealed (perhaps for storage). There are additional kitchens near these buildings.

N. Each of the structures that we have just discussed is shown on the handout, although some of the locations shown are matters of opinion since the text does not provide a precise location.

O. Now we have a decision to make. Are these chapters describing a literal temple or a figurative temple?

1. If the temple is literal, then this prophecy has not been fulfilled because this temple has never been built. Thus, if the temple is literal, then someday God will cause this great temple to be constructed in Palestine and Jesus and/or David will go there to reign.

2. What are the consequences of this view?

a) First, this view requires us to believe that God still has some special plan for the Jews despite the clear teachings that there is no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile.

b) Second, this view requires us to believe that Jesus will set up an earthly kingdom despite:

(1) (John 18:36) "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."

(2) (Mark 9:1) "And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."

(3) (1 Corinthians 15:24) "Then *cometh* the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power."

c) Third, this view requires us to believe that Christ's once for all sacrifice was not enough to fulfill God's promises to Israel. God owes them even more!

6. Back to Chapter 43

A. As we discussed, the first 12 verses of Chapter 43 tell us why God went into such detail in Chapters 40-42. He was calling the people to holiness. Indeed, he was calling them to a standard of holiness that they had never before obtained.

1. (Ezekiel 43:10) "Son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern. ¹¹ "And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the temple and its

arrangement, its exits and its entrances, its entire design and all its ordinances, all its forms and all its laws. Write *it* down in their sight, so that they may keep its whole design and all its ordinances, and perform them. ¹² "This *is* the law of the temple: The whole area surrounding the mountaintop *is* most holy. Behold, this *is* the law of the temple."

B. Lessons for Today

1. Holiness is not optional! It is called the Law of the Temple in Ezekiel 43. The following verses summarize the message of Ezekiel 40-42 in a nutshell.

a) (1 Peter 1:15-16) "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; ¹⁶Because it is written, **Be ye holy; for I am holy.**"

b) (2 Corinthians 6:17) "Wherefore come out from among them, and **be ye separate**, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you."

c) (1 Peter 2:9) "But ye *are* a chosen generation, a **royal priesthood, an holy nation**, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

2. God provides a pattern for his people to follow.

a) (Ezekiel 43:11) "shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write *it* in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them."

b) (Hebrews 8:5) "Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, *that* thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount."

c) (2 Timothy 1:13) "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."

d) If in fact this temple is an allegory for the church, then one would be hard pressed to argue that God does not want us to follow a pattern for proper worship in the church. God has given us a blueprint in the New Testament that he expects us to follow.

Ezekiel -- Lesson Twenty-Three

Chapters 43:13 - 46

1. Description of the altar. 43:13-17.

1. The first element of temple worship that Ezekiel described was the altar of burnt offering.

1. It was built in four stages consisting of a base plus three stages; each stage was two cubits smaller than the one below.
2. Around the base was a one-cubit gutter with a rim on the outer edge one cubit high (v. 13).
3. The lowest stage was two cubits high and sixteen cubits on each side (v. 14).
4. The second was four cubits high and twelve cubits on each side (v. 15).
5. The third was the hearth and was four cubits high and twelve cubits on each side.
6. On the four corners of the fourth state hearth were horns or projections.
7. The upper ledge on the edge of the second state also had a rim one-half cubit high and a gutter one cubit wide (v. 17).
8. There were steps on the east side of the altar for access to the hearth.

2. The altar was a visible sign of the consequences of sin that encouraged people to confess and repent of sins (43:18-19; cf.

45:13-17).

2. Regulations for the use of the altar. 43:18-27.

1. *Two purposes for the altar were specified (v. 18).*

1. It was to be used for offering whole burnt offerings.
2. It was to be used for sprinkling blood, which was associated with:

1. **Priestly ordination (Exod. 29:20);**

2. **Burnt offerings (Lev. 1:5-13; 9:12); and**

3. **Peace offerings (Lev. 3:2-8; 9:18).**

2. *The altar was a symbol both of the consequences of sin and of the grace and love of God who provided a means to atone for sins (v. 19).*

1. The wages of sin produced the death of the sacrificial animal.
2. The projections on the four corners of the hearth were considered the most holy and sacred part of the altar (Exod. 29:12) and a place of mercy and refuge (1 Kings 1:50; 2:28).

3. *The horns of the altar that Ezekiel saw were sprinkled with blood to purify the altar and make atonement for it (v. 20).*

4. *A bull was offered as a sin offering and burned outside the inner court but inside the temple complex (v. 21).*

5. *On the second day of the dedication of the altar a male goat was offered outside the inner court and the altar purified as in v. 20.*

6. *Then a bull and a ram were offered as a whole burnt offering mixed with salt (vv. 23-24).*

1. The use of salt with an offering has specific overtones and association with the idea of covenant (Num. 18:19; 2 Chron. 13:5).
2. Salt was used as a part of sacrificial communal meals and was a sign of purification and preservation.

7. *This procedure was repeated for seven days (until the seven days had ended rather than an additional seven days).*

8. *The seven days for these ceremonies were for the atonement, cleansing, and dedication of the altar (v. 26).*

9. *At least seven theological concepts are associated with the altar and the sacrifices.*

1. The altar sometimes was regarded as the "table" of Jehovah (Ezek. 44:16; Mal. 1:7, 12).

1. It was where the sacrifice was transformed by fire into smoke that rose to heaven and to God.

2. Because it was burned, it became an irrevocable gift.

2. Since the temple was regarded as the "house" of God, a house normally had a hearth, which was a repository of fire.

1. The altar was considered to be the "hearth" of God (Ezek. 43:15-16).

2. The fire of God was on the altar, and priests were admonished to keep the fire pure (see Lev. 10:1-7).

3. Fire is a symbol in scripture for God's presence (Exod. 19:18), power (Exod. 9:24), wrath (2 Kings 1:9-12), approval (Lev. 9:24), guidance (Exod. 13:21-22), protection (Zech. 2:5), purity (Isa. 6:5-7), deliverance (2 Kings 2:11), God's word (Jer. 5:14), the Messiah (Mal. 3:2), the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:3), judgment (Matt. 25:41), the return of Christ (2 Thess 1:7-8), and the end of the present world (2 Pet. 3:10-12).

