

EZEKIEL

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BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK SERIES

EZEKIEL

By

James E. Smith

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Robert E. Huffman

TO
RACHEL SMITH
the wife of my youth
and
the delight of my eyes
(Ezekiel 24:16-17)

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PREFACE

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

While Ezekiel virtually has been neglected by the church at large, it has come to be the happy hunting ground of cultists, critics and curiosity mongers. The modern negative critics regard Ezekiel as pivotal in their topsy turvy reconstruction of Old Testament history which views the tripartite priesthood as a scribal concoction from Babylon rather than a divine revelation from Sinai. Ezekiel is cited by self-styled "students of prophecy" as proof that God's plan for the future includes the modern Zionist movement (Jews returning to Palestine in unbelief), an imminent Russian invasion of Israel, and the re-institution of the Old Testament animal sacrificial system in a Temple shortly to be constructed in Jerusalem. Science fiction buffs have scoured the Book of Ezekiel in search of spaceships and extra-terrestrial beings who pawned themselves off as God. Mormons regard Ezekiel 37:15-23 as the prophetic allusion to the Book of Mormon (stick of Ephraim) being added to the Bible (stick of Judah). If for no other reason, the Book of Ezekiel merits careful study so that the man of God may be able to silence these modern day "empty talkers and deceivers" who are upsetting so many families today (Titus 1:10-11). The best defense against a thousand and one errors is the truth.

There is something more positive to be said in favor of diligent study of Ezekiel. The book is full of profound theology,

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

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

The format of this study guide has followed that of the author's earlier commentaries on Jeremiah-Lamentation (1972) and I & II Kings (1975) in the Bible Textbook Series. Each major section of the book is introduced by a paragraph designed to give an overview of the entire section. This is followed by the author's own translation, at least up to chapter 40. For the tedious "blueprint" chapters 40-48 the American Standard Version of 1901 has been followed with only minor adaptation. Verse by verse comments follow the translation of the individual units of the text.

The material here treated is divided into nineteen chapters. A review section has been included at the end of each chapter so that the student may gauge his comprehension of the major points of emphasis.

In preparing this study the author is particularly indebted to the excellent words of Fisch, Blackwood and Plumptre. To

PREFACE

condense footnotes as much as possible, a system of abbreviations has been employed. The abbreviations are listed in alphabetical order together with relevant bibliographical information at the end of this volume.

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Chapter One

THE PROPHET AND HIS PROPHECY

The study of a prophetic book is rewarding, but not easy. The serious student must be willing to take time to immerse himself in the historical context which gave birth to the book. He must attempt to walk awhile in the sandals of the prophet who wrote the book—to understand his motives and manners, his actions and attitudes. He must come to grips not only with what the book says to and about men, but also with what men have said about the book. All of this takes years of study. But, as the wise one has said, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. This first chapter contains an historical, biographical, and literary introduction to the Book of Ezekiel.

I. STEPPING INTO EZEKIEL'S WORLD

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

A. Judah Prior to the Deportation of Ezekiel

Ezekiel was born in the eighteenth year of Josiah, 621 B.C. Those were bright and promising days for the tiny Jewish state. The shock of seeing their sister kingdom to the north carried

away into the far corners of the Assyrian empire a century earlier had now largely disappeared. Young King Josiah had successfully thrown off the oppressive yoke of those same Assyrians. A vigorous religious reformation led by the prophets Zephaniah and Jeremiah, the priest Hilkiah, and the king himself seemed to be correcting the basic moral and religious flaws of the nation. Visible signs of idolatry had been purged from the land, but, as it turned out, not from the hearts of the people. The heroic efforts of that mighty coalition of crown, priest and prophets proved to be in vain. The reformation came to an abrupt halt and religious retrogression set in when Josiah met his untimely death as a result of the wounds received in the unfortunate and ill-advised battle of Megiddo in 609 B.C.

Josiah's second son Shallum was elevated to the throne by the people of the land. He assumed the throne name of Jehoahaz. At the end of three months Jehoahaz was deposed by Pharaoh Necho who was still encamped at Riblah about two hundred miles from Jerusalem.

Necho placed Eliakim, an older son of Josiah, on the throne of Judah as his vassal. Eliakim ruled under the throne name Jehoiakim. When Necho was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish on the Euphrates (Jer. 46:1), Jehoiakim shortly thereafter shifted his allegiance to the Babylonian sovereign. Daniel and several other prominent hostages were sent to Babylon at this time (Dan. 1:1). Jehoiakim served Nebuchadnezzar for three years (II K 24:1), probably the years 604-601 B.C. When the Babylonian king received a setback on the borders of Egypt, Jehoiakim withheld tribute and declared himself to be independent.

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

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

B. Judah After the Deportation of Ezekiel

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

The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: For they say, The Lord has forsaken the earth, and the Lord does not see.

That Ezekiel in no way exaggerated the corruption back in his native land painfully is attested by Jeremiah who lived through those dark days. In a vision the subjects of King Zedekiah were represented to the mind of this prophet as a basket of rotten figs (Jer. 24:8). By intellectual madness and spiritual sophistry the inhabitants of Judah had convinced themselves that *they* were special favorites of heaven to whom the land of Palestine had been given for a possession (Jer. 11:15); that their city was impregnable (Jer. 11:3). These delusions were stoked by false prophets. In Zedekiah's fourth year, exactly one year before Ezekiel began his ministry, one of these false prophets

dramatically announced in the Temple that God would shatter the yoke of the Babylon within two years (Jer. 28:1-4). In vain Jeremiah warned of the imminent overthrow of Jerusalem and the final deportation of its population (Jer. 21:7; 24:8-10; 32:3-5; 34:2-3).

Encouraged by the optimistic predictions of his favorite prophets, Zedekiah got involved in a treasonous coalition against Nebuchadnezzar. An embassy from the Kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon assembled in Jerusalem (Jer. 27:3). Unfortunately for Zedekiah, the plot was reported to the great king in Babylon. Zedekiah was required to make a trip to Babylon to set things straight with his overlord (Jer. 51:59) and renew his vassal pledge. Five years later Zedekiah reneged on his vassal pledge and openly broke with Babylon (II K 24:20). In this revolt Zedekiah was joined by Tyre and Ammon, and was supported by promises of aid from Pharaoh Hophra (Jer. 27:15).

Nebuchadnezzar was swift to move his army into Palestine to punish Zedekiah and the other rebellious vassals. The siege of Jerusalem was a gruesome ordeal which, with one brief interruption, lasted for eighteen months. On August 25, 587 B.C. the supposed impregnable fortress fell. Zedekiah was captured as he attempted to flee the city. He was taken in chains to Riblah where he watched his sons executed. He was then cruelly blinded, bound in chains, and carried off to Babylon (cf. Jer. 32:4 and Ezk. 12:13). Nebuchadnezzar showed no more pity on the citizens of Jerusalem. A pitiless massacre of Jerusalem's inhabitants followed the successful capture of the city. A month later the great king had the city walls and palaces razed and burned. Those who escaped the slaughter were herded off to join the captives on the river Chebar in Babylon. Only a handful of the poorest sort were left on their native soil (II K 25; II C 36; Jer. 39, 40, 52).

C. The Situation on the Chebar

Reactions among the Jews taken captive in 597 B.C. were mixed. Some of the more pious may have realized that their

removal from their homeland was a divine stroke against an apostate nation. They sat down by the rivers of Babylon and wept as they remembered the sacred precincts of Jerusalem (Ps. 137:1). Others continued in the old idolatrous ways of their fathers (Ezk. 20:30). While they pretended to be interested in the revelation of God's prophet, they were setting up idols in their hearts (Ezk. 14:4). They enjoyed his preaching (33:32), and pondered his parables (20:49), but they never intended to do as he directed them.

