

Ezekiel

The prophet Jeremiah began to speak God's word in 627 BC, in Jerusalem. Daniel's story as a prophet begins with him and his friends as young captives taken to Babylon to serve the king in 605 BC. Ezekiel's 1st vision is reported in the summer of 593 BC when he was 30 years old in a Jewish enclave located on a Babylonia waterway, along with other Jews removed from Jerusalem in the conquest of 597 BC when Jehoiakim died and Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon. We have these 3 contemporaneous prophets in very different circumstances confronting the same set of national circumstances but in very different personal circumstances.

Ezekiel 1-4

Ezekiel recorded the dates of some of his prophecies, including this one, and 8:3 and 40:2. The dates are based on the years in captivity, counting from 597 BC.

Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, was a priest, a descendant of Aaron. At the age of 30 he entered the service of the LORD far from home, as an exile in Babylonian territory. "The hand of the LORD was upon him," v3, which is stated again in 3:14, 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1.

Some of Ezekiel's messages were apocalyptic visions, as in 1:1-3:15, 8:1-11:25, 37:1-14, 38:1-39:29, and 40:1-48:35. The last has a strong correlation with John's vision in Revelation 21-22. Several of Ezekiel's messages were visual plays where he acted out God's message then explained or answered questions.

The circumstances of his ministry encompassed the last days of Jerusalem and the temple, climaxing with the destruction in 586 BC.

The appearance of the LORD to Ezekiel in chapters 1-2 includes elements of God's appearance on Mt Sinai in Exodus 19-20, and the throne scenes in Exodus 24 and Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4-5. The appearance of the angel sent by Jesus to John in Revelation 1 has much in common with the appearance of the divine messengers Ezekiel saw. The appearance of the burning ones in Isaiah 6 and the living creatures in Revelation 4 aligns with that of the cherubim in Ezekiel's vision. The lion, the eagle, the ox/calf, and man align with the living creatures in Revelation 4 and with the 4 tribes whose banners led the camps of Israel from the 4 sides of the Tabernacle. Judah, the lion, Ephraim the ox, Reuben the man, and Dan the eagle, according to the rabbis.

Commentator Adam Clarke identified the wheeled throne borne by cherubim in Ezekiel's vision as the chariot of Jehovah, and that's about right. The LORD's mobile throne, carried by the mightiest of heavenly created beings.

The "glory of the LORD" in 1:28 will come around again in Ezekiel, and evokes memories of the Exodus, when Israel saw the glory of the LORD again and again (Exodus 16:7-10, 24:16-17, 40:34, Deuteronomy 4:12, for example). This also points forward to Jesus, as we'll see later in the book.

When the LORD called the prophet he called him, "Son of Man." That titular phrase was used by

the LORD almost every time he addressed Ezekiel. The one time we have the name “Ezekiel” in a divine statement is in 24:24, a time of extreme duress for Ezekiel. “Son of Man” comes to us as a loaded phrase, since Jesus persistently referred to himself as the son of man. Jesus asserted to the Sanhedrin that Daniel’s prophecy of “one like a son of man” being enthroned (Daniel 7:13) was fulfilled in himself (Matthew 26:64), and they called it blasphemy. When reading Ezekiel and seeing him act out the divine role in judgment in various prophecies, acting in God’s behalf, think about how he is enacting the LORD’s will as a son of man, anticipating the coming of God in the flesh to act out the Father’s will in this world.

In chapter 2, like Jeremiah and other prophets, the LORD told Ezekiel up front that most of the people most of the time weren’t going to listen to his prophecies or pay attention to his message, but they needed to be told anyway. One of the things they were to know was that a prophet had been among them. Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, would be persecuted by his own people, but also like Jeremiah, God would enable him to stand and do what was asked of him.

The commissioning message in chapters 2-3 included Ezekiel being told to eat a scroll written on both sides, which he did. The scroll was both sweet in his mouth (3:3) and bitter and hot in his spirit (3:14). His divine message was going to be God’s truth, with redemption in his message, but also condemnation of sin and sinners that would be received with hostility by most who heard it.

Ezekiel’s service was as a watchman giving warning (3:17ff), and that was the sum of his responsibility. He was accountable before God for telling the people what God gave him to say. He was not accountable for how they responded to that message. If he failed to speak the truth he would damn himself, but how that truth was received depended on the heart of the hearers. The Lord’s disciples today have a similar responsibility to teach the truth, and those who hear it bear accountability for how they respond to the message.

Ezekiel was often explicitly limited by the LORD in his actions and his words, as in 3:24-27.

Ezekiel 4 begins a prophecy about the final siege and destruction of Jerusalem, which would happen 7 years after the message was given. This message called for Ezekiel to role play, building a representation of Jerusalem with a brick and modeling how the LORD would not act to rescue the city in any way. It’s interesting that the defined time for Ezekiel’s visual prophecy was 390+40 days, 430 years represented, which is the number of years mentioned in Exodus 12:40, the sojourn of Israel before the Exodus. God was pointing the way to a new redemption after another sojourn. Numbers 14:34 also comes into the message of the prophet.

The “Ezekiel bread” in chapter 4 was intended to convey the idea of hardship, though some in modern times have missed that point entirely, eating whatever could be found. The cooking of that bread likewise conveyed a message of desperation for Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 5-8

In chapter 4 Ezekiel, the son of man, was directed to label a brick “Jerusalem,” then make scale model siege works around it with mounds and equipment of war. He was to place an iron griddle

as a wall between himself and the brick as he lay on his side for 430 days. 390 days on his left side, and 40 days on his right side, for the years of the sins of Israel and Judah. The iron barrier symbolized God abandoning Jerusalem to her fate, as the son of man acted out the decisions of God. He was to eat a bread made with various beans and grains mixed together, and cooked over an unclean cooking fuel. This symbolized the hardship of the siege that lay ahead for Jerusalem, and also problem of being unclean in foreign lands that the survivors of the Jews would face as deportees (4:13). Daniel and his friends in Daniel 1 tackled that problem right away, but few of their fellow exiles were so determined, including King Johoiachin as depicted in Jeremiah 52:31-34.

The enacted parable of chapter 4 continues in Ezekiel 5, with Ezekiel cutting off his hair, shaving his head, with a sharp sword and then dividing the hair into 3 piles. The piles of hair were then subjected to fire, sword, and scattering to the wind, with only a very few hairs left. Then the few were again divided and subjected to similar treatment. In this the son of man's hair represented Jerusalem and the woes that lay ahead for her in her rebellion. God had set Jerusalem/Israel in the center of the nations (5:5) so that they could be a light to the nations, but instead they had gone after every perversity the nations pursued, with gusto, and ignored God's Law. Consequently Israel/Jerusalem would instead be a sign to the nations of divine judgment. As Jeremiah had repeatedly stressed sword, famine, and pestilence as tools of divine discipline, so also in 5:12, with the tiny remnant scattered to the wind.

Ezekiel 5:13 states God's purpose that "they shall know that I am the LORD" when Ezekiel's prophecies came true. That is a core message of God's word to Ezekiel, and is repeated at least 34 times in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 6 is a message against idolatry, which would still be a challenge even in the dispersion of the survivors among the nations. (The exiles who took Jeremiah to Egypt stubbornly persisted in worshiping the queen of heaven.) The LORD expressed his broken heart over Israel's unfaithfulness in 6:9, and again in v7 and 10, "they shall know that I am the LORD." Ezekiel was to dramatize the appropriate reaction against the idols and associated injustice and immorality in v11.

Chapter 7 warns of the imminent day of the Lord, a day of wrath with no pity (v4) while they went about their unfaithful ways, heedless of the Law and of the prophets among them. v10 is a sad call back to the affirmation of Aaron's priesthood/leadership in Numbers 17, when his rod blossomed and budded, but this time what is affirmed is corruption in priest and prince, requiring harsh correction with the rod of God. The rod of human authority had been perverted to violence and wickedness. The perversity was virtually universal (v12-13). The wealth accumulated by cruel greed (v19-22) and displayed in pride not only couldn't feed their hunger in a siege, it was a magnet drawing their enemies to plunder them. All that lay ahead was of their own volition (v27).

Chapter 8 begins a prophecy in 592 BC that continues through chapter 11. Ezekiel was in his home in Tel Abib in the area of Babylon, far from Jerusalem, and the elders of the Jewish community were with him, probably seeking guidance, though they would not necessarily follow what he told them. In that setting, Ezekiel was overwhelmed by a vision, a divine messenger

with supernatural features reminiscent of chapter 1 or John's vision in Revelation 1.. This messenger took Ezekiel by the hair and he was transported by the Spirit to Jerusalem, specifically a gate of the temple. While his body remained at home, he was transported to Jerusalem hundreds of miles away in real time. At the temple, which he had last seen in person 6 years earlier, he saw an abomination, an idol, but also the glory of God as he had previously seen in chapter 1 by the Chebar river/canal. This vision in 8-11 is all about the abominations corrupting the temple, the priesthood, and the whole of Jerusalem and Judah, and the divine decision to chasten and to depart. The perversions of worship and of injustice were driving God out of his sanctuary (v6). Adam and Eve had been driven from the presence of God in Eden because of sin (Genesis 3) but this time the egregious sins of Judah were driving the presence and glory of God from the sanctuary.