3. The altar was a sign of God's presence among his people (43:27).

1. It was commemorative of an appearance of God (Gen. 12:7; 26:24-25).

2. Such manifestations of God were often accompanied by fire (Exod. 19:18; Judg. 13:16-22).

4. The altar was associated with the idea of holiness, purity, and mercy, especially the horns of the altar (43:15, 20; 1 Kings 1:50-51; 2:28).

1. The sprinkling of blood on the horns of the altar was a rite of purification (43:18-21).

5. The altar was an instrument of mediation (40:47; 43:19).

1. Offerings were translated from the physical world by burning and given to God as they rose to heaven in smoke.

2. By keeping the commandments, the offerings, sacrifices, and feast days, the covenant promises were maintained (Lev. 1:1-7:28).

6. Sacrifices were considered a gift to God (Ezek. 43:27).

1. A domesticated animal that was needed for food or work was given to God.

2. The sacrifice was burnt for at least two reasons:

1. Burning made the gift irrevocable; and
2. Burning translated the sacrifice to the invisible world where God lived.

3. Thus, the sacrifice was a means of communication with God and was considered a form of prayer (Psa. 141:2).

7. Sacrifice was for expiation of sins (43:25-27; Lev. 4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:3-4, 15, 18; Num. 15:22-31).

10. When the altar had been properly dedicated and the seven days fulfilled, God would then accept them (v. 27).

11. From the eighth day onward the altar was used for sacrifice of burnt offerings.

1. The beginning of the service of the altar of sacrifice from the eighth day has messianic overtones.
2. The eighth day and the use of eight as a messianic number is an important part of the new temple of Ezekiel's vision.
3. The use of the number eight and especially the eighth day in Scripture is significant (Ezek. 43:27).

1. Every seventh year was considered a Sabbatical year in which the land was to lie untilled.

1. The pattern of six days of work followed by a Sabbath of rest was fixed in the years just as in the weeks (Lev. 8:1).

2. While this principle certainly had agricultural value, it also was to help guard against covetousness.
3. A year without tilling the ground or harvesting crops required careful planning and storing in preparation for the Sabbatical Year.
4. But the Sabbath Year was followed by the eighth year that was to be a year of new beginning; it was to be a time for plowing the ground, sowing seeds, and harvesting crops once again.
5. Jesus the Messiah is the person of the eighth day and eighth year of new beginnings.
6. He is our Sabbath rest who satisfied both the Sabbath Day and the Sabbath Year of rest (Matt. 11:28-29; Heb. 4:1-13).
7. He will lead his people to a final time of eternal rest (Rev. 14:13).

2. Priests were chosen and prepared for a seven-day period (Lev. 8:1).

1. The eighth day was the day for consecration and beginning their priestly duties (Lev. 9:1-2).
2. Nazarites, who made a personal consecration similar to the priests, were cleansed and consecrated on the eighth day (Num. 6:10).
3. **The sign of the covenant of Abraham, circumcision, was to be administered on the eighth day after birth (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3; Rom. 2:28-29).**
4. **Those who were healed of sickness were to present themselves to the priest to be examined and pronounced clean on the eighth day following healing.**

1. Lepers were pronounced clean in such eighth-day ceremonies (Lev. 14:10, 23).
2. Cleansing of running sores was done on the eighth day (Lev. 15:14, 29).

5. The eighth day was a day of holy convocation and gathering.

1. A holy convocation was called on the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles, and an offering was made unto the Lord (Lev. 23:36, 39; Num. 29:35).
2. When the law was reinstated after the Babylonian exile, it was done by Ezra and Nehemiah in a holy convocation on the eighth day (Neh. 8:18).
3. The eighth day convocations beautifully anticipated the observance of the Lord's Day as a day of worship.

6. Animals to be used for sacrifice had to be at least eight days old (Lev. 22:26-27).

1. The grace of God could be sought through obedience to the sacrificial system from the eighth day and beyond.
2. The eighth day was the beginning point of grace and mercy anticipating the messianic work of Jesus in providing salvation by being our perfect sacrifice (Heb. 10:1-18, esp. v. 10).

3. Duties of the Prince and the Priests. 44:1-31.

1. *Vision of the Prince and the Gate. 44:1-3.*

1. Ezekiel's angel-guide brought him back to the eastern gate of the inner court of the sanctuary; the gate was shut and Ezekiel heard God declare that it was to remain shut.

2. This raises several questions: why was it shut; when was it shut; who is the Prince of the gate?

1. The answer to the first question is suggested in the text.

1. Jehovah returned to the temple through the east gate just as he had departed through the east gate (10:1-22; 11:22-25).
2. When God returned he promised never again to depart the city or temple (37:28; cf. 14:11; 34:30-31; 37:24-28).
3. Closing the east gate was a way of providing an affirming sign of his intention to remain in permanent residence.

2. Ezekiel was not told when the gate was closed, but it is evident that it was closed when he saw it.

1. Today the eastern gate, also called the Golden Gate, is a significant holy site for three religions -- Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

1. Jews believe that when the Messiah comes he will open the east gate and enter the temple mount first and then enter the city of Jerusalem.

2. Moslems believe that the gate is the site of final judgment and call it the gate of heaven and hell; they believe the final judgment of humanity will take place before the eastern gate and the redeemed are those who will be allowed to enter the temple mount; all others will be outcasts.

2. The gate was open in Jesus' day and perhaps he did use it on Palm Sunday as tradition suggests.

3. In 70 A.D. the temple, along with the eastern gate and the entire city of Jerusalem were destroyed.

4. The gate that is there now is a seventh century A.D. structure, perhaps modified by the Crusaders and partially destroyed by the Ottoman Turks, who rebuilt the gate in the early sixteenth century.

5. The Turkish governor of Jerusalem closed and walled up the gate in A.D. 1530 and it has remained closed since then.

3. Who is the Prince of the gate?

1. Some suggest that it is the Messiah.

1. *This is inconsistent with the fact that the prince made a sin offering for himself (cf. 45:22), which Christ did not need (Heb. 4:15).*

2. *In addition, this leader had natural children (46:16).*

2. Some suggest that it is David resurrected and serving in the temple during the millennium.

1. *This is generally based on 34:23-24 and 37:24; however, these passages have been shown to apply to Christ, not David.*

3. Still others suggest that it is a special representative of the Messiah who will serve as an administrator of the temple, temple area, and sacred district.