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

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

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

CHRONOLOGY OF THE EXILIC PERIOD

Biblical Events		Babylonian Events
Nebuchadnezzar marches triumphantly through the Hatti land; takes hostages — Daniel and others (Dan. 1:3)	604	
	602	Daniel made ruler over the province of Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.
Jehoiakim rebels against Nebuchadnezzar — bands of guerrillas are sent against Jerusalem (II Kings 24:2)	601	
December 9, Jehoiakim dies. He is succeeded by his son Jehoiachin.	598	
March 20, Jehoiachin surrenders to Nebuchadnezzar — 10,000 Jews go captive.	597	
Jeremiah sends a letter to the captives in Babylon.	596	
Zedekiah attempts revolt, is summoned to Babylon (Jer. 27:3ff., 51:59)	593	Ezekiel begins to prophesy
January 15, Nebuchadnezzar begins the final siege of Jerusalem.	588	
August 25-28 Jerusalem destroyed; third deportation to Babylon.	587	
Still more Jews are deported to Babylon	582	
	573	April 28, last dated event in the Book of Ezekiel (40:1)

CHRONOLOGY OF THE EXILIC PERIOD (continued)

Biblical Events		Babylonian Events
Daniel's vision of four beasts, a little horn, and the Son of Man (Dan. 7). Daniel's vision of the ram, the he-goat and a little horn (Dan. 8).	568	Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt
	562	Nebuchadnezzar succeeded by his son Amel-marduk; King Jehoiachin released from prison.
	560	Neriglissar comes to power.
	556	Nabonidus comes to power.
	549	Belshazzar begins to share the authority with his father Nabonidus.
Daniel's revelation of the seventy weeks (Dan. 9). Daniel's vision of the inter-testamental period (Dan. 10-12)	547	
	539	October 12, Belshazzar's feast; the fall of Babylon to Darius the Mede, an agent of Cyrus the Great; Daniel made one of three presidents.
	538	Cyrus' decree allowing the Jews to return home.
	536	

II. GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH EZEKIEL

The only source of information concerning the life of Ezekiel is the book which bears his name. Outside of his own book, he is mentioned only by Josephus¹ and Ben Sira,² neither of whom add any significant detail to the prophet's biography.

A. The Name Ezekiel

The fourth book of the Major Prophets, like two of its predecessors, takes its name from its principal prophetic figure and author. The Hebrew form of his name (*Yechezqe'l*) means *God strengthens*, or perhaps *God is strong*. In the Greek Old Testament the name appears as *Iezikiel*, and in the Latin Vulgate *Ezechiel* from which the English spelling is derived. Ezekiel is not mentioned by name by any other writer of Scripture and his name is used only twice in the book which he wrote. Another Ezekiel—a priestly dignitary of David's day—is mentioned in I Chronicles 24:16. It is possible, though not likely, that the prophet Ezekiel was named for the earlier namesake.

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

1. *Antiquities* X.5.1; 6.3; 7.2; 8.2

2. *Ecclesiasticus* 49:8

B. Ezekiel's Family and Station

Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was a priest before he was a prophet. Nothing is known of his father Buzi.³ Circumstantial evidence in the book would suggest that Ezekiel was of the Zadokite line of the priesthood.⁴ This line of priests was descended from Zadok the great priest of Solomon's day (I K 2:35), and ultimately from Eleazer the son of Aaron. The Zadokites came to prominence during the reformation of Josiah (621 B.C.) and they were no doubt considered part of the Jerusalem aristocracy. This accounts for the fact that Ezekiel was carried off to Babylon in 597 B.C.

Did Ezekiel have a ministry in Jerusalem prior to being carried away to Babylon? No certain answer to this question can be given. It has been suggested that Ezekiel became a Temple priest or at least a priestly trainee during the reign of King Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.). However, positive evidence that Ezekiel performed priestly functions before his deportation is lacking. The Rabbinic tradition⁵ that Ezekiel had already commenced his prophetic activity in Palestine likewise finds no support in the Biblical materials.

Unlike Jeremiah who was under divine directive not to marry, Ezekiel had a wife whom he tenderly cherished as "the desire of his eyes." It is not clear whether he was married at the time of his deportation; but the likelihood is that he married in Babylon. He may have chosen a wife in response to Jeremiah's letter to the exiles instructing them to settle down and marry. In the ninth year of his captivity, four years after he had begun his prophetic ministry, Ezekiel's wife died (chap. 24). There is no indication that any children were born to this union.

3. One Jewish tradition understands the name Buzi, "the despised one," to refer to Jeremiah. However, Jeremiah never married and fathered children.

4. Ezekiel 40:66; 43:19; 44:15, 16.

5. *Mekhilla Bo* 1b; Targum Ezekiel 1:3

C. The Shaping of Ezekiel

At this distance in time it is impossible to ascertain all the factors which made Ezekiel the man he was. However, it is clear from his writings that this prophet was deeply influenced by four circumstances in his early life. First, Ezekiel must have been deeply stirred by the heroic reform efforts of good King Josiah. This reformation began in the eighth year of the young king's reign, intensified in his twelfth year, and climaxed in his eighteenth year (621 B.C.). In this latter year Hilkiah the high priest found a lost lawbook in the Temple, and that lawbook became the basis for the most thorough-going reform movement ever launched in Judah. Ezekiel's childhood (up to about age thirteen) coincided with this vigorous governmental effort to bring tiny Judah back to the paths of spiritual fidelity.

It is also rather obvious that Ezekiel was deeply impressed by the elaborate Temple services in Jerusalem. Like the young Samuel, Ezekiel may have spent many of his boyhood hours assisting the priests in their Temple duties. At any rate, large blocks of his book betray his interest in priestly ritual.

During his youth Ezekiel would have been exposed to the energetic ministry of the prophet Jeremiah. It would not be going too far to suggest that Jeremiah, the priestly prophet from the Jerusalem suburb of Anathoth, was the teacher of Ezekiel. The two men lived in close proximity to one another for a quarter of a century. The stamp of Jeremiah can be seen in the form of words, phrases, sentences and even complete paragraphs in the Book of Ezekiel.

In assessing the influence that shaped the prophet Ezekiel one cannot overstate the importance of the prophet's deportation to Babylon. In 597 B.C. Ezekiel, along with King Jehoiachin and ten thousand skilled craftsmen, was carried off to the distant land of the Chaldeans. Ezekiel does not appear to have suffered much physically in foreign exile. He, like the other captives, was treated humanely and even kindly. Ezekiel was among those captives who settled in the city of Tel-Abib (3:15) in the midst of a fertile district near the river Chebar (1:3). Unlike his fellow

exiles, Ezekiel did not view the exile as a temporary and inconsequential setback for Judah. He had been indoctrinated by Jeremiah too thoroughly to accept that superficial view of the situation. He knew the exile and servitude to Babylon would last seventy years (Jer. 25:11). He knew that the deportation of 597 B.C. was the first stage of a process which climaxed in the overthrow of the Judaeen state and the destruction of Jerusalem. For five years Ezekiel kept silent in Babylon. He listened to others who claimed to be prophets—Ahab, Zedekiah, Shemaiah—proclaim speedy deliverance (Jer. 29). He surely must have read the letter written by Jeremiah to Babylon rebuking these deceivers and pronouncing God's judgment upon them for presuming to speak in the name of the Lord when they had received no message from God (Jer. 29). His confidence in the truthfulness of Jeremiah's message must have been strengthened when two of that trio of false prophets were seized by Nebuchadnezzar and roasted in a fire. The point is that Ezekiel had five years in Babylon to pray and meditate, to sift and sort, to ponder and evaluate and to seek to comprehend the full theological significance of what had already happened in 597 B.C. and what was about to happen in 587 B.C.

D. The Ministry of Ezekiel

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

Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah, and yet he never mentions the name of his co-laborer. He does mention Daniel

three times (14:14, 20; 28:3). The early sixth century before Christ saw a flowering of the prophetic institution the likes of which had not been seen since the mid-eighth century when Hosea, Amos, Isaiah and Micah were all flourishing. If the mid-eighth century has been called the golden age of Hebrew prophecy, the early sixth century could just as well be dubbed the silver age of the prophetic movement.