Chapter 8 v7-13 describe the LORD having Ezekiel looking through a hole in the wall to see elders of Israel (remember that elders of Judah in exile were at that moment gathered in his home) engaged in perverse behavior in the dark with loathsome images. Idolatrous images included beasts, and also included perversion and pornographic sexuality. Archaeologists have confirmed the presence of cannabis residue on incense altars from high places in ancient Israel, and it's likely the incense burned here by a leader Ezekiel recognized (v11) and the elders had mind altering substances in the mix, as they were/are often included in pagan ritual.

Weeping for Tammuz (8:14) indicates embracing Babylonian fertility worship, and then on top of that 25 men worshiping the sun in the courts of the temple. The perversity and abuse of divine blessings, despite ongoing testimony from the prophets and persistent chastening by the LORD could only lead to the declaration, "my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity... I will not hear them."

This vision continues with Ezekiel spiritually in Jerusalem in chapter 9.

Ezekiel 9-12

Ezekiel began a virtual journey to the temple in Jerusalem in chapter 8 as he sat in his house in Tel-Abib, an exile in Babylon, with elders of Judah in the house with him. Having seen various abominations in the precincts of the temple in chapter 8 involving elders and city leaders and women, Ezekiel heard the LORD call out loudly in chapter 9 for "the executioners of the city." Ezekiel saw six men come with weapons for slaughter, plus another man clothed in linen with a scribes writing kit. These 7 approached the altar where burnt offerings were made. The executioners would be like the "band of destroying angels" unleashed against Egypt in the plagues (Psalm 78:49). The linen clad scribe evokes memories of (faithful) priests and Levites who wore linen in their service to God (Exodus 39:27-28, 1 Chronicles 15:27). Once again, "the glory of the LORD" draws attention (8:4, 9:3). The LORD's glorious presence moved from the chariot borne by the cherubim to the threshold of the house. Once upon a time, about 375 years before Ezekiel's vision, the glory of the LORD had filled the temple when Solomon dedicated it to God's purposes. But the glory was not in the temple in Ezekiel's vision.

The glory of the God of Israel called to the linen clad scribe, that he was to mark the inhabitants of the city who were distressed by the abominations committed there (9:4). This divine marking

is seen again in John's vision of the servants of God being protected in Revelation 7:2ff with the seal of God on their foreheads. Paul connected the seal of God for Christians with the Holy Spirit God has given (Ephesians 1:13, 4:30). Once those who rejected the abominations of idolatry and immorality and injustice had been securely marked, the executioners were unleashed, without pity, to destroy young and old, male and female, all those who'd accepted the abominations. "Begin at my sanctuary" (9:6) is the backdrop for Peter's comment in 1 Peter 4:17.

As Josiah had defiled the worship sites of idolators a few years earlier, so the very temple of God was to be defiled with dead bodies in the future Jerusalem had chosen. Ezekiel was moved to plead with God for Israel (recall Moses in Exodus 32), but God was unrelenting because of the depth of guilt and bloodshed without remorse, a condemnation much like the words of Jesus in his own generation (Matthew 23:32-36). "I will bring their deeds upon their heads."

In chapter 10 Ezekiel describes another scene of the throne of God, as experienced in various settings by prophets before and after him. The prophet saw and heard awesome brightness and noise as God's glory moved and filled the area. Sacred fire was to be scattered by the linen clad scribe over the city, the purging called for by the rampant sin of the people. Ezekiel identified the "living creatures" (see Revelation 4) as cherubim, which had been artistically represented on the ark and in the temple. Their power and speed and super-human characteristics clearly intrigued and impressed the prophet. After briefly dismounting in the courtyard and filling the area of the altar with cloud and noise, the glory of the LORD remounted the cherubim. I'm reminded of Jesus' anticlimactic visit to the temple after the "triumphal entry" (Mark 11:11) and the subsequent dramatic cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:15ff). Ezekiel saw the glory move to the east entrance, facing the rising sun, facing the Mt of Olives.

Ezekiel 11 has the prophet taken by the Spirit to the east gate of the temple, where the glory of the LORD had paused, unnoticed by the spiritually blind leaders who gathered there to weave plans of wicked counsel for the community. Remember the idea of the city as a cauldron, 11:4, it will come back again. Here the idea the wicked counselors were discussing was the notion the best of the Jews was still there in Jerusalem, that the ones taken away in captivity were inferior. These men, greedy for gain, were contemplating how to exploit the lands left behind by the deported and the weak people who had no defenders. God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy against the corrupt leaders, seemingly a symbolic gesture since Ezekiel was in the spirit, and his flesh was hundreds of miles away in his house, but as he obeyed he was startled to see one of the men that he recognized fall over dead. Once again, Ezekiel was deeply disturbed by divine justice. However, this was going to be an important sign that Ezekiel was a true prophet of God. On the very day Pelatiah died in Jerusalem, Ezekiel told the elders in his house in distant Babylon what had happened (v25), so that when they heard the news weeks later they would know Ezekiel's vision was true.

Meanwhile, the glory of the LORD left the temple (11:22-23) departing to the summit of the Mt of Olives. The return of the glory of the LORD to the temple in the person of Jesus is referenced several times in the gospels, especially John (John 1:14, 17:4-5, for example). The departure of the glory of the LORD was a huge event, only to be remedied by the coming of God in the flesh to build his new temple.

At the end of 11 the vision that began in chapter 8 concluded with Ezekiel back home again to tell what had happened.

Ezekiel 12 once again focuses on the siege and fall of Jerusalem, when King Zedekiah in rebellion against God rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. The events Ezekiel predicted a few years before they happened are recorded historically in 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 51. Because some of Ezekiel's prophecies were years ahead of time, some of the people became skeptical (12:26-28). God warned that time was running out, and these things were on the cusp of happening.

Ezekiel 13-15

Ezekiel 12 began a series of prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem, continuing through chapter 24.

Ezekiel 13 focuses in particular on the prophets of Israel, both male and female (v17) who shared their own ideas with the claim that they were from God. God promised judgment, and exclusion from the roll of Israel (v9, remember Moses' mention of God's book in Exodus 32:32, and the Lamb's book of life in Revelation). The prophets offered messages of false hope (v10), whitewashing notions of nonexistent strength in themselves or the rulers or the city walls. The false prophets readily used forbidden practices of divination and magic (v6, 18), readily conflating God's name and pagan practices. Their delusions mislead people to their own destruction (v18), all for a little profit and to prolong a devious life a little longer (v19). People who listen to lies are nothing new, and people who lie for profit continue to fuel rebellious delusions in our generation.

It's a great sin that God will certainly judge to discourage his righteous people and to encourage the wicked in their evil (13:22).

It looks like a good thing when elders of Israel come to Ezekiel for counsel in chapter 14, except the LORD knows their hearts and that they had come on their own terms with their own agenda, and not with any true interest in God's word and God's will. They were putting on a front, like the Pharisees Jesus rebuked (Matthew 23). Unless their hearts changed, they faced punishment for sin.

When things go persistently wrong in the normal cycle of events, as with recurring disruptions of food supplies (14:12-13), nature out of control (14:15), violence in the land (14:17), or pandemic (14:19), God wants people to stop and think about their lives, their behavior, and the need for penitent change. When there is no change of heart and evil behavior persists, petitioning God won't bring a change of outcome. Three men of renown for righteousness are cited as reference points in v14, Noah, Daniel, and Job. Their righteousness, God said, could only deliver themselves from judgment, no one else. This theme of every person answering for their own sins was first mentioned in chapter 3 and will be revisited at length in chapter 18. No human can lift the burden of another person's sin... until another Son of Man came to do what no one else could.

Daniel is remarkable in the list of 3 righteous men, in that he was a living person serving at the time in Nebuchadnezzar's government in Babylon, whereas Noah and Job had lived and died

centuries before Ezekiel's lifetime.

The frequently mentioned trilogy of divine instruments of national judgement, sword, famine, and plague, are augmented in chapter 14 (and elsewhere) with a fourth, wild beasts (v21). Think not only of lions, think also of rats and other vermin.