4. The word translated prince usually was associated with royalty, but prior to the monarchy it was a general term that meant a "leader."

5. The use of this term to describe the office of the eastern gate seems consistent with the view that he is to be a leader of the people; his identity must remain unknown.

1. *The physical posture of sitting "in the gate" is also a familiar term of leadership in a municipality.*

1. Lot was "sitting in the gateway" of Sodom when the angel messengers came to warn him of the destruction of the city (Gen. 19:1-19).

2. This was an indication that he was a city official.

2. The city gates functioned as a town council, chamber of commerce, city court, and welcome wagon all in one.

3. Amos decried the lack of justice in the gate and indicted the city fathers because they were corrupt and could be bribed into perverting justice.

4. Thus the rich were able to secure whatever injustice they could buy, and the poor were disadvantaged (Amos 5:10,12,15; Prov. 22:22).

5. The prince of Ezekiel's temple is a godly representative of the messianic King.

1. He will sit in the gate, commune with God, and serve as a guarantor of mercy, justice, and righteousness.

2. He will be the perfect spiritual-administrative leader of the restored kingdom.

2. Return to the sanctuary. 44:4-14.

1. Since the east gate was shut, Ezekiel's guide brought him into the temple court through the north gate.

2. As he stood in front of the temple, the glory of God filled the

sanctuary (v. 4).

1. The return of the glory of God was the sign of the restoration of God's presence that Ezekiel saw withdrawn from the temple in chs. 10 and 11.

2. Ezekiel's reaction was predictable -- he fell on this face at the sight of the glory of God out of fear and reverence (v. 4; cf. 1:28; 43:1-5).

3. Once again Ezekiel was instructed to pay close heed to what he saw and heard (v. 5; cf. 40:4).

1. The message condemned bringing foreigners into the sanctuary (vv. 7-8; cf. Neh. 13:4-9), giving unauthorized individuals charge over holy things, and desecrating the temple with unholy foreign worship (44:7-8).

1. Rabbinic tradition says the "detestable practices" consisted of the employment of priests who were unqualified to minister before the Lord because of their evil deeds.

2. It may also refer to the use of prisoners of war to perform menial tasks in the temple.

3. They are not directly attributed to the Levites, however, whose sin is said to have been the idolatry and encouraging Israel in idolatry (vv. 10, 12).

2. Because of their idolatry the Levites were confirmed in the subordinate status given them in Numbers.

1. There they were to serve at the tabernacle (Num. 16:8-11), guard the tabernacle from defilement (Num. 1:53; 3:10), and redeem the firstborn (Num. 3:12-13, 40-43; 8:14-19 --Ezekiel mentions all but the last).

2. In spite of their sin they were allowed to have a part in the temple service, but only as ministers in charge of the temple, in contrast to the priests who would be in charge of the altar (v. 10; cf. 40:45-46).
3. They were to guard the temple gates and slaughter the animals of sacrifice, but they could not minister as priests or "come near," meaning they could not go into the inner court (vv. 11-12).
4. For their faithfulness the priesthood is entrusted to the Zadokites, who are enjoined to protect the holiness of the temple (44:15).

3. God has a place of service for everyone.

1. Though the Levites were disqualified from leadership roles, they still had a significant part in the service of the temple.
2. Past moral failure does not exclude one from worship or service in the house of God.
3. It may, however, preempt one from serving in leadership roles where a moral failure would present a compromised testimony (44:11-14).

3. *The Zadokite priesthood. 44:15-31.*

1. The line of Zadok is to be the only legitimate line of priests allowed to minister in the inner court and in the sanctuary before the Lord (v. 15).
2. Several regulations for the Zadokite priesthood are described in vv. 17-21.
 1. **Their clothing would be only linen, a symbol of purity in contrast to wool which was an animal by-product and therefore unclean.**

2. Their hair must neither be too long nor totally shaved (v. 20).

3. They could drink no wine in the inner court (v. 21).

4. They could marry but only a virgin or the widow of another priest (v. 22).

1. V. 23 breaks into the flow to give the reasons for these regulations -- They are to teach the people the difference between the holy and the common and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, teaching by example as well as precept.

2. The priests were to provide the kind of unblemished example that would encourage Israel to worship God and attract unbelieving nations to serve him.

5. The priests will serve as judges in civil disputes, and see that all the laws of God were observed, especially the feast days and the Sabbath (v. 24).

6. The priests will refrain from touching the dead.

1. Any priest who violated the law must remain unclean for seven days.

2. When he returned to duty, he had to offer a sin offering for himself (v. 27).

7. God was the only legitimate possession of the priests.

1. All food, clothing, and needs will come from the temple service (vv. 28-29).

2. They received the first fruits of the harvest and the best of each household (v. 30).

8. The priests will eat nothing that died a natural death or that had been killed by a wild animal (v. 31).

3. Those who would fill leadership roles must make whatever personal sacrifices necessary to maintain their moral purity.

4. Both the character and conduct of those in leadership roles should demonstrate an obedience of and conformity to the physical, moral, and spiritual principles of the Word of God.

4. Division of the land for the priests, Levites, and prince. 45:1-8.

1. These verses give the details of the apportionment of the central sacred district of the land that is to be assigned to the priests, Levites, and the prince (47:13 - 48:35 will divide the remaining land among the people).

2. The sacred district that Ezekiel saw had a central area of 25,000 by 20,000 cubits flanked on either side by areas for the prince with the sanctuary located in the center.

1. This land was allotted to the Zadokite priests who lived in this section and ministered in the sanctuary (45:3,4).

3. Just to the north of this section was a tract of 25,000 cubits by 10,000 cubits assigned to the Levites (v. 5).

4. A third section 25,000 by 5,000 cubits was allotted for the new city (v. 6).

5. On either side of the central district allotted to the Zadokite priests, Levites, and city is the land allotted to the prince (v. 7).

1. He received two sections of land on either side of the central

district that are also 25,000 cubits from north to south but extend from the sacred central district to the borders of the land to the east and west (v. 8).

2. This land will belong to the prince who will oversee the allotments of the land for all the tribes (see 47:13 - 48:35).

3. The land of the priests will be a sacred district belonging to the Lord.

4. Those who commit themselves to God's service are his and are to live by what his people provide for his work (45:1-8; 1 Cor. 9:14).