1. *The tone of his ministry.* Ezekiel understood his mission as being primarily, if not exclusively, to the Judaeans exiles in Babylon. His preaching was meant for their ears, and he worked among them as their prophet. The fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. was the pivotal event in the prophet's career, and that disaster served to divide Ezekiel's ministry into two distinct phases.

In phase one of his ministry (593-587 B.C.) Ezekiel was a prophet of doom. In various ways both by deed and word he announced that Jerusalem must fall. His threat seems unconditional. The exiles had to be freed from their dependence on the existence of Jerusalem and the Temple by destroying their confidence in the inviolability of the Holy City. Again and again he dashed to pieces the desperate hope of the exiles swiftly to be returned to their homeland. Ezekiel's basic thesis during these years was that sin had severed the union of Yahweh and Jerusalem. For the exiles to have faith meant to free themselves from their dependence on the Temple city, to understand the judgment upon it, and to accept that judgment as being the will and purpose of God.

Following the destruction of Jerusalem, the tone of Ezekiel's ministry changed. His audience was no longer overconfident and overbearing. They were crushed, despondent and spiritually shaken. The primary tenet of their man-made theology had been demonstrated to be false. Their faith was shattered. Ezekiel sought to comfort those who had lost hope by raising their vision to see the glorious future which God had in store for His people. He sought to guide those who wished to return to the Lord into proper channels. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel followed the path from a demand for repentance to a promise of deliverance.

2. *The preaching of Ezekiel.* As with most prophets, preaching played the primary role in the ministry of Ezekiel. "Prophets were not writers in the study, but rather impassioned speakers in the market-places."⁶ Twice Ezekiel was told to write something—the name of the day (24:2), names on two sticks (37:15-16)—but in so doing he was only underscoring or illustrating the spoken word. Once he was told to draw (21:18-23), but the sketch which he made in the sand only served as a visual aid to his preaching. However, dozens of times in the book Ezekiel is instructed by God to verbalize the divine message; *Prophecy . . . say* (6:2-3; 13:2; 34:2; 36:1); *Speak . . . say* (14:4; 20:3; 33:2); *Propound a riddle . . . speak an allegory . . . say* (17:2-3); *Take up a lamentation . . . say* (19:1-2). Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel probably had a scribe to date and record the various oracles which he delivered.

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

6. Weavers, NCB, p. 11.

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VARIETIES OF PROPHETIC ORACLES IN EZEKIEL		
TYPE OF ORACLE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Judgment Oracle	Commonly begins with a formula declaring divine hostility.	6:3b-7 21:3-5
Restoration Oracle	Begins with declaration of God's positive feelings or actions.	34:11-15 36:9-12
Commands	Usually serve to introduce a more lengthy oracle. Prophet is commanded to set his face against something and prophesy.	6:2-3 20:46-47 21:2, 3 25:2, 3 29:2, 3
Demonstration Oracle	Begins with <i>Because</i> clause and ends with <i>Therefore</i> statement which gives the reason for the judgment. Very common in Ezekiel.	
Prophetic Invective	A statement of condemnation by itself. An oblique declaration of judgment.	16:44-52 22:3-12
Woe Oracle	Introduced by <i>Woe to</i> . . . and usually involves some particular class in society.	13:3-7 34:2-6
Recital Oracle	Recounts past judg-	36:16-21

VARIETIES OF PROPHETIC ORACLES IN EZEKIEL (continued)		
TYPE OF ORACLE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
	ments of God. Hortatory in character.	
Situation Oracle	An oracle growing out of a specific situation.	22:17-22 30:21-26
Disputation Oracle	A popular proverb is first stated and then refuted.	12:22 Chap. 18 33:24
Prophetic Lament	The victim of divine judgment is addressed in the second person.	Chap. 19 Chap. 27 28:11-19 32:1-16
<i>Mashal</i> Oracle	An allegory or extended simile.	Chap. 15 Chap. 16 Chap. 17 31:3-9

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

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

SYMBOLIC ACTS IN EZEKIEL		
REFERENCE	SIGNIFICANCE	DESCRIPTION
4:1-3	The Siege of Jerusalem	Ezekiel sketches a diagram of Jerusalem and the siege against that city on a soft clay tablet. An iron pan was used to represent the wall of the city.
4:4-6	The Sin of God's People	Ezekiel lies on his right side 390 days and on his left side 40 days to symbolize the years of Israel's and Judah's sin.
4:9-12	The Famine in Jerusalem	Ezekiel to eat scant measure of bread made of inferior grains and baked over a fire kindled with dung.
5:1-4	The Fate of Jerusalem's Population	Ezekiel shaves the hair and beard. Some of

SYMBOLIC ACTS IN EZEKIEL (continued)		
REFERENCE	SIGNIFICANCE	DESCRIPTION
		the hair is burned, some chopped with the razor, scattered to the wind, and a few are bound in the prophet's skirt.
12:3-6	The Imminent Fall of Jerusalem	Ezekiel digs a hole through the wall of his house and in the evening stealthily slips through that hole with his meager belongings.
12:17-20	The Anxiety of Jerusalem	Ezekiel eats and drinks with quivering and anxiety.
21:19-20	The Military Decision of Nebuchadnezzar	Ezekiel made a drawing of a road with two branches and a signpost pointing the way to Jerusalem and Rabbah Ammon.
24:16-17	The Shock over Jerusalem's Fall	Ezekiel restrained himself from customary mourning when his wife suddenly died.
37:16-17	The Reunion of Israel and Judah	Ezekiel inscribed the names of Judah and Ephraim on two sticks

SYMBOLIC ACTS IN EZEKIEL (continued)		
REFERENCE	SIGNIFICANCE	DESCRIPTION
		and then held both sticks end to end so that they appeared to be one stick.

4. *The visions of the prophet.* Visionary experiences were also a prominent part of the ministry of Ezekiel. Each vision in the book is introduced by the technical phrase *the hand of the LORD was upon me*. There is no hint that Ezekiel experienced any traumatic physiological reaction to these visions as did Isaiah (chap. 21), Habakkuk (Hab. 3:16), and Daniel (Dan. 10:7, 8). Each vision account contains relevant interpretative oracles which are intended to convey some divine message to the prophet and/or his audience. Dialogue between God and the prophet in the visionary experience is common. While the vision itself was an individual experience, the telling of it was a prophetic revelation (cf. 11:25). Presumably Ezekiel related to the captives all of the visions which he received from God.

The prophetic vision was similar to but not identical with a dream experience. Categories of time and space become meaningless. Ezekiel could be physically in Babylon, but then suddenly in Jerusalem or on a high mountain (40:2), or in the midst of a valley (37:1). Scenes change rapidly and illogically. Time is compressed. The measuring of the New Temple would have taken considerable time, but in vision this is compressed into but a moment. Unlike a dream, the vision did not occur while sleeping (8:1). The prophet was conscious of entrance into and departure from the visionary state (cf. 8:1 with 11:24b).

Ezekiel's visions occur in four sections of the book. The book opens (1:1—3:15) with the vision of the magnificent

throne-chariot of God. This was Ezekiel's inaugural vision, the basis for his prophetic ministry. Chapters 8-11 contain the prophet's visions of the terrible abominations being practiced back in the Jerusalem Temple. The most famous vision in the book is undoubtedly that of the valley of dry bones (chap. 37). This vision sets forth in the most bold symbolism the resurrection of the nation Israel following the Babylonian exile. The Book of Ezekiel closes with a lengthy vision of a future Temple in a new era (chaps. 40-48). Ezekiel devotes more space to recording his visionary experiences than any other prophet in the Old Testament.