Ezekiel 15 tells a parable of a purposeless vine. Israel was a vine planted by God, with the intention it should bear fruit. Not being fruitful because of sin, idolatry, injustice, and immorality, the vine was dead wood. But the wood of a vine is useless for anything except burning, and doesn't even make good fuel. If the people of God wouldn't be fruitful for God, they had no other value, no other purpose, and burning was the only possible outcome for a useless vine. Jesus described himself as the true vine (John 15) whose branches (disciples) bear much fruit, with the help of divine purging and pruning. Branches bearing fruit in him are not destined for the fire.

Ezekiel 16-17

Continuing the series of prophecies against Jerusalem and Judah (chapters 13-24), chapter 16 pictures Jerusalem as an abandoned newborn, pitied and nurtured by the LORD. Eventually, when she was old enough, he gave her a pledge of marriage. The Hebrew phrase in 16:8 is the same as that in Ruth 4:9 and Ruth 2:12 ("spread the corner of my/his garment" = "spread my/his wings"). Reading v8-14 should give pause to reflect on Paul's description of the church as loved, sanctified, and adorned by Jesus in Ephesians 5:22ff. While the richly blessed geographic Jerusalem regressed and became like the whore called Babylon in Revelation, the church is by definition those who are faithful to the eternal covenant of God. The process of grotesque rebellion against the LORD who gave her life and loved her, and his increasingly severe chastening of his unfaithful wife in v15-29 parallel the book of Hosea which had been addressed 150 years earlier to Israel. The matter that mattered was ultimately the heart of the people, "How sick is your heart, declares the Lord GOD" (v30). As elsewhere in Ezekiel, the fierce suffering of that generation amounted to the LORD returning "your deeds upon your own head" (16:43). Like it or not, this is justice.

Remember that when Lot looked toward Sodom in Genesis 13 the plains there were well watered "like the Garden of God." Hence the description of her abundant blessings in 16:49-50, before the very soil of the entire region was destroyed in the conflagration of divine judgement in Genesis 19. The sins of Sodom included sexual immorality, but also as delineated here that was interwoven with her pride, her excesses of luxury and ease, her refusal to aid the poor or help the needy. The haughtiness of attempting violent homosexual rape of strangers flowed from the pride of abundance and ease they enjoyed from God's hand, without giving God credit. The condemnation of arrogant Jerusalem, loved by God but utterly unfaithful to him and unmerciful in her former prosperity, is mitigated again by a prophetic glimpse of a better future in 16:6-63, when God established a new "everlasting covenant" with his people. Like the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34, this covenant was made with people who "know that I am the LORD." Jesus identified his blood on the night of his betrayal as the blood of the new covenant, and Hebrews also points to the blood of Jesus as "the blood of the eternal covenant" (Hebrews 13:20). The atonement of Ezekiel 16:63 is that of Christ, preparing for himself a radiant bride.

Ezekiel 17 presents another parable (with mixed metaphors). At first glance we might guess that the eagle in the opening sentences was the LORD, but this is a political commentary. The eagle first eagle was Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (v11-12). The branch of cedar planted by waters to flourish and bear fruit (recall Psalm 1, this is ironic contrasting parallel) was King Zedekiah (v13). But Zedekiah, instead of listening to the prophets (especially Jeremiah) rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and sought an alliance with Egypt, the other eagle. God's regard for covenant breakers is highlighted again in 17:15-19. Individuals and nations who break their covenant promises (treaties, oaths, contracts, etc) are condemned by God. This is as true in the 21st century as it was in the days of Joshua or Ezekiel.

The metaphor of the sprig from the top of the cedar is revisited in 17:22-24. This time the royal branch is not Zedekiah, and the planter is not Nebuchadnezzar. Rather, it is the LORD who takes the royal branch and plants it on the high mountain of Israel. Geographic Jerusalem is not on a high mountain. This is not a geographic future glory, but is the glory of the offspring of David, Jesus, planted on high as the true vine (John 15, Ephesians 4:7, 2:6) whose branches are fruitful. The shade and shelter of every kind of bird turned up in Jesus' parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32). The analogy of trees being exalted and humbled in 17:24 is echoed by Jesus teaching that "the last shall be first and the first shall be last" in his kingdom (Matthew 20:16).

Ezekiel 18-20

Ezekiel 18 dwells on a theme previously introduced to Ezekiel in 3:16-21. In that first statement of principles, the onus was laid on Ezekiel to tell people if they needed to repent, because God had made him a watchman. Whether or not they repented was their own volition, as spelled out again in more detail in chapter 18.

Notice in 18:4, "all souls are mine." Every living being belongs to the LORD and is accountable to him. And, "the soul sins shall die." Every person is accountable for their own sin, and no one else's.

Note the examples of righteous living in 18:6-9. There are both positive examples of things to do for others, and negative examples of things to never do.

18:10-13 emphasize that children do not "inherit" righteousness from parents. Godly parents don't give ungodly offspring a pass. In v13, no matter how righteous a person's father might be, if that person persists in sin, "his blood shall be upon himself."

On the other hand, v14-18 affirm that an unrighteous father doesn't prevent a child from choosing righteousness and being approved by God. Every person answers only for themselves in v19-20.

The assurance of justification through repentance in v21-22 is a foundational principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who believe the good news are called upon to repent, to turn away from past sins and toward the Lord. God made it possible through Jesus' self-sacrifice for sinners who repent to be forgiven and accounted righteous. God has no "pleasure in the death of the

wicked” but wants the unrighteous to “turn from his way and live” (v23, 32; see also 2 Peter 3:9). God’s judgment, as reiterated several times in the New Testament, is of “everyone according to his ways” (18:30). Escaping from guilt for sin depends on repenting and having a new heart and spirit (v30-31) which has been made possible by Jesus death, burial and resurrection and the Spirit he gives. “Why will you die...” (v31) when God has offered a way to live?

Ezekiel 19 is another parable directed against the corrupt offspring of Josiah, the rulers in Jerusalem. It appropriately follows chapter 18, because Josiah was a righteous man/king, though his father was wicked, and Josiah’s sons and grandson who ruled after him were all wicked. Using the metaphor of lions, first we have Jehoahaz, v1-4, who was deposed by Pharaoh Neco, then his brother Jehoiakim and briefly his son Jehoiachin, who was deposed by Nebuchadnezzar and taken to Babylon (see 2 Chronicles 36:1-9). Part of the point in this prophetic look backward is that those rulers were not coming back. Jehoahaz was not coming back from Egypt, Jehoiakim had died, and Jehoiachin was not coming back from Babylon (19:5, 9). The vine that was Israel/Judah/Jerusalem had brought forth rulers, the line of David, but it was ruined and unproductive. This was cause for mourning (v10-14), but we know from other prophecies that the withered vine would yet put forth a root, 600 years later, and a branch of David would again grow and rule.

The prophecy in chapter 20 is dated August 14., 591 BC. Once again elders of Israel came to Ezekiel to inquire of the LORD (remember chapter 14). Ezekiel was instructed by the LORD to remind the elders of their history, God’s providence and Israel’s rebellions. God had restraint “for the sake of my name” (recall Moses’s dialogue with God in Exodus 32-34, the golden calf incident). Notice the highlighted “sign” of the Sabbath among the regulations God gave Israel (v12-13). God convicted them of many egregious sins, but the Sabbath was a unique sign given only to Israel which they had obviously ignored continually. V17 highlights again that God showed restraint, and did not destroy Israel for her rebellions.

19:25 sounds odd, as though God had given commandments to Israel that were not good for them. However, comparing Psalm 81:12 and considering the next verse here, 19:26, what Ezekiel was telling them was that God gave them up to their own rebellious ways. An example of that was giving them Saul as king, with a large dose of warnings about the consequences that would follow, and they chose to proceed with having a king. God sanctioned what they demanded, at the same time telling them how badly it would go. Notice that the phrase in 19:32, “Let us be like the nations,” is right out of 1 Samuel 8:5, 20.

As previously in chapter 14, the elders who came to Ezekiel were rejected by God in 20:31, because while their mouths sought divine guidance, their hearts were far from him.

God affirmed that he would in fact reign over Israel in v33-34. The outstretched arm of God was ultimately expressed as Jesus in the flesh, who came to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. There is redemption in Christ, but also condemnation for rejecting him. Once again Ezekiel spoke of the high and holy mountain of God in v40, God’s dwelling that is beyond the heights of Jerusalem (which isn’t very high). Those who would gather to the mountain of God would be from all nations where Israel had been scattered (v41), and it would be “all the house of Israel,”

not just the remnant of the southern tribes. That amounted to calling in the nations where the northern tribes had been scattered and lost their identity.

Ezekiel noted that his prophecies of death and destruction were being largely dismissed by his hearers who derided him as “a maker of parables” (v49). The greater Son of Man was likewise a maker of parables whose teachings and warnings were dismissed by many, but proved true nonetheless.