5. Regulations for offerings and feast days. 45:9 - 46:24.

1. *The demand for just standards. 45:9-12.*

1. This section is a rebuke of the priests for their dishonesty in the use of scales, weights, and measures used to weigh offerings brought to the temple.

2. Abuse of these tools of the marketplace was a source of frequent mention in the O.T. (Lev. 19:35; Deut. 25:13-16; Prov. 11:1; Amos 8:5; Mic. 6:10-12).

1. Amos preached against insincere worship and dishonest practices (Amos 8:1-6).

2. He painted a sordid picture of people who were impatient because of the arrival of the Sabbath that interrupted their dishonest and deceitful business practices perpetrated on the populace.

3. The people of Amos' day loved dishonest gain more than they loved God.

4. They were selfish and covetous; their lack of morality in the market reflected their loose attitude toward all standards of righteousness.

5. These dishonest merchants tampered with the scales, placed false bottoms in the measure used in the sale of grain, mixed chaff with the salable wheat, and shaved metal off the coins used in exchange (Amos 8:5-6).

6. Concern for honesty applied to the temple precincts as well as the marketplace.

7. In the temple animals were bought and money was exchanged by those who came to worship.

3. Ezekiel had already soundly rebuked the community leaders for their injustices (22:1-31).

1. That he here also rebuked the priests was another reminder of how seriously God views honesty and probity in dealings between individuals.

2. It was sad testimony to the lack of honesty among the spiritual leaders of Ezekiel's day and a warning for spiritual leaders in every age (cf. 22:1-22).

4. The princes (v. 9) will be responsible for setting and enforcing a system of standard weights and measures to insure honesty in trade and exchange not only in the temple but for all commercial enterprises as well.

1. God admonished the princes to avoid violence and oppression and to enforce justice.

2. Also the priests will be responsible for receiving money,

gifts for offerings such as grain and oil, and were also involved in exchange.

3. Standard weights and measures were necessary for acceptable offerings.

4. This law set a standard to enforce justice that the prophets championed and God demanded.

5. Accurate scales and dry measures were to be used in buying, selling and exchanging (vv. 10-11).

6. The shekel was the unit of monetary exchange, and a standard weight for the shekel was set (v. 12).

7. No standard conversion table has been established for the weights and measures named by Ezekiel.

1. A homer was a dry measure of approximately five bushels.

2. An ephah was one-tenth of a homer, making it about one-half bushel.

3. A bath was a liquid measure of about five-and-one-half gallons.

4. The shekel weighed an average of about four-tenth of an ounce and equalled twenty-four gerahs.

5. The shekel was one-fifth of a mina.

8. Just dealings precede acceptable worship.

1. God abhors false balances (Prov. 11:1; Amos 8:5; Mic. 6:11) because they represent injustice and deceit (Ezek. 45:9-

12).

2. Jesus made this same connection between justice in our relationships and acceptable worship in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21-26).

2. Offerings for the prince. 45:13-17.

1. The people will provide for the operation of the temple by making an offering to the prince.

1. This was like the provision for the service of the tabernacle in Exod. 30:11-16.

2. The required offering for grain will be one-sixth of all produce (v. 13).

3. One percent of the oil will be given for use in the temple (v. 14).

4. One of every two hundred animals will be given (v. 15).

5. These commodities will be used in the feast days and festivals of the temple.

2. Everyone will be required to participate in these offerings brought to the prince as the administrator of the temple stores (v. 16).

3. Regulations for the feasts. 45:18-25.

1. The first of the feasts described is an annual rite of purification for the temple (vv. 18-20).

1. This rite was to be carried out on the first day of the first month, which would have been March or April each year.

2. The prince is to offer a bull as a sin offering and place the blood on the door posts of the sanctuary, the four corners of the altar, and the gate posts of the inner court (v. 19).

3. The same ceremony to be on the seventh day for everyone who had gone astray to make atonement for the house (v. 20).

2. The Passover observance followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread is also the responsibility of the prince (v. 21; cf. Exod. 12:1-2; Num. 28:16-25).

1. At Passover the prince will offer a sin offering for himself and for the people.

2. On the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed, the prince offered seven bulls, seven rams, and a male goat as a sin offering each day (v. 23).

3. Accompanying these sacrifices is to be an ephah of grain and one hin of oil, which was about twelve pints (v. 24).

3. The feast of the seventh month is the Feast of Tabernacles.

1. It is described in Lev. 23:33-36 and Num 29:12-38.

2. Since it too was a seventh-day feast, the same regulations applied (v. 25).

4. *Regulations for the Sabbath. 46:1-8.*

1. The inner east gate of the sanctuary was closed for six days and opened on the Sabbath and New Moon, a special Sabbath celebrating the beginning of a new month (v. 1).

2. The inner east gate is the place from which the prince will carry out his ministry on Sabbath and feast days (v. 2).

1. He will not enter the inner court or take part in the sacrifices because he was not a priest.

2. He remained inside the east gate of the inner court to perform his duties while the people were just outside the gate in the outer court (v. 3).

3. For each Sabbath observance the prince will bring six male lambs, one ram, plus a grain offering and a hin of oil for each ephah of grain (vv. 4-5).

4. On the New Moon he will bring an offering consisting of a young bull, six lambs, a ram, a grain offering, and a hin of oil for each ephah of grain (vv. 6-7).

5. The prince will perform his duties entering the east gate by way of the porch (v. 8).

5. *General worship regulations. 46:9-15.*

1. Worshipers could enter by the north or south gate, but they must exit by the opposite gate; no one could exit by the gate through which they entered (vv. 9-10).

2. Every animal of sacrifice brought by a worshiper was to be accompanied by an offering of one ephah of grain plus a hin of oil (v. 11).

3. Any time the prince desired, he could offer a freewill offering; when he presented a freewill offering, the inner east gate was opened for him, and the regulation of 46:1 was temporarily set aside (v. 12).

4. Daily sacrifices are to be offered consisting of a yearling lamb (v. 13); accompanying the sacrifice is to be a grain offering of one-sixth an ephah of grain and one-third a hin of oil (vv. 14-15).

5. All the details of worship are a reminder that God is a God of order, not chaos (1 Cor. 14:40); this is an appropriate prescription for worship at any time.