E. The Character of Ezekiel

Ezekiel was endowed with high intellectual capacity, clear perception, lively imagination, and eloquent speech. He certainly was acquainted with the sacred books, institutions and customs of his own people as well as the learning and culture of the world in which he lived. So accurate is his knowledge of Egypt and Tyre that one wonders if perhaps he had travelled to these places in his youth. Ezekiel possessed boundless energy, firm resolution, and amazing self-control (3:15, 24, 26; 24:18). He evidently was a man of deep personal humility as is indicated by the title applied to him some ninety-three times in the book, "son of man." This title as used in Ezekiel sets forth man's finite dependence and lowliness in the presence of God's infinite power and glory.

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

Wellhausen referred to Ezekiel as a "priest in a prophet's mantle," and so he was. From the moment he was told to eat the scroll containing God's Word this man was endowed with the spirit and message of the Lord. From that point on he became the very embodiment of the word which Yahweh would have the exiles hear. His overt actions were fully as significant as the words he spoke. Ezekiel immersed himself in his prophetic duties for some twenty-two years. Like his two illustrious contemporaries Jeremiah and Daniel, Ezekiel possessed an invincible fortitude which kept him faithful through long years of rejection and dejection.

Ezekiel had a propensity for visions, dramatized signs and trance-states. His visions are on occasion couched in stories of angel translation and include somewhat bizarre symbolism. Some of his actions—his dumbness (3:22ff.) and symbolic lying on his side (4:4-8)—have been interpreted as symptoms of a more or less profound mental disturbance. Albright, for example, states that Ezekiel became one of the greatest spiritual figures of all time "in spite of his tendency to psychic abnormality."⁷ Others see evidence of schizophrenia or catalepsy⁸ in his personality. It is ridiculous in the extreme to attempt amateur psychoanalysis on a person of another culture and age who has been dead for twenty-five hundred years. One is on safer ground to speak of Ezekiel as "a highly developed mystic who was able to utilize channels of communication not normally available to others."⁹ The fallacy of suggesting that Ezekiel was in some sense deranged can be easily demonstrated from a study of his words. His thought processes are normal, his ideas are completely comprehensible, his sentences are coherent and the sequence of ideas yield a meaningful continuity.

In closing this assessment of the personality and character

7. Albright, *FSAC*, p. 325.

8. Catalepsy is a pathological condition akin to autohypnosis. The afflicted person manifests a tonic rigidity of the limbs to the point where they can be placed and maintained in various positions for long periods of time.

9. Harrison, *IOT*, p. 851.

of Ezekiel it might be of interest to note the three paradoxes which Fohrer¹⁰ has observed: (1) burning passion on the one hand, pedantic casuistry on the other; (2) bold hopes for the future, but also a sober sense of reality; (3) on occasion he speaks coldly and bluntly, while on other occasions he feels full sympathy for the devout and the wicked.

F. The Message of Ezekiel

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

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

10. Fohrer, *IOT*, p. 415.

1. *Ezekiel's doctrine of God.* In Isaiah the focus is on the *salvation* of the Lord; in Jeremiah, the *judgment* of the Lord; in Daniel, the *kingdom* of the Lord; and in Ezekiel the focus is on the *glory* of the Lord.¹¹ To Ezekiel God was the supreme, self-existent, almighty (1:24) and omniscient (1:18) One.¹² The God of Israel was no mere local or national divinity. He was infinitely exalted above the earth, clothed with honor and majesty. Yahweh was the ruler of the celestial hierarchies and all that dwell on earth. Men and nations yield to His sovereign decisions. Egypt, Babylon and all heathen peoples were bound to obey Him. The mighty Nebuchadnezzar was but a tool in His hand.

To Ezekiel God was the Holy One (39:7) whose name was holy (36:21, 22; 39:25). He was a God who could make no compromise with sin, who could by no means overlook the guilty whether individual or national. Because of the sin of His people He withdrew His glory from Jerusalem and the Temple (10:18; 11:23). This holy God placed terrible denunciations against the wickedness of Israel and Judah in the mouth of His prophet. In fact Ezekiel's denunciation of the spiritual waywardness of Judah is more severe than that of his contemporary Jeremiah.

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

2. *Ezekiel's doctrine of the Messiah.* The Messiah is not so prominent in Jeremiah and Ezekiel as in Isaiah. Nonetheless there is some striking teaching about the promised one in this book. The Messiah is represented as a "tender twig" taken from the highest branch of the cedar of Judah's royalty, planted

11. Feinberg, *PE*, p. 12.

12. Whitelaw, *PC*, p. xxix. The theological summary which follows is adapted from Whitelaw.

upon a high mountain (17:22-24). He is the one to whom the diadem of Israel's sovereignty rightfully belonged and to whom it would be given after it had been removed from the head of the wicked Zedekiah (21:27). The Messianic David will be a faithful prince among God's restored people. He will perform all the functions of a true and faithful Shepherd (34:23, 24), ruling over them as king (37:24). This Prince will eat and drink before the Lord in His capacity of special representative of God's people (44:3).

3. *Ezekiel's doctrine of man.* Ezekiel viewed man as God's creature and property (18:4). He shows awareness of the Biblical teaching of the original innocence of man (28:15, 17). But man had fallen; man is sinful (18:21-30). His heart needs to be softened and renewed (18:31). For his wickedness he is and will be held individually accountable (18:4, 13, 18). He is a free moral agent and is therefore responsible for his own reformation of life and purification of heart¹³ (33:11; 43:9). To those willing to receive it God would give a new heart (11:19; 36:26; 37:23). Among the Old Testament prophets Ezekiel has earned the title "the champion of individualism."

4. *Ezekiel's doctrine of the kingdom of God.* Though the book never uses the terminology "kingdom of God," the book certainly points to the concept of God's reign over the hearts of redeemed men. Ezekiel stressed one point which was considered rank heresy by his countrymen, viz., that the kingdom of God was not inseparably connected with the political existence of Judah. He saw an inner spiritual kernel of the nation existing in the lands of the dispersion (12:17). This nucleus was constantly growing as penitent men were added to it (34:11-19). Eventually Ezekiel saw a new Israel with Messiah as its prince (34:23, 24; 37:24). That new Israel would walk in the law of the Lord (11:20; 16:61; 20:43; 36:27) and dwell in the land of Canaan (36:33; 37:25). God would enter into a new covenant with that people¹⁴ (37:26-28), and He would walk in close fellowship with

13. Ezekiel is expanding on a theme proclaimed by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:34).

14. The classic Old Testament promise of a new covenant is Jeremiah 31:31ff.

them (39:29; 46:9). Upon them He would pour out His Holy Spirit (36:27; 39:27).

G. The Mission of the Prophet

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

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

2. He was to *expose apostasy*, and thereby present God's rationale for the judgments which had already befallen Judah, and those more terrible judgments which were about to fall. He was "to interpret for Israel in exile the stern logic of her past history."¹⁵

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

4. He was to *stimulate hope* for a better tomorrow with the promise of restoration after the seventy years of Babylonian supremacy had ended.

Ezekiel's mission was in stark contrast to that of Daniel, his illustrious contemporary and fellow captive. Daniel was God's messenger to the mighty monarchs of Babylon and Persia. He rubbed elbows with royalty and never, so far as is known, mingled with and preached to his fellow exiles. Ezekiel, on the other hand, conducted most of his ministry from his home. He

15. Whitelaw, *PC*, p. x.

apparently never undertook journeys to distant colonies of exiles but restricted his prophetic utterances to those who sought him out at his dwelling (8:1; 14:1; 20:1; 24:19). However, some of his sermons may have been delivered before larger audiences.¹⁶ Most of his utterances were first spoken before being written. His foreign nation oracles (chaps. 25-32) and his elaborate description of the Messianic Temple (chaps. 40-48) were probably never spoken orally.

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

III. THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

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

A. The Authorship of the Book

The view that Ezekiel the son of Buzi, the sixth century exile, authored the entire book which bears his name has good evidence in its support. First, and most important, this book throughout claims to be by this Ezekiel (1:1; 8:1; 33:1; 40:1-4).