Ezekiel 21-22

The series of prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem begun in chapter 13 continue in Ezekiel 21-22. A complete destruction of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah was imminent (21:3-4). The sword of the LORD was drawn from its sheath, and would not be sheathed again until it had done its complete work. What was true of Judah then will be true of all the nations when the Lord returns with his sword unsheathed (Revelation 19:15). This is reminiscent of Isaiah’s message that God’s (s)Word always accomplishes the purpose for which it is sent (Isaiah 55:11). Sometimes that purpose is judgment.

Once again in 21:25-26 the reigning prince, Zedekiah, stood condemned ... but the chosen Ruler would come at the right time (21:27). Before he came to whom judgment belongs (see John 5:22) there was to be ruin in Jerusalem (21:27). The judgment on Judah would soon be poured out with similar results in Ammon (21:28-32), the descendants of Abraham’s nephew Lot, who were perpetual enemies of Israel. Unlike Israel, no remnant was promised to restore Ammon.

Ezekiel 22 – The son of man was again called upon to play out the divine role of judging “the bloody city,” Jerusalem. Blood guilt and idolatry polluted the city. The blood of innocents, the blood of the oppressed, injustice, abuse of power, tainted Jerusalem and made her loathsome not only to God but even to other (pagan) nations. The people in power abused their power for gain (v6) and there was not honoring of parents, no compassion for refugees or foreigners among them, no help for the fatherless and widows. God’s people are called upon individually and collectively to seek justice, to show mercy, to be hospitable to the needy, even the needy foreigners. The list of sins in v1-12 are a prelude to Paul’s message in Romans 1:18-32, sins great and small that contribute to the downward spiral of people and nations who wander from God.

The scattering of Israel among the nations (22:15) had a purpose, to purge their collective uncleanness. The LORD was seeking precious sliver, but what he had was baser metals that needed to be smelted in a hot furnace (22:17-22) to remove the dross. Paul restates this theme for the New Covenant in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15.

The prophets colluded together to sell lies, fake news as it were, to a public eager for their misdirection. Prophets and rulers were preying on the lives of people willingly misled, who didn’t want to change in the ways God’s prophets were telling them. Essentially the same story as the political scene in the 21st century. There were no political solutions to the sin problems that plagued them, these were heart problems. As in v30, there was no man among them to bring salvation... the wall builder would have to be supplied by God himself (see also Isaiah 59:18).

No man could or would stand in the breach, so God sent Jesus to do what no one else could. He's still the only answer today to the real problems of this nation and every nation, no matter what the prophets of the day may say.

Once again in v31, the horrors coming upon Jerusalem were of their own choosing.

Ezekiel 23-24

These two chapters conclude the collected series of prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem that began in chapter 13. The sins of Israel, of Judah and Jerusalem, of the elders, prophets, princes and priests have been broadly described and condemned. Chapter 23 continues the diatribe, casting the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the role of 2 sisters married to the same husband, the LORD. This reflects back on Jacob who married sisters, Leah and Rachel. Except these two sister wives are altogether immoral and unfaithful, engaging in adultery and prostitution through idolatry and through political alliances with ungodly nations. Some of the descriptive language in chapter 23 is brutally graphic, conveying the utter wretchedness of idolatry and immorality and injustice.

The names Oholah and Oholibah both have the Hebrew word for "tent" as their root. Those people were supposed to be God's dwelling place on earth, but instead they opened their tent doors to everyone and everything except God. Oholah was Samaria/Israel, and Oholibah Judah/Jerusalem.

Israel and her affair with Assyria are described first, 23:5-10, making the point that the Assyrian destruction of Israel and deportation of survivors began with the king of Israel making overtures of political alliance with the Assyrian king. Once the king of Assyria had the bribe offered by Israel for assistance against Syria, the Assyrians turned on Israel and subjugated them. Their policy of working out their own salvation rather than turning to the LORD backfired.

Then Judah is portrayed in v11-35, again with very graphic language and descriptions of her behavior. Her downfall, like a woman attracted to "bad boys," was also self-inflicted. She tried to have a brief fling with Babylon but Babylon wanted more, and took it by force. God was disgusted with both sisters (23:18), and saw in them the same tendencies that had made the Exodus generation long to return to Egypt rather than depend on God. Consequently, God's furious judgment was descending upon Jerusalem in the form of the very "lovers" she had previously invited (23:24-27). As in previous prophecies, the message is "you brought this on yourself" in v35. Notice the correlation in 23:40 with Jezebel's last day. Jerusalem was much like the self-absorbed Phoenician princess.

In contrast to the wicked men/nations who patronized the perverse women (23:43-44), righteous men will judge and condemn the adultery and bloodshed of the sisters and their lovers. Consider Matthew 19:28, Revelation 2:26-27, 20:4, 1 Corinthians 6:2-3.

Ezekiel 24 is dated as a message received January 15, 588 BC. Late in the 9th year of Ezekiel's exile, which began in 597 BC. Hundreds of miles away the king of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem on that day, and Ezekiel was to record the message and the date as a sign that God was

revealing truth to him, knowledge he could have had from no other source.

In a previous vision (11:3ff), Ezekiel had seen leaders in Jerusalem proclaiming themselves the good meat in the pot, and thinking the walls of their pot were like strong iron, but God repudiated that false notion of quality and of safety. In chapter 24 the imagery of the pot is revisited, and the LORD said the pot was corroded by shedding of blood and there was nothing good in it, the pot which was the city. The divine response was a fierce cleansing by fire, consuming even the bones to purge the pot of its corrosion.

Then, another vision of doom in Ezekiel 24:15ff, and a very sad tale it is. Ezekiel was going to experience the personal tragedy of losing “the delight of your eyes”. His wife was going to die that night, and it would be the same night that Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (August 14, 586 BC). Ezekiel was not to engage in any of the typical mourning customs, thus confusing his neighbors and causing them to ask why he behaved as he did. The explanation was that they themselves would be utterly shocked and not know how to respond when the news that their beloved home, Jerusalem which longed to return to, and the families and friends they’d left behind, had been utterly destroyed. Ezekiel marked the day in an unforgettable way, and then a fugitive from the fallen city arrived some days later it would affirm again the Ezekiel spoke the words of God (24:26-27).

Ezekiel 25-27

The previous chapters, 13-24, are a collection of prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem, Ezekiel’s own people. Chapters 25-32 are prophecies against other nations, Ammon, Moab, Edom/Seir, Tyre (and Sidon), and Egypt. The lengthiest prophecies are collections directed against Tyre (26-28) and Egypt (29-32).

Ezekiel 25:1-7 predicts the downfall of Ammon, Israel’s neighbor and cousin to the east. Ammon was happy to see the destruction of Jerusalem (v3), God’s sanctuary, and their attitude would bring the same destruction down on their own heads, except that while Israel was promised a remnant and renewal, Ammon had no such promise.

Ezekiel 25:8-11 predicts the same fate as Ammon for Moab, another cousin of Israel on the east side of the Jordan, and Seir, or Edom, the land and descendants of Esau. They too chose to overlook God’s centuries of providence for Israel and regard Jerusalem as mundane despite God’s presence there.

Ezekiel 25:12-14 condemns the kingdom of Esau’s descendants for longstanding hostility against Judah and an attitude of spiteful vengeance against God’s chosen people. For their hearts set on vengeance, they would experience divine vengeance.

Ezekiel 26 begins a series of prophecies against Tyre that continue through chapter 28. The first of the series is in Ezekiel’s 11th year of exile, 587-586 BC. In that year Jerusalem was under siege and fell to the Babylonian army, and was then destroyed and burned. Tyre, the center of the Phoenician kingdom and trade empire, celebrated the fall of Jerusalem as an opportunity for profit. The LORD promised the diminishing and desolation of Tyre, not all at once but by many

nations in succession, like waves of the sea (26:3). The process began with Nebuchadnezzar and was continued by successive empires, with the conquest of the island fortress of Tyre by Alexander 2 1/2 centuries after Ezekiel, and the final crushing of the Phoenician kingdom by Rome 2 centuries after that. Tyre had been the capital of a prosperous trade empire at least since the days of the judges of Israel, but her days were numbered because of pride and greed, and her glory would diminish wave after wave, until she was destroyed.

Notice Nebuchadnezzar's title in 26:7. As God's servant he was made king of kings for a time. There is another king of kings who reigns over all nations forever.

The reaction of the traders who profited from Tyre in 26:16-18 is very much like the reaction of those who prospered from the world city of Babylon in Revelation 18:17-19. Tyre's demise is not just the physical process, but going "down to the pit" (26:20), into Sheol or Hades. In contrast, there is that promise of renewal for the living who've been redeemed from "the pit" and occupy "the land of the living" (v20).