6. *Regulations concerning the prince and his property. 46:16-18.*

1. The preexilic kings were able to increase the property holdings of the crown by purchasing available property (2 Sam. 24:24; 1 Kings 16:24).

2. The prince will exercise the same right of purchase and will be able to increase his land holdings by purchase of available property (v. 16).

1. Inheritance and property rights were extremely important and carefully guarded by the Israelites.

2. All property was to be returned to its original owner or family in the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:10).

3. The same regulation will apply to all property given by the prince to a servant (v. 17).

3. Any property given by the prince to one of his sons will be theirs in perpetuity, but the prince is specifically prohibited from taking the property of others and giving it to his sons (v. 18).

7. *Regulations for cooking in the temple. 46:19-24.*

1. Ezekiel was brought to the entrance of the priest's building in the

inner court that was described in 42:1-14.

2. In these rooms the priests cook the animal offerings and bake the grain offerings to avoid defilement by contact with the people (v. 19; cf. 44:19).

3. In the four corners of the outer court were kitchens used to prepare sacrifices for the people (vv. 21-24).

6. Applications.

1. *The altar was a reminder not only of the gap that separates human beings from God, but also of the possibility of that gap's being bridged. Human life finds its meaning in the relationship with God, but evil humans may not commune with the holy God. Only when human evil has been dealt with is communion with God possible. And thus the altar of Ezekiel's visionary temple reminds us of another altar, in the form of a cross, on which a perfect sacrifice at last achieved the bridging of that gap that separates human beings from their God.*

2. *As in the heart of Israel's land God's plot was to be located, so too in every human life the divine presence must be located at the center. The significance of the whole land was to be found at the center; in the center strip, at its central point, was the sanctuary which symbolized God's presence. Our own lives, however diverse their territory and character, require a focal point: it is the recognition that God is central to human living.*

3. *These regulations concerning worship in the temple are a reminder of the diversity of Israel's worship, its daily continuity and its annual highlights. Every day there was worship in the temple; every seventh day there was special worship; at special points throughout the year, there were festivals and feasts. The*

maintenance of these worship activities were integral to the spiritual life of God's people. Now, no less than in the past, we continue to need worship if the health of the inner person is to prosper.

4. Just as worshipers of old could not exit the same way they entered, we should not be able to leave worship in the same way we entered. If it doesn't affect and change us we may be only attending, not worshipping.

5. Today there would be those who would urge changes in what God commanded. After all, it would be suggested, look at the people flocking to the high places. If we are ever going to attract people in those numbers we are going to have to get over doing it the same way all of the time. How much wiser it is to make our worship to God the best it can be in the manner he has commanded than it is to change it in a manner that is designed to please us with the excuse that it is done for the sake of others. God, not the community, determines what pleases him. Those who think God is pleased with those who change what he has commanded need to review God's wrath poured out of the Hebrews for that very thing.

Lesson 24: Ezekiel 47-48

I. The River Out of the Temple (47:1-12)

A. We have now reached the concluding two chapters of the book of Ezekiel. In commenting on the end of the book, one commentator notes:

1. "There are but few of the prophets of the Old Testament who have left a more valuable treasure to the Church of God than Ezekiel. It is true that he is in several places obscure; but there is a great proportion of the work that is in the highest degree edifying; and several portions that for the depth of the salvation predicted, and the accuracy and minuteness of the description, have nothing equal to them in the Old Testament Scriptures."

B. Chapter 47 begins with a description of a great river flowing out of the temple that was described in the preceding chapters.

C. Ezekiel is brought to the door of the holy place in the temple and sees a stream of water that flows into the inner court area, south of the altar.

D. The prophet is then taken out of the inner court by way of the north gate into the outer court. He is taken to the eastern outer gate and sees the water coming out of that gate at its southern side. From there the water flows down to the Dead Sea.

E. Flowing rivers are found elsewhere in the Scriptures:

1. In Zechariah 14:8 there are two rivers, one flowing east and the other west.
2. Joel 3:18 speaks of one river that waters the valley of Shittim, which is on the eastern bank of the Jordan.

F. Each of these prophecies about rivers is speaking about the same thing -- a coming blessedness for the people of God as the goodness of God pours forth from his throne. The book of Ezekiel ends with a beautiful description of the goodness of God toward his people.

G. This river gets deeper and wider the farther Ezekiel gets from the city.

1. The water begins as a trickle. The Hebrew word used here means "drop by drop."
2. The water is ankle-deep a 1000 cubits farther downstream. The Hebrew is "water of ankles." So strange did this phrase appear to the translators of the Septuagint that they translated it as "water of remission," which caused many early Christian commentators to see here the water of baptism.
3. Continuing to move along at distances of 1000 cubits, the water is up to his knees, then up to his waist, and then too deep and wide to cross.

a) *The Charismatics use these verses as support for their arguments that the power of the Spirit comes in "waves." Some argue that these waves come every 1000 years. One immediate problem with this view is that there aren't any "waves" in Ezekiel 47.*

4. What does this deepening depict? There are a number of theories:

a) Some say that it depicts the fact that the more we know and experience the goodness and mercy of God, the more we realize its depth and width.

(1) (Ephesians 3:17-19) "that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the **width** and length and **depth** and height --19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

b) Others say it depicts the blessings of God that began with the patriarchs, then went to the Israelites, and finally to the whole world -- increasing at each step.

c) Others say it depicts the word, which begins as a seed in the heart of a believer and then grows into a fruitful tree.

H. Everywhere this river reaches, it heals.

1. The barren areas thrive and the Dead Sea becomes a sea of life when the river of God reaches it. The Dead Sea's stagnant waters become fresh and swarming with fish.

a) Is any sin so bad that it cannot be cleansed by God's healing power? God's healing power can turn the Dead Sea into the Living Sea!

2. Along the side of this river are trees that bring forth fruit each month of the year. The fruit of these trees is used for food, and the leaves provide healing.