16. Sermons on Judah's sins (chaps. 6, 7, 13, 16); sermons on repentance (chaps. 33, 36); and sermons on the justice of God (chaps. 18, 33).

A unity of theme is observable throughout the forty-eight chapters—God's vengeance in Israel's destruction and God's vindication in Israel's restoration. Thirteen prophecies are dated and localized in such a way as to point to the life and times of Ezekiel. Similarity of thought, style, phrasing and arrangement make it clear that the entire book is the work of one mind. The evidence for the authenticity and unity of Ezekiel is so convincing that some scholars who otherwise take a critical view toward the Old Testament have written in support of the essential Ezekielian authorship (e.g., Cornill, and Driver). The work as a whole bears the decided imprint of a single personality.

The traditional view of Ezekielian authorship is clouded by two curious statements which are found in Jewish literature regarding the Book of Ezekiel. The first is in the Talmud (fifth century A.D.) where it is said that "the men of the Great Synagogue wrote Ezekiel and the Twelve."¹⁷ A second curious statement is found in Josephus (first century A.D.): "But not only did he [Jeremiah] predict to the people [the destruction of Jerusalem], but also the prophet Ezekiel who first wrote two books about these things and left them [for posterity]."¹⁸ The Talmud statement probably means nothing more than that the men of the Great Synagogue in the days of Ezra edited and copied the original writing of Ezekiel. The *two books* referred to by Josephus probably is a reference to two major divisions of the present Book of Ezekiel. Young¹⁹ suggests that chapters 1-32 may have constituted the first book and chapters 33-48 the second.

In spite of the positive evidence supporting the traditional view of authorship some modern critics have questioned the authenticity of the book. Bentzen, for example, contends that "the book as it now stands is no authentic work of the prophet Ezekiel."²⁰ The grounds upon which such a statement is made are two. First, some critics dogmatically assert that a prophet

17. *Baba Bathra* 15a

18. Josephus, *Antiquities* X:5:1

19. Young, *IOT*, p. 256.

20. Bentzen, *IOT*, II, 125.

cannot hold forth both doom and promise. They imagine that the historic Ezekiel must have been a preacher of darkness and doom who afforded the nation no ray of hope. Unfortunately for the critics, nearly all Old Testament prophets who speak of doom also hold out some hope of restoration and glory for God's people. The mixture of gloom and discouragement on the one hand, and hope and optimism on the other can be observed in the discourses of any great preacher of the word.

In the second place, the critics contend that the Book of Ezekiel betrays a Palestinian rather than a Babylonian viewpoint. The descriptions of events back in Palestine—the idolatries of the Temple worshipers (chap. 8); the sudden death of Pelatiah (11:13); Zedekiah's attempted flight from Jerusalem (12:3-12); Nebuchadnezzar's encampment outside Jerusalem (24:2)—are so vivid that they must have been composed by an eyewitness living in Palestine. But in some cases (e.g., chap. 8) a supernatural vision must have been given to the prophet. In other cases tidings from Jerusalem may have reached the prophet in Babylonia before he penned the passage.

Jeremiah preached for twenty-three years before he was instructed by God to record his messages for future generations. It is impossible to say at what point Ezekiel penned his messages. Fohrer²¹ conjectures that Ezekiel probably wrote down his sayings and reports rather than relying on oral tradition. Sometimes Ezekiel seems to have written down his inspirations at once and proclaimed them later or even kept them to himself, so that they became known only much later (e.g., 3:16b-21).

Modern critics generally postulate a complicated editorial process with expansions, enrichments, and exegetical contributions which "have more or less overgrown the words of Ezekiel."²² The sayings of Ezekiel were passed on by his disciples during an "indeterminate oral stage."²³ These sayings were not considered "immutable holy givens" but relevant messages which were often modified by explanatory phrases and new sayings "amplifying,

21. Fohrer, *IOT*, pp. 410-11.

22. Fohrer, *IOT*, p. 411.

23. Wevers, *NCB*, p. 22.

changing or correcting the original.”²⁴ Rival collections of the prophet’s utterances gradually grew up. These were eventually put in writing “as an aid to memory.”²⁵ These critics would not allow that Ezekiel was responsible for the arrangement and assembling of the utterances and reports. Others must have done this work. The critics disagree among themselves as to whether this rather extensive editorializing was a long process (Freedman), a single editor (May) or a particular circle of disciples (Zimmerli). In any case the critics believe that the evolution of the book continued even after the editors put it together. Later “literary accretions” by scribes who copied the work are postulated by the critics.²⁶

It would seem, then, that Ezekiel himself compiled the book on the basis of notes of his prophetic oracles that he had accumulated over a period of time. Subsequently he edited and augmented the first edition of his work. The view that the duplicate sections were the work of copyists is weak in that it tends to disrupt the acknowledged unity of character exhibited by the book.

B. The Canonicity of the Book

The Book of Ezekiel was one of five antilegomena—books spoken against—in the Hebrew canon. Certain Rabbis were convinced that the teaching of this book was not in harmony with Mosaic law. The Torah (Law), for example, prescribed that two bullocks and seven lambs and one ram be offered at new moon celebrations (Num. 28:11) whereas Ezekiel speaks of only one unblemished bullock, six lambs and one ram (Ezk. 46:6). Rabbai Hananiah vigorously defended the book before those who argued that it should be removed from the canon. Legend has it that he burned the midnight oil—300 jars of

24. Weavers, *NCB*, p. 22.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

it—in harmonizing Ezekiel with the Pentateuch.²⁷ Hananiah's effort at harmonization must not have satisfied all Jewish scholars. The Talmud (*Menach.* 45a) states that when Elijah comes (cf. Mal. 4:5) the discrepancies between Ezekiel and the Pentateuch would be explained. Modern scholars are not concerned about the differences between the worship system described in Ezekiel and that set forth by Moses. Ezekiel was describing the worship of a new age and a new covenant.

The Book of Ezekiel certainly belongs in the Old Testament canon. It apparently was found in Nehemiah's collection of "the acts of the kings, and the prophets, and of David, and the epistles of the kings concerning holy gifts" (II Macc. 2:13). Ezekiel was included in the Septuagint translation which was initiated about 280 B.C. Josephus the famous Jewish historian numbered this book among the books held sacred by the Jews in his day.²⁸ The majority of the Rabbis defended the book against the disparagement of those who were concerned about the discrepancies with the Pentateuch. The Book of Ezekiel was listed in the Talmud (*Baba Bathra* 14b) as belonging to the canon. Among early Christian scholars the book was acknowledged by Melito (A.D. 172) and Origen (A.D. 250). In Christian circles the canonicity of Ezekiel has never been seriously questioned.

C. Ezekiel in Modern Criticism

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

1. *Attacks on the unity of the book.* In the eighteenth century questioning the unity of ancient documents came in vogue. The unity of nearly every Old Testament prophetic book became

27. *Shabbath* 14b; *Hagiga* 13a; *Menachoth* 45a.

28. *Against Apion* 1:8. Reference has already been made to the curious statement of Josephus that Ezekiel wrote two books (*Ant.* X:5:1).

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

2. *Attacks upon the authenticity of the whole book.* In the nineteenth century some critics began to argue that the entire Book of Ezekiel was a literary fraud. One group of critics dated the book to the Persian (Zunz, Geiger) and some even as late as the Maccabean age (Seinecke). C. C. Torrey with his characteristic propensity for out radicalizing the radicals proposed in his book *Pseudo-Ezekiel* (1930) that the whole book was a pseudepigraphic work composed centuries after the time of Ezekiel.²⁹ Another critic, James Smith (no relation to the present writer), argued that the book was actually written in the time of King Manasseh early in the seventh century a century earlier than Ezekiel. In response to these conjectures the opinion of another respected critic needs to be heard. Fohrer sees Ezekiel active in the period defined by the dates given in his utterances. "There is no evidence in favor of a date different from that suggested in the book of Ezekiel."³⁰

3. *Attacks upon the integrity of the text.* Most critics will allow that the sixth century Ezekiel wrote some part of the present book; but they attribute to him only a bare minimum of the total verses in the book. This trend began with Jahn (1905) who proposed that scribal notes from the margin of ancient manuscripts had been later inserted into the text of the Book of Ezekiel. Hoelscher (1942) wielded the knife of literary criticism mercilessly, arguing that only 170 verses of the 1273 in the book actually belonged to Ezekiel.³¹ William A. Irwin (1943) did a little better for the prophet, giving him 251 verses of the book. H. G. May in the *Interpreter's Bible* generously assigns about half the book to Ezekiel.