Ezekiel 27 is another prophecy against Tyre, a lament for her downfall. As will be stressed again in chapter 28, a big problem for Tyre was the arrogance (27:3b-4). She was like a magnificent ship made of magnificent materials and manned by skillful sailors, maintained by artisans. Her trade, wealth, and influence spanned the Mediterranean Sea from east to west and south to north, and extended by roads into Arab kingdoms and distant lands. But the mightiest ships can be broken by wind and wave, no matter how great their cargo, and v26ff describes the wreck of the ship that was the Tyrean trade empire, with all her wealth and all her allies. Again, the wealthy and powerful of the nations bemoaning the fall of Tyre in v28ff is very much like the wailing for Babylon, the city of idols and greed in Revelation 18.

Ezekiel 28-30

Ezekiel continues the series of prophetic utterances against Tyre (chapters 26-28) with a lament for the king of Tyre. Just as Tyre had much in common with Babylon (Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51, and Babylon in Revelation 18-19), so also the prince/ruler of Tyre had much in common with the king of Babylon (see Isaiah 14) and with the dragon (see Revelation 12). The "prince" of Tyre in Ezekiel 28:2 in the Septuagint Greek version of the Old Testament is the "archon" of Tyre. In the New Testament that language is used to identify Michael as "arch-angel" (archangel, or prince of angels) in Jude 1:9, and to identify Satan as "archon demon" (arch-demon or prince of demons) in Matthew 12:24-26, and in Ephesians 2:2 Satan is "archon" of the power of the air.

The core sin of the prince of Tyre is pride (28:2) and his heart was like the heart of a god... but which god? As we read of his splendor and beauty and wisdom it's beyond any human reality, and so while it does describe the downfall of the ruler of Tyre it also describes a pattern of pride and rebellion, the pattern that began with the serpent in the garden in Genesis 3. In his craftiness and pride he (the serpent) determined to chart his own course in opposition to God. It is consistent to read the description of the downfall of the ruler of Tyre (and of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14) as recapitulating the downfall of the one we call the devil or Satan. He was in the garden of God, on the mountain of God, as a mighty guardian, a cherub (v13-14). Remember that Ezekiel had a notion of the beauty of cherubim from his own visions of God's throne in chapters

1 and 10. But the ruler turned from beauty to greed, from perfection to unrighteousness, and so he was cast out as profaned. For “the stones of fire” remember Ezekiel’s vision of the throne chariot of God and Isaiah’s throne room vision in Isaiah 6. Remember too, in thinking of the pride that was the downfall of Satan and the king of Babylon and the ruler of Tyre (and in 29 the king of Egypt) the warning given for potential elders in the church in 1 Timothy 3:6.

Sidon was also a Phoenician city state (28:20-24) along with Tyre, and she too would be humbled by the glory of God. Notice the promise of New Covenant renewal, the new creation, in v24 when the thorns of the cursed ground in Genesis 3 will no longer plague God’s people. Again, in 28:25-26 there is the promise of a new world to come, God’s people united and prospering, while the nations who oppose them are subject to divine judgment.

Ezekiel’s prophecy against Pharaoh in chapter 29 is very close to the events of Jeremiah 32-33, in the 10th year. Ezekiel’s calendar was a prophetic sign, as he dated predictions and then later his fellow exiles heard of the things he foresaw taking place on schedule hundreds of miles away. So the prophecy against Pharaoh is dated January 7, 587 BC (on our calendar). Jerusalem was under siege, and the Egyptians had briefly marched north, causing a short break (3 months) in the siege as Babylonian forces pursued the Egyptian army back to Egypt. But the Pharaoh’s strategy failed and the Babylonian returned to Jerusalem and resumed the siege.

The prophecy against the king of Egypt, like that against the ruler of Tyre, is cast in supernatural terms. Pharaoh was seen as a great dragon in the Nile, as Satan was later seen by John as a great red dragon. This dragon, this sea monster, is going to be hooked by God, like a fish (recall Job 41:1-2). All his supplicants, like the traders of Tyre and of Babylon, will be judged along with him. Casting the great water dragon into the desert is like the imagery of Psalm 74:12-14 which has reference both to the flood of Noah, when the remains of hordes of ancient monsters (we call them dinosaurs) were left in heaps in the wilderness, and a reference to the Red Sea overwhelming the Egyptian army that pursued Israel.

Egypt’s problem included offering false hope to Israel (29:7ff) by promising them strength to withstand their perceived enemies, when it was God’s will that they humble themselves and yield to his discipline. Like the devil regarding the kingdoms of the world as his own, the Pharaoh said, “the Nile is mine” (v3, 9), but like the devil he didn’t have the power to keep what he claimed.

God did not promise total desolation of Egypt as he did Babylon and Ammon, but a generation, 40 years, of being broken. Eventually Egypt would be a kingdom again, but never again with her former glory.

Ezekiel’s prophecy in 29:17 is dated April 26, 571 BC. His own 27th year of exile, and almost 16 years after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Nebuchadnezzar had spent those 16 years with an army besieging Tyre, but never able to completely defeat the sea-faring Phoenicians. Remember that Ezekiel had predicted the enemies of Tyre coming against her like waves of the sea, and Nebuchadnezzar had done his part, so God gave him a consolation prize in Egypt’s wealth. God had stated in Jeremiah that Nebuchadnezzar was his servant, and here he affirms that Nebuchadnezzar and his army were doing the LORD’s work (29:20).

29:21 proffers a reminder that God isn't forgetting the restoration of Israel in all of these epic events. Israel's horn would not come from Egypt, Egypt was never their answer.

Ezekiel 30 again relates to Egypt, a day of judgment coming upon her. Nebuchadnezzar would break her power and plunder her wealth (v10ff).

Chronologically the prophecy in Ezekiel 30:20ff takes us back to April 29, 587 BC, when Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, but briefly broke the siege to break the advance of the Egyptian army. God foretold the continued diminishing of Egypt with not recovery.

The prophecies against Egypt and Pharaoh continue in chapter 31-32.

Ezekiel 31-33

Ezekiel 31 and 32 continue the series of prophecies against Egypt and Pharaoh that began in chapter 29. The prophecy in Ezekiel 29:1ff was dated January 7, 587 BC. Then the prophecy in 30:20ff was given April 29, 587 BC, 3 ½ months later, and the prophecy in 31:1ff was given June 21, 587 BC, 2 months later. During those months the Babylonian army was engaged against Jerusalem.

In Ezekiel 31 Pharaoh's greatness is first compared to that of Assyria, which had been fully defeated 20 years earlier by Nebuchadnezzar's father. The imagery of the great tree shading the animals and the nations is used of other great kingdoms, including Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon (Daniel 4 for example) and including the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:31-32).

In Ezekiel 28 the prince/ruler of Tyre was likened to a guardian cherub (cherub is singular for cherubim, the mighty living creatures who are the honor guard of God's throne) in Eden on the Mountain of God. Describing Assyria, and the impending fate of Pharaoh, Eden once again comes up in 31:8-9 and 31:16ff. Despite its beauty and greatness, Assyria was cast down by God's decree, through the agency of Babylon, "a mighty one of the nations." Every nation on earth is subject to the same destiny, nations like humans are mortal and subject to death (31:14), going down to the pit (Sheol or Hades).

The main point of the prophecy is the humbling of nations who become smug and inflated with their own self-importance, whether Assyria or Egypt or any nation today. However, we have interesting snippets about Eden in the allegories the LORD gave the prophet. In chapter 28 we had mention of a mighty cherub, full of beauty and cleverness in Eden, who yielded to greed and pride and lost his place. There the Garden of Eden was identified with a location on the mountain of God (28:13-14). This makes sense in connection with Genesis 2, where the Garden enclosed the headwaters of a river that divided into 4 rivers. Such a headwater would have to be on a mountain. In Ezekiel 31 the end of Eden correlates with the account of the world wide cataclysmic deluge in Genesis 6-8 when everything on the face of the earth was destroyed with water, and a new world emerged with no trace of the old (except remnants buried in what became sedimentary and igneous rock). What happened to Eden and the Garden of God? It is described as having gone down to the depths, being swallowed up into "the world below"

(31:16-18). As God's beautiful garden had been buried, never to be seen in this world again, so also Assyria had gone down to Sheol, and so also would the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt.

Incidentally, while using the language of allegory, this description of Pharaoh's fate asserts that there is conscious existence after death, awareness and comfort for some, awareness and humiliation for others, just as Jesus also described in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19ff.