3. Why each month? Twelve is the number symbolizing God's

people! This flowing river of goodness is for the people of God.

a) *The number twelve is a symbol for the people of God. In the Old Testament, there were the 12 tribes of Israel, and in the New Testament there were the 12 apostles. In Revelation 7 when God wants to emphasize that he is speaking about ALL of his people, he uses the number 144,000, which is 12 times 12 times 1000!*

b) *Numbers in the bible often have special significance, but we must not take this too far. Numbers can be made to symbolize anything if one is willing to work hard enough. For example, I can "prove" that Hitler was the anti-Christ and that William Shakespeare wrote the Bible.*

(1) *Let $A = 100$, $B = 101$, $C = 102$, etc. and note that $107 (H) + 108 (I) + 119 (T) + 111 (L) + 104 (E) + 117 (R) = 666!$*

(2) *How old was William Shakespeare in 1611 when the King James version was written? 46. The 46th word in Psalm 46 is "shake." The 46th word from the end of Psalm 46 is "spear."*

4. No tributaries are mentioned because they would be inconsistent with the message that these blessings all come from one true source.

5. The swamps retain their saltiness. Why? Perhaps because of the need for salt in the priestly activities. (Ezekiel 43:24).

6. Another commentator says that the swamps depict the "incorrigibly inpenitent who cannot be healed."

a) *(Revelation 22:11) "he who is filthy, let him be filthy still"*

I. John uses these same symbols in Revelation 22:1-3.

1. "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ² In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations. ³ And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him."

2. In this chapter, a river flows from the midst of a city. John also sees trees, and twelve fruits, and healing leaves.

a) We have to be careful to remember our rule that identity of symbol does not necessarily imply identity of subject, but I think the link between Revelation 22 and Ezekiel 47 is very clear in this instance. The two chapters follow different judgments -- but the message following each judgment is the same: God has a plan to abundantly bless His people.

3. Revelation 22:3 says that the throne of God will be in "it." Was is that "it"? It is the New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21. What is that "New Jerusalem"?

a) It must be Heaven, right? Because that is where the throne of God is. But, the Bible also views God as ruling from his church. (Ezekiel 43:7; Psalm 2:6) Indeed, as we have seen, God dwells with us in His church.

b) The church fits the name of this city very well -- the New Jerusalem. The old Jerusalem was once the dwelling place for God's people. The church is the new dwelling place for God's people.

c) Revelation 21:2 tells us that this New Jerusalem is the bride

of the Lamb, coming down out of Heaven, prepared as a bride for her husband. And what group is pictured in the Bible as the bride of Christ? The church!

(1) (Ephesians 5:25) "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her."

d) *This city is holy. This city provides healing to the surrounding nations who are drawn to this city by the light that it casts into the world. This city is the church.*

(1) (Isaiah 2:2-4) "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days *That* the mountain of the LORD's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. ³ Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore."

e) *But the events in Revelation aren't going to happen for a long time. Right? Well, that is not what the book of Revelation says:*

(1) (Revelation 1:1) "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants -- things which must shortly take place."

(2) (Revelation 1:3) "Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near."

(3) (Revelation 22:6) "Then he said to me, "These words *are* faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place."

(4) (Revelation 22:10) "And he said to me, 'Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.'"

(5) In Daniel 8:26 Daniel was told to seal up his vision because it wouldn't happen for a long time. John was told not to seal up his message. How long did it take for Daniel's message to be fulfilled? About 400 years.

J. Water in the Bible often represents God's abundant blessings.

1. "Blessing, fertility, and water are almost interchangeable in the Old Testament."
2. (Psalm 46:4) "There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High."
3. (Psalm 65:9) "You visit the earth and water it, You greatly enrich it; The river of God is full of water; You provide their grain, For so You have prepared it."
4. (Psalm 36:8) "They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. ⁹ For with You *is* the fountain of life; In Your light we see light."
5. (Habakkuk 2:14) "For the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea."

6. *The Garden of the Lord:* (Isaiah 51:3) "For the LORD will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, And her desert like the garden of the LORD; Joy and gladness will be found in it, Thanksgiving and the voice of melody."

7. (Joel 3:18) "And it will come to pass in that day *that* the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; A fountain shall flow from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Acacias."

a) And when were the prophecies of Joel fulfilled? Peter quotes Joel 2 in Acts 2 and said that it was being fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost when the church was established.

K. The Jewish Feast of the Tabernacles

1. The Jewish feast of the Tabernacles is described in Leviticus 23:39-43. It came on the 15th day of the seventh month, which was typically around the end of September or early October.

2. The Feast was primarily agricultural and celebrated the gathering of the harvest. In John 7:37 it is referred to as "The Feast." The Rabbies said that "he who has not seen Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles does not know what rejoicing means."

3. One of the most important rituals on this day was the pouring of water in the temple. A specially appointed priest was sent to the Pool of Siloam with a golden pitcher to bring water from the pool. This was poured by the high priest into a basin at the foot of the altar amidst the blasting of trumpets and the singing of the Hallel (Psalm 113-118).

4. The significance of this pouring was twofold. First, it was a symbolic and ritual prayer for abundant rain. Second, it looked toward the outpouring of God's spirit upon all nations as mentioned in Joel 2:28 ("I will pour out my spirit on all flesh") and which Peter in Acts 2 says was fulfilled during the first century.

5. Part of the closing words of Psalm 118 are "Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity." As with the other feasts, this feast looks forward to the coming Messiah.

6. It was at the end of such a celebration that Jesus announced that he was the real source of living water.

a) (John 7:37-38) On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

7. Jesus stood up and said that he was the answer to their prayers! Those who were looking for the river of God's blessings did not need to keep looking. They had found it. Jesus is the source of living water!

8. (Zechariah 14:8) "And in that day it shall be *that* living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, Half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; In both summer and winter it shall occur."

9. (John 4:13-14) Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

L. Is this flowing river literal or figurative?

1. McGuiggan begins his comments on this section by saying: "It seems to me that a man will literalize all this only when he has sold himself to literalizing."
2. Another commentator writes: "To attempt to take this literally, as some have done, is to miss completely the point which is being made. ... No amount of water divining will confirm Ezekiel 47."

a) *First, there is no such source of water in the Temple. Indeed, when the Assyrians threatened to invade Palestine, King Hezekiah ordered workmen to dig a tunnel through nearly 2000 feet of solid rock from the Pool of Siloam to the spring outside the walls of the city to provide fresh water during the siege.*

b) *The temple's water came from the Great Bronze Sea, which was a large bronze bowl that stood in the court of Solomon's temple. That source of water was located on the southeast side of the temple (1 Kings 7:39). (The river in Ezekiel 47 begins south of the altar.)*

c) *There is no literal source of water that could produce the river described by Ezekiel. If after reading this chapter, you are looking forward to a fishing trip to the Dead Sea, I would suggest you go back and read it again -- you have missed something important!*

d) *McGuiggan: "This is worth spending time on to build up our hearts rather than to spend time figuring out how we can get such a literal river to flow in the manner this one flows."*

3. What then does it symbolize? Let's review the clues:

- a) *The water flows from the temple. God is the source.*
- b) *The water starts small and deepens and widens as it flows.*
- c) *The water purifies and cleanses what it touches. It brings life.*
- d) *The water yields a great harvest of fish.*
- e) *The water produces trees with fruit and healing for the nations.*

4. Each of these statements is true of the church and its proclamation of the gospel.

- a) *God is the source of the church and the gospel. It is His church -- not our church. It is His word that sets men free -- not our word.*
- b) *The church began as a mustard seed on the day of Pentecost when God's spirit was poured out as Joel had prophesied.*

(1) Matthew 13:31-32 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, ³² "which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."