On what basis do these critics deny these large chunks of

29. Torrey dated the book about 230 B.C. Browne dated the book to the time of Alexander the Great, and van den Born to the days of Ezra-Nehemiah.

30. Fohrer, *IOT*, p. 406.

31. Harrison (*IOT*, p. 824) refers to Hoelscher's work as "one of the most radical treatments to which the book of Ezekiel has ever been subjected."

material to Ezekiel? Hoelscher and Irwin take the distinction between poetry and prose as the criterion of genuineness. They deny Ezekiel's authorship of everything that cannot be fitted into a pre-determined poetic style. Fohrer takes to task other critics for denying large sections of the book to Ezekiel. He then asserts: "Nevertheless, the material preserved under the name of Ezekiel contains a series of later passages deriving from various authors and various periods."³² Fohrer himself denies about 111 verses to Ezekiel. Each critic seems to have his own criteria for deciding what is genuine and what is not. The subjectivity of this approach is manifest. Harrison raises an appropriate question: How is it possible to establish canons of genuineness, and what in fact constitutes an oracle thus defined?³³

4. *Attacks upon the setting of the book.* In 1932 Hertrich introduced the suggestion that Ezekiel actually lived and ministered in Palestine rather than in Babylon as the book plainly states. Later editors were responsible for the literary framework of the book which makes it appear that Ezekiel lived in Babylon. Other critics have suggested that the locale shifted during Ezekiel's ministry. Ezekiel is said to have returned to Palestine from Babylon (May) in 591 B.C. or to have commenced his ministry in Palestine and subsequently to have gone to Babylon (Bertholet). Some complicate the matter further by postulating a double shift in Ezekiel's ministry. Pfeiffer would have Ezekiel first in Babylon, then back in Jerusalem, and finally back among the exiles in Babylon.³⁴

Five arguments have been advanced in support of the view that Ezekiel spent part of his time ministering in Palestine.

a) Many of the oracles in chapters 1-24 are relevant to Jerusalem and Judah rather than to the exiles. Answer: Very little is known about the religious attitudes of the exiles apart from the Book of Ezekiel. How then can one be so sure that what Ezekiel

32. Fohrer, *IOT*, p. 410.

33. Harrison, *IOT*, p. 840.

34. Bentzen (*IOT*, II, 128) suggests that Ezekiel was a Babylonian secret agent who was allowed to return to Palestine a few years before the fall of Jerusalem.

says was not appropriate to the situation in Babylonia? The exiles apparently considered themselves still a part of Jerusalem society. They optimistically expected to return to the homeland shortly. Therefore invectives against Jerusalem society are far from meaningless to the exilic audience. Furthermore, some of Ezekiel's utterances may actually have been carried back to Jerusalem by travelers.

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

c) Prophecies are directed to "the house of Israel," the "rebellious house" which might refer to the inhabitants of Palestine. Answer: The exiles considered themselves a part of the house of Israel. The concept of national solidarity made the exiles corporately part of the rebellious house.

d) Ezekiel betrays an intimate acquaintance with what is going on in the Temple in chapters 8-11. Answer: Ezekiel's priestly background would have provided him with vivid recollection of the Temple structure and worship. Furthermore, Jeremiah 29 proves that contacts between Jerusalem and Babylon were greater than one might think. News of recent developments in Jerusalem could have reached the prophet's ears by means of those who travelled between the two places. Finally, Ezekiel may have received his knowledge of the Temple idolatries through Divine revelation.

e) Chapter 11 would demand clairvoyant powers on the part of Ezekiel if he were living in Babylonia. How could he have known that Pelatiah had died immediately in response to the oracle which he had just given? Answer: It may be that the statement in 11:13 that Pelatiah died immediately in response to the oracle is itself a part of the vision. If so, no problem exists. On the other hand, through Divine revelation Ezekiel may have

known immediately that Pelatiah died in accordance with the prophetic word.

The theory of a Palestinian ministry for Ezekiel creates more problems than it solves. Far-reaching textual alterations are necessary in order to support the theory. Whole sections of the book must be pronounced spurious. Fohrer, himself a radical critic, has stated: "Nothing suggests Jerusalem as one or the only location of Ezekiel's ministry; on the contrary, everything points to Babylonia."³⁵ Of the utterances of Jeremiah, he is familiar essentially with those from the period before 597 B.C. Not one shred of evidence can be produced to suggest that Ezekiel spent the crucial years under Zedekiah in Jerusalem and experienced the bitter siege of that city. Besides, no one has ever successfully explained what an editor possibly could have gained by transferring the ministry of a Palestinian prophet to Babylon.

The critical studies of the Book of Ezekiel over the past fifty years or so have largely cancelled each other out. The situation now is much the same as it was prior to 1924 (the work of Hoelscher) when the unity and integrity of the book were generally accepted by the critics.³⁶ H. H. Rowley (1953) defended the essential unity of the book and took issue with those who would transfer the prophet from Babylon to Palestine or from the sixth century to some other time-frame.³⁷

D. Literary Characteristics

Most modern critics give Ezekiel low marks on literary style. Driver referred to him as the most uniformly prosaic of the earlier prophets. However, it is wrong to analyze the book on

35. Fohrer, *IOT*, p. 407. Even among critical scholars the trend is to support an exclusively Babylonian ministry for Ezekiel as can be seen in the works of Howie (1950), Cooke (1960) and in West's *Introduction* (1971).

36. Ellison, *NBD*, p. 407.

37. Rowley's work *The Book of Ezekiel in Modern Study* is an excellent introduction to modern criticism of Ezekiel.

the naive assumption that the author was essentially a poet as some critics have done (e.g., Hoelscher and Irwin). It is true that the book is characterized by a certain amount of prolixity. The sentences are often long and involved. But Ezekiel's style is enriched by uncommon comparisons. The straight forward and unembellished narration is at times punctuated by passages sublime in both thought and expression. If at times Ezekiel smothers his readers with comparatively dry and uninteresting details (e.g., 40:6-49), at other times he overwhelms them with a barrage of simulating images (e.g., chap. 27). At times he halts and staggers (chap. 17); at other times he emotionally plunges forward. To be specific, the Book of Ezekiel is marked by at least five stylistic characteristics.

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

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

3. Ezekiel makes extensive use of earlier Scriptures. He displays an intimate knowledge of the works of the eighth century prophets—Hosea, Amos and Isaiah—as well as those

of his own century—Jeremiah and Zephaniah.³⁸ Most certainly Ezekiel was acquainted with the Pentateuch.³⁹

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

5. Ezekiel employed cultured diction. He was an aristocrat, and there is something aristocratic about his style.⁴⁰

6. The book is marked by originality. Ezekiel freely reproduced the sentiments of the earlier writers "with the stamp of his own individuality upon it."⁴¹ Among the expressions and thoughts original in the book are the following: *son of man*; *rebellious house*; *hand of Yahweh was on me*; *the word of Yahweh came unto me*; *set your face against*; *they shall know that I am Yahweh*; *they shall know that a prophet is in their midst*; *thus says Yahweh Elohim* (God). A long list of Hebrew verbs and nouns peculiar to Ezekiel could also be produced.