Ezekiel 32 gives a date of March 3, 585 BC, which is after the final fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah at about this time had prophesied the doom of Pharaoh Hophra (Jeremiah 44:30) by the hand of his enemies, which happened in 570 BC when he was assassinated by political rivals. In 32:2 Pharaoh is described as seeing himself as a lion, as Nebuchadnezzar was described (Jeremiah 4:7, and consider 1 Peter 5:8), and being a dragon of the seas (again recall Satan in Revelation 12-13). Again, the monster of the river was going to be hooked and netted by God's design, and destroyed because of his stubborn pride and unrighteousness. The cosmic imagery in 32:7-8 remind us of the 9th plague, and remind us of the coming day of the LORD when Jesus returns and judgment follows, and also remind us of the day Jesus died and overcame the great dragon, the ancient serpent.

While we may read the fouling of the waters in 32:2 as allegory for sin, and the cleansing in 32:14 as purging sin, we should not overlook that God gave us a pristine world to live in, and he disapproves of mankind fouling and destroying what he made and entrusted to us (consider Ezekiel 34:18-19, Revelation 11:18).

The prophecy in 32:17ff is dated to the 12th year, 586-585 BC, but no month specified in the Hebrew. The ancient LXX Greek version has April 27, 586 BC. Once again, Ezekiel warns of Egypt's doom, going down to the realm of the dead. As Assyria had gone before her, so Egypt would soon follow. Along with Assyria we have a litany of other nations and kingdoms that had lost their glory and departed into the realm of the dead in 32:22-32, each humbled and broken for their iniquities and their abuse of power.

The prophecies against the nations, chapters 25-32, concludes with the sad demise of Egypt. In chapter 33:1-9 the LORD recapitulated Ezekiel's role as a watchman for the exiles of Israel (Ezekiel 3:16-27), assigned to give warning, but as in chapter 18 the response to God's word rested upon each individual that heard it. Ezekiel was responsible for faithful telling, the people were responsible for listening and obeying, or not. The message of Ezekiel 18, that everyone is responsible for his own sins and everyone can choose to make correction or continue in rebellion, is restated here in 33:1-20. Everyone will be righteously judged by the Lord, 33:20. "Why will you die, O Israel?" (33:11)

The day anticipated in Ezekiel 24:26-27 (when Ezekiel's wife died even as Jerusalem fell, about 5 months earlier) happened in Ezekiel 33:21-22. January 8, 585 BC the news of Jerusalem's destruction reached Ezekiel and the exiles, as predicted. The limit God had set upon Ezekiel in 3:26 and mentioned in 24:7, hindering Ezekiel's personal speech, was removed that day.

Those who were still scattered refugees in the land of Judah likened themselves to Abraham

(33:24) with the grand notion of rebuilding a nation. The problem was they hadn't yet made any correction of their sins (33:25-26). As Ezekiel had already foretold years earlier in chapters 4-5, even those few hairs scattered on the wind would be harassed by wild beasts and sword and disease.

Ezekiel wasn't called to be an entertainer, but that's what the LORD said he was to the people who came to hear him proclaim the word of God. To them he was like a singer of love songs (at least some of his messages, the laments, were literally sang), with a beautiful voice (33:32). They found Ezekiel and his divine message entertaining, but weren't swayed by his warnings to actually repent and do God's will. Sounds familiar. Over and over again God had said they would know he is God when these things Ezekiel prophesied took place. This time he says that they will know a prophet has been among them. Ezekiel was exonerated as a prophet of God, not merely an entertaining preacher, by the work of God he faithfully related as a watchman.

Ezekiel 34-36

Chapter 34 begins with chastening of the leaders of Israel, shepherds who enrich themselves without caring for the flock, the sort of shepherds Jesus decried in John 10:12-13 who take without giving. It's right for shepherds to be sustained by their labor for the flock, it's not right to take from the flock without meeting the needs of the flock. 34:4 is pertinent to the responsibilities of the shepherds of the church toward the flock of God (1 Peter 5:1ff). Shepherds who don't guard the Lord's flock and care for the weak and seek the lost will be judged by the Chief Shepherd for their dereliction.

The Lord GOD, the Good Shepherd (John 10), Jesus the Son of God, came on the other hand (34:11-16) to seek the lost and bring them together into one fold under one shepherd. He fulfills the assurances of Psalm 23 for his people. When Jesus identified himself as the shepherd who seeks the lost sheep and the Good Shepherd he was certainly identifying himself as the fulfillment of Ezekiel's promise here.

The Good Shepherd is of course the Chief Shepherd as well, and he has authority to judge those sheep who are aggressive, competitive, and do harm to the flock (34:17-25, 1 Peter 5:1-4). Jesus is that one shepherd ruling as "my servant David." Not only is Jesus the Son of David, the name David means beloved, and the Father openly declared Jesus to be his beloved son.

The covenant of peace in 34:25-31 is that same new covenant we've read of before (Jeremiah 31:31ff/Hebrews 8:8ff), which Jesus ratified with his blood (Luke 22:20). The showers of blessing and covenant of peace belong to the followers of Jesus, both Jew and Gentile who obey the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

Chapter 35 is another testimony against the house of Esau, Mount Seir. Their desolation was at hand, and the Edomites or Idumeans would vanish, leaving nothing but ruins behind. Their punishment was rooted in loving to be at odds with their siblings, the Israelites. They "cherished perpetual enmity..." (v5) and "did not hate bloodshed" (v6) and coveted power over God's people (v10). In the moment of crisis Edom looked at Judah and relished the opportunity to take even more (v12) and God promised their recompense for their hubris would be in kind.

Chapter 36 foresaw a restoration of “the whole house of Israel” (v10) upon the mountains of Israel, which physically were substantially empty in Ezekiel’s generation. Israel had defiled the land (v16) by their sins, and God’s holy name required vindication (v21). And for his own name’s sake, God would act, though the people did not deserve it (v22). The cleansing of v24ff, with the new heart and new spirit is all about the gospel of Jesus Christ who washes us clean, circumcises our hearts, and gives us his spirit. Repentance is fundamental to the new beginning (v31). These promises in chapter 35-36 are in the “already but not yet” category, of things fulfilled in Jesus that bless us, but have not come to their fulness until he comes again to take us to himself. The Garden of Eden that went down to Sheol (31:16ff) is coming back, will be flourish again in the Lord’s kingdom (36:35), and his land will be filled with people who honor his holy name.

Ezekiel 37-39

Ezekiel 37:1-14 describes another visionary experience with language like that in 8:1 where Ezekiel was transported in the spirit to Jerusalem. “The hand of the LORD was upon me...”

The vision revealed to Ezekiel’s spirit by the hand of God was of a valley filled with dry bones. Ezekiel was to command the bones, in the name of the LORD to live. When he did so, the flesh grew on the bones and then at God’s command the son of man called for the breath (spirit) from the 4 winds (everywhere) to enter the reformed bodies and make them live. In the vision, Ezekiel did as he was commanded and saw the bones become living bodies, a great army.

The primary message of Ezekiel’s vision was to give hope to his generation. Israel appeared to be finished, dead, with no future, but God again promised new life for Israel, a resurrection from the dead.

There are additional messages in this vision. The “whole house of Israel” in 37:11, as we had in 36:10 and will have in 39:25 and 45:6 connects to the ultimate restoration in the messiah’s kingdom, not just the initial small return to the land in the days of Ezra. “The whole house of Israel” require bringing in people of all nations (the four winds in v9) because much of Israel had been assimilated into the nations. The short term message of new life for Israel really looked forward to Israel in Christ, newly alive and newly complete.

Another message not to overlook is the affirmation of bodily resurrection. Several other prophets including Isaiah and Daniel have definite promises of bodily resurrection for the righteous and the unrighteous. Ezekiel’s allusion to opening graves and raising the dead at the divine command of the son of man (37:12-14) anticipates the claim Jesus made that he, the Son of God, would call the dead from their graves (John 5:21, 25-29). Jesus calls people from death to life in the gospel (Romans 6:1ff), and puts his Spirit in them; and at the last day when he comes on the clouds he will call all the dead to come out of their graves and stand before him.

Ezekiel 37:15-27 has Ezekiel once again acting out a divine message. This time 2 sticks are bound together to become one, the divided kingdom of Ephraim/Joseph/Israel and Judah. In literal terms the promise is problematic, since the house of Joseph had been dispersed and

swallowed up among the nations. There were a few survivors of northern Israel among the Jews, but the bulk of the descendants of Joseph were either mixed with the nations, like the Samaritans, or had lost their identity among the Medes and others, wherever they'd been displaced by the Assyrians. Once again, the only way to unify Israel and Judah into one "stick" was by bringing in the nations (as anticipated in the Great Commission and reported in Acts). The two becoming one was echoed by Paul when wrote of Jew and Gentile becoming one "new man" in Ephesians 2:13-22). The one king to rule them all is Jesus (v22, 24; Acts 2:34-36, Revelation 19:16). The Lord does not have two flocks, two peoples, he had one flock under one shepherd (John 10:15-16), purchased by the blood of the Lamb (Acts 20:28). The repeated promise for God's new covenant nation, "I will be their God and they shall be my people" is stated again, a promise applied to the church in the New Testament.