- c) *The gospel purifies, cleanses, and brings life.*
- d) *The gospel yields a great harvest of fish.*

(1) Matthew 13:47-48 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸ "which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they

sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away.

e) *The gospel produces trees giving food and healing to the nations.*

(1) Psalm 1:1-3 Blessed *is* the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; ² But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. ³ He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.

5. Finally, I think we would miss an important point if we failed to notice the great importance of water in the Scriptures.

a) *When God first began to order his creation, he moved upon the face of the waters.*

b) *When mankind's sin became too great, God cleansed the earth with water.*

c) *When the Israelites escaped from Egypt, God put a wall of water between their former bondage and their promised land.*

d) *God put water between the priests and the Holy Place in the temple. Before they could enter they were required to wash themselves with water.*

e) *God put water between sickness and health in the case of Naaman, who was healed only after he obeyed God and washed himself in the Jordan river.*

f) *Jesus put water between blindness and sight when he put*

clay on a blind man's eyes and told him to wash in the Pool of Siloam.

g) *God put water between sin and salvation. It is at the point of baptism that our sins are washed away. (Acts 22:16)*

h) *Anyone who is surprised that God put water between spiritual death and spiritual life just hasn't been paying attention. It would have been surprising if He had not done so!*

II. The Land and Its Boundaries (47:13-23)

A. These verses describe the land that is to be divided among the twelve tribes.

1. The specific and orderly division described here and in Chapter 48 would have been very important and very meaningful to the Jewish mind. No longer would the tribes be mixed and confused, but everything would be properly ordered.
2. This is not a prophecy that the church will be divided, but rather to the Jewish mind this orderly division meant that everything under the New Covenant would be as it should be. God will be in charge, and all of His people will be included in his new kingdom. As we will see, the tribes are not arranged randomly.
3. (1 Corinthians 14:40) "Let all things be done decently and in order."

B. What were the twelve tribes?

1. This question is harder than it sounds.
2. The Tribe of Levi had no portion of the land because they were

provided for by the offerings and by the land surrounding the temple.

a) (Ezekiel 44:28) And it shall be unto them for an inheritance: I *am* their inheritance: and ye shall give them no possession in Israel: I *am* their possession.

3. To keep the total number at 12, Joseph was given two portions -- one for his son Manasseh and one for his son Ephraim.

4. Thus, we have 14 groups to choose from in obtaining 12 tribes.

5. In Revelation 7:4-8, Levi, Joseph, and Manasseh are included, but Dan and Ephraim are left out! Why?

a) Dan was very early connected with idolatry.

(1) Judges 18:30 And the Danites set up the graven image for themselves.

(2) 1 Kings 12:28-29 So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." 29 And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.

(3) Genesis 49:17 Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that his rider falls backward.

b) Rome was full of idolatry and so was Dan. Hence, Dan was not used in the description of the church in Revelation 7. Dan was the classic example of a tribe that compromised with the world! The message to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 was not to compromise with the world!

c) Why was Ephraim left out? For the same reason.

(1) Hosea 4:17 Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.

(2) Hosea 12:1 Ephraim herds the wind, and pursues the east wind all day long; they multiply falsehood and violence; they make a bargain with Assyria, and oil is carried to Egypt.

d) Ephraim had forsaken God and was busy trying to make deals with the world. They made a covenant with Assyria, but at the same time were making deals with Egypt. Ephraim was also guilty of compromise.

e) Note the careful use of symbolism in Revelation 7 in the omission of Dan and Ephraim because of their compromise with the world and in the inclusion of Manasseh and Joseph to keep the total number at 12.

f) *A question for the premillennialists: Why bother will all of this if the numbers are not symbolic? If the numbers are literal, then who cares if we have 12 tribes or 13 tribes? Why not throw them all in and have 14 tribes? And why 1000 years? Does God just like nice round numbers or is there a deeper significance?*

C. What area of land is described here?

1. The Great Sea (the Mediterranean) is on the west (verse 20) and the river Jordan is on the east (verse 18).

2. The northern border runs along a line drawn roughly from Tyre on the coast to the headwaters of the Jordan, southwest of Damascus (verses 15-17).

3. The eastern boundary follows the Jordan to the Dead Sea

(which is the eastern sea in verse 18). Tamar was probably near its southern end, and it marked the beginning of the southern boundary, which ran to the Mediterranean coastline.

D. It is very interesting that the boundaries given here in Ezekiel 47 match the boundaries given in Numbers 34.

1. Premillennialists insist that the land promise was never fulfilled to Abraham's seed -- not as to either area or duration.

a) They point to Genesis 15:18 for the area and to Genesis 17:8 for the duration ("everlasting possession").

b) As we discussed in earlier lessons, Joshua tells us that the "area" promise was completely fulfilled, and Deuteronomy tells us that the "duration" promise was forfeited when Israel broke their covenant with God.

2. According to the premillennialists, these promises will be fulfilled in the Millennium. But what does the Bible say?

3. Israel possessed and dwelled in all the land mentioned in Numbers 34. See Joshua 21:43-45 and 23:14-16. But the millennialist says that was not enough -- God owed them even more land and they have not received it even to this very day! But Ezekiel tells us here that Israel will not have enough land even in the supposed Millennium because Ezekiel here does not include all of the land mentioned in Genesis 15.