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

E. The Interpretation of Ezekiel

Such obscurity as does exist in Ezekiel is found in the main in the first ten and in the last nine chapters of the book. Ezekiel was the great mystic among the prophets. It is probably because of the difficulty of interpreting his visionary and symbolic prophecies, that Ezekiel is the most neglected of all the

38. See Whitelaw, *PG*, p. xxv for a list of passages reflecting the writings of Jeremiah.

39. An extensive list of passages indicating widespread acquaintance with the Pentateuch can be found in Whitelaw, *PC*, pp. xxv-xxvi.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

prophets.⁴² Hall has put his finger on the reason for the difficulties in Ezekiel. He regards the book as

“a transition from regular prophetic literature with its announcements and denunciations to the highly figurative apocalyptic literature of works such as Daniel and Revelation.”⁴³

Ezekiel is a mixture of prosaic and poetic, historical and prophetic, literal and symbolic, realistic and idealistic discourse. Each type of literature must be interpreted according to its own hermeneutical principles. Ordinarily it is not too difficult to identify clearly these various types of literature. Obviously, the visions and symbols are the most difficult. Ezekiel's visions seem to have been based on actual scenic representations that were present to his mind's eye during the moments of ecstasy. But what of his symbolic acts? Were they actual occurrences or merely carried out mentally by the prophet and reported to the captives? Were they external (Plumptre) or merely internal occurrences (Keil; Hengstenberg)? There is no reason to doubt that Ezekiel did physically perform some of his symbolic acts, e.g., carrying stuff from his house (11:7); sighing bitterly before the eyes of the people (21:6). In other instances the question is not so easily answered. This much is clear: If Ezekiel did not actually perform the actions before his auditors in his own house, it at least seemed to him while in the ecstatic state that he did.⁴⁴

F. The Text of Ezekiel

Harrison describes the Hebrew text of Ezekiel as “poorly preserved.”⁴⁵ He attributes the difficulties in the Hebrew text to the obscurities and technical expressions and *hapax legomena* which led subsequent copyists into frequent error. It is interesting, however, that the fragments that could be detached from the Ezekiel scroll found in Cave 11 at Qumran show that the

42. Feinberg, *PE*, p. 13.

43. Hall, *WBC*, p. 369.

44. Whitelaw, *PC*, p. xxix.

45. Harrison, *IOT*, p. 854.

Hebrew text was fixed in a form similar to the standard Masoretic Text by the middle of the first century B.C. at the latest.

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

G. Structure and Arrangement

The Book of Ezekiel has been carefully constructed, and it is to Ezekiel himself that the credit for this arrangement belongs. The fall of Jerusalem was the mid-point in the ministry of the prophet and also in the book. Chapters 1-24 come from the period prior to the fall of Jerusalem; the last twenty-four chapters in the main are post-fall.⁴⁶ In terms of subject matter the book breaks down into three divisions—oracles against Israel (1-24), oracles against foreign nations (25-32); and a second section pertaining to Israel (33-48).⁴⁷

THE STRUCTURE OF EZEKIEL		
Oracles Concerning Israel	Oracles Concerning Foreign Nations	Oracles Concerning Israel
Chapters 1-24	Chapters 25-32	Chapters 33-48
Prior to the Fall of Jerusalem	During the siege of Jerusalem	After the Fall of Jerusalem
Condemnation and Catastrophe		Consolation and Comfort

46. Because of the importance of the destruction of the Temple some would divide the book at 33:21.

47. The structure of Ezekiel is similar to that of Isaiah in the Hebrew Bible and Jeremiah in the Greek Bible where the oracles against foreign nations are grouped in the middle of the book.

EZEKIEL

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

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

REFERENCE	YEAR/MONTH/DAY	CONVERSION
1:2	5/4/5	July 31, 593 B.C.
8:1	6/6/5	September 17, 592 B.C.
20:1	7/5/10	August 14, 591 B.C.
24:1	9/10/10	January 15, 588 B.C.
29:1	10/10/12	January 7, 587 B.C.
30:20	11/1/7	April 30, 594 B.C.
31:1	11/3/1	June 21, 587 B.C.
32:1	12/12/1	March 4, 585 B.C.
32:17	12/?/15	* March 18, 585 B.C.
33:21	12/10/5	January 8, 585 B.C.
40:1	25/1/10	April 28, 573 B.C.
26:1	11/?/1	* August 19, 587 B.C.

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

THE PROPHET AND HIS PROPHECY

The dating in the Book of Ezekiel is based on the years of the deportation of King Jehoiachin. This eighteen year old king who went captive in 597 B.C. was apparently considered by many of that time the legal ruler of Judah vis-à-vis Zedekiah who was looked upon as a mere regent of Nebuchadnezzar.⁴⁸

Harrison⁴⁹ follows Brownlee in suggesting that the Book of Ezekiel is "a literary bifid," i.e., the book reveals a two part arrangement. Harrison puts a great deal of emphasis on the statement of Josephus (*Ant.* X.5.1) that Ezekiel left behind *two* books. These books, originally separate productions of the prophet, have been combined in the present book of Ezekiel. Harrison thinks that chapters 1-23 constitute Book One and chapters 24-48 Book Two. The following chart indicates parallels between the two "books" of Ezekiel.

BOOK ONE CHAPTERS 1-23	BOOK TWO CHAPTERS 24-48
The Vengeance of the Lord against His People	The Vindication of the Lord through His People
The name Ezekiel appears once (1:3)	The name Ezekiel appears once (24:24) ⁵⁰
A commissioning of the prophet (3:16-21)	A commissioning of the prophet (33:1-9)
Commission followed by dumbness 3:25-27	Commission followed by release from dumbness 33:21f.
Divine glory forsakes the Temple (chaps. 8-11)	Divine glory returns to sanctify the land 43:1-5

48. Even after his deportation to Babylon, Jehoiachin appears to have possessed land in Palestine. A seal of his steward dating after 597 B.C. has been found in Palestine. See W. F. Albright, "The Seal of Eliakim and the Latest Pre-Exilic History of Judah, with Some Observations on Ezekiel," *JBL*, LI (1932) 77-106.

49. Harrison, *IOT*, pp. 848-49.

50. Such renewed claim to authorship is made by Thucydides in his *History* (V, 26), the probable beginning of the second roll of his work.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

True and False

1. Ezekiel began his prophetic career prior to being deported to Babylon.
2. Ezekiel was deported to Babylon after Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 B.C.
3. Jehoiachin was the last king of Judah.
4. Ezekiel was born during the reformation led by King Josiah.
5. Chronologically it is possible that Ezekiel knew Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel.
6. Jeremiah was taken captive with Ezekiel to Babylon.
7. The exiles in Babylon initially believed that their stay there would be brief.
8. Ezekiel is mentioned by name in the Bible three times outside his book.
9. Ezekiel's name means *Yahweh is Lord*.
10. No other person by the name Ezekiel appears in the Bible.
11. Ezekiel's father Amoz was thought in Jewish tradition to be a prophet.
12. Unlike Jeremiah, Ezekiel had a wife.
13. Ezekiel lived five years in Babylon before God called him to be a prophet.
14. Ezekiel was only a youth of eighteen when God called him.
15. Ezekiel initially was a prophet of doom.
16. "Son of Man" is the most frequent title given to Ezekiel in the book.
17. Ezekiel was a priest as well as a prophet.
18. The Messiah is not as prominent in Ezekiel as in Isaiah.
19. The term "kingdom of God" is one of the most characteristic expressions in Ezekiel.
20. Unlike Isaiah and Jeremiah, the Book of Ezekiel contains no prophecies concerning foreign nations.

THE PROPHET AND HIS PROPHECY

21. Josephus refers to two books of Ezekiel.
22. The canonicity of the book of Ezekiel has never been seriously questioned in the Christian Church.
23. Only the poetic verses in the book actually go back to Ezekiel himself.
24. The trend among modern critics currently is to support the unity and integrity of Ezekiel.
25. Events in Ezekiel are dated according to the years of the captivity of King Jehoiachin.