It is worth contemplating that the two sticks becoming one might anticipate the typical Roman cross where the blood of the covenant was poured out, two sticks that made one tree upon which the prince of glory died for his people.

The "everlasting covenant" (Ezekiel 37:26) is the covenant of Christ (Hebrews 13:20) and the land, "their land," is the whole world (Matthew 5:5, 13:38, 28:18-20).

Ezekiel 38-39 describe enemies of God's people coming against them in overwhelming force, naming a leader, Gog, and a people, Magog.

Only one historical character in the Bible was ever named Gog, a descendant of Reuben in 1 Chronicles 5:3-4. Other than being a descendant of Reuben, the eldest son of Jacob, nothing is known about Gog. Perhaps this is ironic, but there is nothing factual we can build from the name "Gog."

Most versions, including the KJV, NIV, and ESV call Gog "chief prince of Meshek and Tubal." However, one version, the NKJV, transliterates the Hebrew word for "chief" as "Rosh" and states that Gog is "prince of Rosh, Meshek and Tubal." The Hebrew word translated "chief" or transliterated "Rosh" is found hundreds of times in the Hebrew Bible and is usually translated as "head" or "top" or "chief," including many instances in Ezekiel. However, in the recent past some premillennialist interpreters made an etymological leap and decided, without evidence, that in this one place the Hebrew "rosh" was a geographical reference to Russia and again without historical or etymological evidence that "Meshek" should be equated with "Moscow." Hence a whole new line of prophetic interpretation was birthed in the mid 20th century cold-war, with a presumed invasion of the Holy Land led by Russia and the Russian ruler, Gog. Again, there is no historical or linguistic basis for these very recent assertions.

In Genesis 10:1-5 we have mention of Magog as a son of Japheth. Traditionally, Magog has been associated with Scythian people who inhabited the Caucasus and adjacent regions southeast of the Black Sea in antiquity. After millennia of wars and migrations it is not possible to identify Magog with any particular nation or people group in the modern world. It is impossible to identify Gog or Magog with a particular historical character or people group in the modern world. Perhaps that's not the point.

What we do have in Ezekiel 38-39 is a host of enemies from the nations of the world attempting to annihilate the people of God who themselves are “gathered from many peoples” (38:8). The same names and imagery are evoked again in Revelation 20:7-10, where the aggressors against “the camp of the saints” (which would be God’s people “in the wilderness”, Revelation 12:6, 14, 17). And we have divine intervention to break and destroy the forces of evil that oppose the people of God. As in Revelation 12-20, every assault against the faithful fails and those who attack God’s people are consumed by fire from heaven (Ezekiel 39:6, Revelation 20:9). They suffer the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of the adversaries of Elijah. The day of divine retribution upon the nations is coming (39:8). Note that all the weapons of war are weapons of wood that can be gathered and burned, and the end of war and of weapons of destruction are the culmination of the kingdom of God (Isaiah 9:5-6, 2:4, 11:9).

The process of burning and burying and cleansing in 39:9-20 describes the depth of depravity humanity has sunk to, that so much desolation needs to be removed and the habitations of man and beast restored to pristine order. In some sense this is in accord with the work of the heirs of the kingdom Jesus alluded to in some of his parables, as for example in the rewards of responsibility and authority given in the parables of the talents and the minas.

Remember that God’s glory departed from the temple in geographic Jerusalem in Ezekiel 11:22-23. Here in Ezekiel 39, as God delivers his people from the rebellious nations, he establishes his glory among the nations (v21). This process of deliverance and victory may seem long to us (see 2 Peter 3), but it is in progress, having begun when God poured out his Spirit (v29; Acts 2:17-33, 10:45, Romans 5:5, Titus 3:5-6).

Ezekiel 40-42

The rest of Ezekiel, chapters 40-48, are all a continuous vision, a single narrative, describing the coming Prince, the temple he would build, and renewed priesthood, and the distribution of sacred land to God’s holy people.

Beginning at the end, in this vision of the new temple in chapter 47 Ezekiel saw a life-giving river of water flowing from the temple (47:1-12). This river flowing from the temple had trees growing on both sides of the river that had green leaves and fruit every month, whose leaves were for healing. This is the same imagery we have of the throne of God in the new Jerusalem in Revelation 22:1-2, so we should consider that just as the vision of attack upon God’s holy people in Ezekiel 38-39 is paralleled by a similar account in Revelation 20:7-10, so also Ezekiel’s description of the place where God dwells among his people is paralleled by a similar account in Revelation 21-22.

The vision in Ezekiel 40:1 is set at the beginning (Rosh) of the year (Hashanah). Despite what Rabbinic Judaism now calls Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Trumpets in the fall, ancient Jews followed the divine edict and began the new year in the spring, as directed in Exodus 12-13 when the Passover was set up. The date of the vision was April 28, 573 BC, 25 years after Ezekiel was taken into exile, and the 14th year after Jerusalem was defeated and destroyed. This date, the 10th of the 1st month, is the day when the Passover lamb was to be consecrated (Exodus 12:3). That appears to be the day of Jesus “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem. In Ezekiel’s day (as also today)

it was impossible to actually celebrate Passover because there was no temple under the Jewish covenant. That would be part of the point of choosing this day for the vision of the new temple.

Ezekiel had previously been taken to the city (of Jerusalem) in visions (chapters 8-11), and shown the reality of how things were at that time. This vision took him to “the city” (40:1) and showed him a visionary future, not the then current reality of a ruined city.

Jerusalem is not literally built on a “very high mountain” (40:2), at an elevation of about 2500 feet, but the idealized future Jerusalem where God dwells among his people is often seen in the prophets as the highest of mountains, as in Isaiah 2:2. John also saw the new Jerusalem, “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb,” when he was carried away in the Spirit to “a great high mountain” (Revelation 21:10). With the city of the southern slope of the mountain, the high mountain rises to the north (recall Psalm 48:1-2).

In 40:5 Ezekiel states that the measuring cubit for the temple and structures he saw was the long cubit, sometimes called the royal cubit, about 21”.

The structure Ezekiel saw had numerous side rooms and chambers (40:7, 21, 29, 36, 38, 44, 41:3, 6, 10, 42:1, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13. Recall Jesus words in John 14:2, “In my Father’s house are many rooms...” Some of the chambers are for the priests (Ezekiel 40:44-47), some would have been for temple vessels and treasure devoted to the LORD. Christians are described in all of these ways, and are encouraged to “store up treasure in heaven” (Matthew 6:20).

Like the tabernacle and Solomon’s temple, there were depictions of cherubim and of trees (41:18-19), connecting back to Eden and forward to the restoration of Paradise when God again is among his people.

The squared doorposts (41:21) are noteworthy. The doorposts will come up again in 45:19 as the place where blood of the sin offering is put, reminding us of the original Passover in Exodus 12, and of the blood of Jesus staining the “post” on which he was crucified as our Passover and our sin offering.

The altar Ezekiel saw in 41:22 was not the altar of incense, but rather the table where bread was presented perpetually before the LORD. There is no description of the altar of incense or the sea where priests washed repeatedly in this temple vision, suggesting that there is no longer a purpose for prayer, when this temple is completed, and no longer any uncleanness to be cleansed repeatedly.

We should appreciate the reality, the detail, of what Ezekiel saw of the work of God in these chapters. The LORD’s temple is grand and glorious, especially because it is filled with his glory. It is substantive, it is spacious, it is planned and executed according to divine purpose. No human ever has or ever will produced a temple like this, except the one called “the Prince” in these chapters (44:3, 45:7-9, 45:16-17, 45:22, 46:4-18, 48:21-22). The temple builder here on the highest of mountains is the Lord (John 2:18-22, Ephesians 2:22, 1 Timothy 3:15, Hebrews 3:3-6, Revelation 3:12).

When we read of the priests (40:44-46, 42:13-14, and again in chapters 43-44) we should

remember the fulfillment of the priesthood, the kingdom of priests, established under Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest (Hebrews 2:17-18, 4:14-5:10, Hebrews 7-10, 1 Peter 2:9-10, Revelation 1:5-6).