4. Also, if the land is an everlasting possession then Israel will have to dwell there for all eternity! I don't know about you, but I don't want any land as an everlasting possession. I had much rather move on to that place that Jesus has prepared (John 14:2).

E. What about the land in Genesis 15:18? Has Israel ever possessed all of that land? If not, then is that a promise remaining to be fulfilled?

1. First, the passages from Joshua 21 and 23 listed above tell us four times that ALL of the promises to Israel were fulfilled.

a) *Example:* (Joshua 21:43) And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein.

2. But what about Genesis 15:18 and Exodus 23:28ff, which speak of much larger tracts of land? Although that land was given to Israel, only a section of that gift was ever intended to be the promised inheritance.

3. The promised land was a subset of the land described in Genesis 15. How do we know this? We ask and answer a simple question -- Did Moses ever enter the promised land?

a) (Numbers 20:12) Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

b) (Numbers 27:12-13) Now the LORD said to Moses: "Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel. 13 "And when you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered.

c) *If that huge section of land mentioned in Genesis 15 and Exodus 23 was the promised land, then Moses was standing in the promised land when God told him he would never enter the*

promised land!

d) *The promised land was located entirely to the west of the Jordan river. Deuteronomy 2:29 tells us that the people would have to "cross the Jordan to the land which the LORD our God is giving us." That is the same land that Joshua said the Israelites had possessed, and it is the same land described here by Ezekiel.*

F. Strangers are not be mistreated, but are to be treated as the home-born.

1. This was a common theme in the Mosaic Law, although it was never followed whole-heartedly by the Jews. It points toward the day when God would bless the entire world through Abraham.
2. (Leviticus 24:22) "Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I *am* the LORD your God."
3. (Isaiah 56:6-8) "Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; ⁷ Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *shall be* accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people. ⁸ The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather *others* to him, beside those that are gathered unto him."
4. This river was not just a blessing to the Jews, but was blessing to all of the people of God everywhere. God through Jesus Christ fulfilled his promise to bless the entire world through the seed of

Abraham.

III. The Division of the Land Among the Tribes (48)

A. The land is divided among the twelve tribes in Chapter 48. (See handout.)

B. Again, we are faced with a now familiar question -- literal or figurative?

1. If literal, remember that Ezekiel 37:25 tells us that these people will live in this divided land forever.

a) Ezekiel 37:25 And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, *even* they, and their children, and their children's children for ever.

2. After all we have seen, we must conclude that this division of the land is a symbolic division. God is showing us his wonderful plan for the church -- it will include all of his people and none will be left out. He uses the symbol 144,000 in Revelation 7 to say the same thing.

C. Judah and Benjamin are located right next to the Levites and the Temple area.

1. Judah had the position of honor immediately north of the temple area because the royal Davidic line was from the tribe of Judah. (Genesis 49:8-12)

2. Judah superseded Reuben (the oldest son), who received the next position on the north side.

3. The other two northern places are held by the grandsons of Rachel, the children of Joseph.

D. The three tribes that are farthest north of the sanctuary (Dan, Asher, and Naphtali) were the sons of Jacob's concubines.

1. Dan and Naphtali were born to Rachel's maid Bilhah, and Asher to Leah's maid Zilpah.

a) Only one Biblical character of note came from tribe of Asher -- and it was a New Testament character! It was Anna the prophetess in Luke 2:36.

2. The positions farthest from the temple were the least honorable positions. Dan is the farthest away to the north, and interestingly as we have seen Dan is excluded from the list of tribes in Revelation 7.

3. The fourth son by a concubine (Gad) is the farthest away from the sanctuary in the southern group of tribes.

4. To the Jewish mind, this orderly division is a clear message that under the New Covenant everything will be as it should be. God will be in charge, and there will be no confusion.

E. The central portion is described in verses 8-22.

1. Much of this description is an expansion of what we were told in 45:1-8.

2. The central portion includes the temple area, the priestly area, the city proper, land belonging to the city, and land along each side belonging to the Prince. (See Lesson 23 for a discussion of the

Prince.)

3. The total area is 25,000 by 25,000 cubits, which would be between 50 and 70 square miles.

F. To the south of the city are the five remaining tribes.

- 1.** Benjamin, as his father's youngest son by Rachel, has the privileged position immediately next to the sanctuary.
- 2.** Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun come next, all born of Leah.
- 3.** Finally, we have Gad, a son of the concubine Zilpah.

G. The city that stands south of the temple area has twelve gates, each of which is named after one of the tribes.

- 1.** In this list, Levi has a gate, and so Joseph gets one gate in place of his two sons to keep the total number at 12.
- 2.** On the north side (the side facing the sanctuary) the gates are named after Reuben (the eldest son), Judah (the Davidic ancestor), and Levi (the founder of the priesthood).

H. These verses can also be compared with Revelation 21-22.

- 1.** As we have seen, that chapter describes the new Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven. It too had twelve gates, named after the twelve tribes of Israel, but it was also inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

a) *Recall that Matthias was added to the apostles in Acts 1:26 to replace Judas, again to maintain the total number of 12. (But*

Paul was also an apostle, so yet again we seem to have 14 people for 12 positions.)

I. The book closes with the name of that city: "Jehovah is there!"

1. McGuiggan: "A great ending for a great book."

2. Ezekiel's closing words give the city its new name -- The Lord is There!

a) Jeremiah 3:17 At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts.

b) Jeremiah 33:16 In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this *is the name* by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.'

3. Again, compare Revelation 21:3 -- "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people."

a) God dwells with man now in the church! If you want to find God, then look in His church. The Lord is there!

b) Zechariah 2:10-11 Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," says the LORD. ¹¹ "Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.

c) Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will

dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God.

d) Ephesians 2:19-22 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

4. In his 25 years of exile and in the 48 chapters of his book:

a) Ezekiel had seen God withdraw from his temple because of the sin that was committed there.

b) He had seen God by the waters of Babylon in the vision of the chariot throne.

c) He had promised the exiles that that there would be a new covenant when God would be with his people forever.

d) Now at last, he saw the completion -- the time when God would be with his people forever under that new covenant.

e) (Jeremiah 33:14-18) Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah: ¹⁵ 'In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David A Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this *is the name* by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.' ¹⁷ "For thus says the

LORD: 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; ¹⁸ 'nor shall the priests, the Levites, lack a man to offer burnt offerings before Me, to kindle grain offerings, and to sacrifice continually.' "