Ezekiel 43-45

Ezekiel had seen the glory of the LORD depart from the temple in his vision of chapters 8-11, out the east gate and over the Mt of Olives. As this future temple vision continues, chapters 40-48, 14 years after Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, Ezekiel saw the glory of the God of Israel coming back to the new temple, from the east (43:1-5). Notice the sound of the coming of God in 43:2 and consider the appearance and voice of the angel Jesus sent as his spokesman in Revelation 1:15. The voice of the glorified Jesus through his angel in John's vision is like the sound of the coming of the glory of God in Ezekiel's vision. The coming of the glory of God into his temple is reflected in both ends of Jesus' appearances, the glory he manifested as a man (John 1:14, 2 Peter 2:12-16), and the glory of his 2nd coming (Matthew 24:30). The coming of God's glory from the east, from the Mt. of Olives to the temple, is particularly highlighted in the story of the triumphal entry, Mark 11:1-11.

Ezekiel had seen a man "like bronze" who measured everything in the divine temple (40:3ff) and showed Ezekiel the temple and its services. While that "man" stood with Ezekiel in 43:6ff, a voice came from the temple, claiming that place (remember this temple is on a very high mountain, unlike geographic Israel) as his dwelling among his people forever.

The Israel of God's permanent dwelling place is utterly clean, pristine, undefiled (43:8-9, see Revelation 21:27, 22:14-15).

Note the purpose of the vision in 43:10-11. This was never accomplished in the flesh of Israel, but only in the redemption of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The consecration of the altar in 43:18-27 echo the ordination of the original tabernacle, and Aaron and his sons in Leviticus 8-9. The 8th day of 43:27 restarts the priesthood from Leviticus 9:1. The day of Jesus' resurrection was the 8th day, the day after the Sabbath, which John highlighted in the account of Jesus' appearances to his disciples, the 2nd group appearance being on the 8th day, a week after the resurrection (John 20:26). The priesthood had been defiled and broken by the burgeoning corruption of the days of Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel, and continued in Malachi and centuries later in Jesus' generation. A reset was necessary, and was accomplished when Jesus was called by the Father to be a high priest forever.

The prince who alone has the authority to enter by the gate God himself entered in 44:1-3 foretells the Messiah, who is given all authority, including the authority to judge, which sitting in the gate implies. While he alone is worthy, he has nevertheless invited his followers to share his bread in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 26:27-29).

Ezekiel 44:9-14 explains consequences for the whole family of Levites who defiled their responsibilities before God, and a diminished role for them in the future Prince's temple, while 44:15-31 recasts the priesthood as a remnant section of the sons of Aaron. Zadok was the priest who upheld God's will and helped secure a peaceful succession from David to Solomon in 1

Kings 1. A different family of priests, heirs of the family of Eli, were disqualified from service at that time. Similarly, the Lord's true temple would have only faithful priests who honored the holiness of God and his sanctuary in their lives, in their dress, in every way. The inheritance of the priests (44:28) is the Lord God, and so things devoted to him are for their use. Remember again the new covenant priesthood, 1 Peter 2:9.

The precincts of the temple, including the housing of the priests, is all presented as squares and rectangles in 45:1-6, everything divided fairly and equitably and without dispute, as God apportions it. The great portion is allotted to the Prince in 7-8 as his by right, with an idea echoing what Nathan said to David in 2 Samuel 12:8, where the Lord asserted he had given David everything he had, and was willing to give more, yet David had abused his power to take what was not his. The kingdom of heaven will have no more such abuses of power.

Again, noting an original purpose of the vision, this remade temple and city of God is to help persuade people, and the rulers especially (45:9-12) to do justice and love mercy, to use consistent and honest standards, to stop oppressing the weak and powerless for their own gain, and to trust God by doing what's right.

The Prince receives offerings from the sanctified people in 45:13-16 (see Hebrews 13:14-16) and in turn he provides all the offerings for the people, 45:17.

Remembering that this vision was given on the 10th day of the first month, when the Passover lamb should be set apart, we now come to the plans for the Passover in the temple of glory. Note that the square doorposts mentioned in 41:21 received the blood of the Passover sin offering in 45:18-19. The priest who did this for the new temple is Jesus, and he himself is that sin offering (see Hebrews 10:12, and context, 9:23-10:14). What begins at Passover in Ezekiel 45:21-23 is then repeated at the feast of booth/tabernacles in the 7th month, 45:25, signifying the full circle of the holy calendar, from 1st to last, from the incarnation to the 2nd coming when the tents (bodies) in which we live in this world will be transformed into immortal bodies (2 Corinthians 5:1-10).

Ezekiel 46-48

The sacrificial services of the new temple pertaining to the Prince and the priests and servants and people are described in chapter 46. We see sacrifices reminiscent of those described in Leviticus 1-7, and Leviticus 23, and especially Numbers 28, but shifted and expanded in various ways, under the Prince. The prescribed numbers and quantities are generally greater than those prescribed for the previous sanctuary services, including the stricture "as much as he is able" in v7. What sort of sacrifices does our Prince present week by week and month by month? What he brings before the Father depends on what his people bring to him (chapter 45:16-17).

The Prince comes and goes by the (inner east) gate whose posts he sanctified (45:19, 46:2), which no one else can use. Everyone else comes in from north or south, and proceeds through to the opposite side, not turning back. While the Prince has his own unique access, he enters and leaves with the people (v10). There is something of Jesus' words in Luke 9:23 and 9:62 in this picture.

The idea of permanent inheritances (46:16-18) had been a concept of the Law that is reemphasized for the new covenant. The Lord's prophets deplored those who deprived people of their family inheritance and expanded their wealth through accumulating lands and houses of others, with no restoration in the year of jubilee. The Lord has an inheritance for his people that will not be taken away.

Among the ideas of sacred space and doing the right things with the right people in the right places in 46:19-24, there is also a bit of Jesus' warning to his disciples in Matthew 7:6. Don't expect more of people than they are equipped to do.

Chapter 47, like Revelation 22, describes life giving water flowing out from the presence of God. Ancient Jerusalem had the Gihon Spring outside the wall of the city, which in the days of Hezekiah was channeled through rock into the city, creating the Siloam Pool. There was no water directly flowing to or from the temple, no river close to Jerusalem. This temple and this Jerusalem though has water flowing from it, east toward the Kidron Valley, and south toward the Dead Sea. Remarkably, the living water grows deeper as it flows out. This is also anticipated in Isaiah 55, and for this current era of the kingdom, manifested in the church, the flowing river of water is the Holy Spirit that flows through and out of everyone who believes in Jesus (John 7:37-39). The water gives life, abundant life. Salt water is made fresh, and fish are abundant. I like to think of the abundant life in v9 in terms of the new creation, that the fullness of the kingdom will include, as Isaiah said, the lion and the lamb, the calf and the wolf, the child and the asp, all at peace. Heaven won't be a sterile static destination, but like the first creation full of life and vigor. At the same time, reading of the fishing in v10, one might also think of Jesus' calling the first four disciples, who were fishermen, and promising that they would catch men.

The tree of life as described in v12 (and named in Revelation 22) that overhangs the river reminds us of Eden, of course, and also of Psalm 1, where the godly person is like a fruitful tree planted by a river whose leaf does not wither and is fruitful. On the one hand, we look forward to sharing in that renewed Paradise where the tree of life grows (Revelation 2:7) for our healing, and at the same time as fruit-bearers in Christ we are to currently be God's tree of life in this world.

Ezekiel 47:13-48:29 re-imagines the divisions of the land, quite differently than the original divisions under Moses and Joshua in Numbers and Joshua. The placement of the tribes is a very different order, and they are essentially pictured as bands of land with straight east west boundaries, from Dan in the north to Gad in the south, and Judah north of the sacred space of the city, the temple, the prince, the priests, and the Levites, with Benjamin south of the holy precinct. None of this matches anything geographic that ever has happened, and once again, achieving this requires bringing the redeemed of the nations into the inheritance, since no one can truly be identified in the flesh as belonging to Ephraim or Zebulun, etc. In fact, people of non-Israelite descent who live as God's people are explicitly included in 47:22-23. The new Israel led by the Prince is ordered, and just, and immutable. The holy city itself has a garden (48:17-19) tended by people of every tribe who dwell in the city. This again is an Edenic connection, with the idea that the Garden was to be the center for humanity's growth into subduing the earth (Genesis 1:28), with order and harmony centered on God's Garden where the LORD walked with humans.

The 12 gates of the city (48:30-34) correspond to the gates of the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21:12. The area seen by Ezekiel (48:35) seems to have been a circular center, perhaps the perimeter of the mountain of God, whereas John heard a much larger square perimeter for the whole in Revelation 21:16. The name of the city, "The LORD Is There," is reflected in the ascription of Revelation 21:3. In Ezekiel's Hebrew the new name, "Yahweh Shammah" would sound similar to the old name, Jerusalem, "Yerushalayim."

And of course, that last sentence is what Ezekiel is all about. God dwelling among his holy people, with the dozens of repetitions that "you shall know that I am the LORD."