Chapter Two

EZEKIEL'S INAUGURAL VISION

1:1-28

Before a prophet could speak to others, God had to speak to him. A special call vision catapulted the apprentice priest Ezekiel into the prophetic ministry. The vision of the divine chariot—the *Merkabah* as it is known in Jewish literature—is a fitting introduction to his career. Jewish mystics have always been fascinated with this material. More recently science fiction writers have subjected the *Merkabah* to the most detailed scrutiny in search of evidence that spaceships from other worlds have landed on this planet. Much has been written on this chapter of Scripture. Often the discussion has centered on the mechanics of the *Merkabah* rather than the message which God is trying to communicate through this vision.

In chapter 1 of his book Ezekiel discusses (1) the setting (vv. 1-3) and (2) the substance (vv. 4-28) of his inaugural vision.

I. THE SETTING OF THE VISION 1:1-3

TRANSLATION

(1) Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, the fourth month, the fifth day of the month that I was in the midst of the captives beside the river Chebar. The heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. (2) In the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the captivity of King Jehoiachin) (3) the word of the LORD came most assuredly to Ezekiel son of Buzi, the priest, in the land of the Chaldeans beside the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD came upon him there.

COMMENTS

The first three verses are in the nature of a preface to the Book of Ezekiel. Two distinct statements can be identified here. Verse 1 is in the first person and verses 2-3 are in the third person.¹ Some critics think two distinct superscriptions are

1. Verse 3 is the only verse in the book in which Ezekiel's personal experiences are described in the third person.

used here, superscriptions which at one time headed separate collections of Ezekiel's writings. It is better, however, to regard verses 2-3 as a parenthetical insertion by Ezekiel himself designed to explain the puzzling, indefinite expressions in verse 1. That verses 2-3 are an integral part of this book can be seen in the fact that they provide, in addition to the date for the book, the customary information about the author. The following chart sets forth the differences between the autobiographical and parenthetical superscriptions to the book.

THE SUPERSSCRIPTION TO THE BOOK		
	VERSE 1	VERSES 2-3
FORM	First Person	Third Person
DATE	Thirtieth Year Fourth month Fifth day	Fifth Year of Jehoiachin's Captivity Fifth day
PLACE	In the midst of the captives by the river Chebar	In the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar
EXPERIENCE	Heavens were opened, I saw visions of God	Word of the LORD came assuredly unto Ezekiel Hand of the LORD was there upon him.
RECIPIENT		Ezekiel son of Buzi the priest

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

A. The Recipient of the Call Vision

The author of the book identifies himself for the first time in verse 3. He is *Ezekiel the son of Buzi*. The name Ezekiel means *God strengthens*. Nothing further is known of his father beyond what is said here. The title *the priest* properly belongs to the name Buzi as is indicated by the Hebrew accent marks. Ezekiel would also be a priest, however, as the Old Testament priesthood was hereditary.

In the first three chapters of Ezekiel that moment in time is described in which the fledgling priest was called to be a prophet. A prophet is one who speaks for another (Ex. 7:1; 4:16). This involved speaking for God to man through sermon and oracle, and it involved speaking for man to God in intercessory prayer. While the priesthood was hereditary, one could only become a prophet who was divinely chosen to be so. Priests interpreted the law of God and led in the divinely ordained Temple rituals. Prophets interpreted history in the light of the Law, urged compliance to the spirit of the Law in the present, and announced God's plans for the near and distant future as those plans related to Israel and the neighboring nations as well. While both priest and prophet fulfilled vital functions, the ministry of prophet was somewhat broader and less affected by time. Priests were concerned with Old Covenant law and ritual—the types and shadows which according to God's grand plan were to pass away. Prophets were concerned with basic timeless principles and with the ultimate developments of God's program for this earth. While the names of even the greatest priests are scarcely known today, the prophets through their writings continue to instruct, challenge, guide and rebuke the sons of men.

B. The Time of the Call Vision

Ezekiel's inaugural receives double dating. In verse 1 the vision is dated in terms of Ezekiel's own life; in verse 2, according to the captivity of King Jehoiachin.

1. *The personal dating (v. 1).* Ezekiel was thirty years old when he received the divine call to be a prophet.² From verse 2 it can be computed that the call vision fell in the year 593 B.C. This would mean that Ezekiel was born about 622 B.C. during the reign of good King Josiah. He was born four years after Jeremiah began his ministry, and one year before the discovery of the lost book of the Law in the Temple. The dated prophecies in this book cover a span of twenty-two years, and thus Ezekiel's prophetic activity centered in the period of his life between the ages of thirty and fifty-two.

It is strange that nothing is said in the Old Testament or in Jewish tradition about the age at which a priest began to serve. However, under the Law of Moses *Levites* entered into their service at the age of thirty (Num. 4:23, 30), and the probability is rather strong that this was the normal age for entering priestly service as well.³ If this is so, then Ezekiel never functioned as a priest prior to his deportation in 597 B.C., for as verse 2 clearly shows, his thirtieth year fell in 593 B.C. While he never officiated in the Temple, Ezekiel must have studied for years the intricate details of priestly ritual. His thirtieth birthday would have been particularly sad for the son of Buzi because he knew he would never succeed his father in the sacred vocation for which he had prepared throughout his youth. This was a crucial time in the life of Ezekiel. Since it would not be possible for this godly man to serve the Lord as a priest, God called him to

2. This interpretation of the *thirtieth year* in 1:1 seems to have been proposed first by the church father Origen (d. A.D. 253). The objection has been raised that it is rather unusual for a prophet to call attention to his age. It must be remembered, however, that Ezekiel was an unusual prophet. Verse 1 presents certain unique characteristics on any interpretation. See Harrison, *IOT*, p. 838.

3. It was at this age that Jesus commenced his priestly ministry. John the Baptist was also in his thirtieth year when he began to preach on the banks of Jordan.

another and even more vital sphere of service.

Some scholars feel that the thirty years should be reckoned from some fixed point in Babylonian or Jewish history. Thus in one scheme the thirty years are counted from the accession of Nabopolassar in 626 B.C. This would yield a date of 596 B.C., one year after the deportation of Ezekiel and ten thousand of his countrymen. This computation would not square with the *fifth year* of the captivity of Jehoiachin mentioned in verse 2. Even less justification exists for counting the thirty years from 621 B.C. when the lost lawbook was discovered in the Jerusalem Temple.⁴ As important as this event was in the history of the monarchy, no example of reckoning time from this year can be adduced in the Old Testament.⁵

So important was the inaugural vision in the life of Ezekiel that he dates it as to month and day as well as year. The call came in the *fourth month*. Ezekiel here follows the normal pre-exilic custom of numbering rather than naming the month. In post-exilic times the fourth month was known as Tammuz. Converted into modern day equivalents, Ezekiel's call vision occurred on July 31, 593.

2. *The national dating (v. 2).* The vision is further dated to the *fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity*. Jehoiachin was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar when he surrendered to the Chaldean conqueror on March 20, 597 B.C. The fifth year of the captivity would thus fall in 593 B.C.

Most of the dates in Ezekiel are given in terms of the captivity of Jehoiachin. It has been suggested that Ezekiel regarded Jehoiachin as the legitimate ruler of the Jews even though he had reigned only for three months after the death of his father Jehoiakim (II Kings 24:8).⁶ However this may be reading too much into Ezekiel's dating system. The captivity of Jehoiachin involved Ezekiel as well, and may simply have been the most

4. An interpretation advocated in the Targum and in Fisch, *SBB*, p. 1.

5. For a host of other interpretations of the thirtieth year see Blackwood, *EPH*, pp. 35-36. Blackwood overstates the difficulty of the expression when he calls the interpretation here "an insoluble puzzle."

6. Carley, *BPE*, p. 10.

convenient way of measuring time for the captives.

The call of Ezekiel did not occur in a historical vacuum. There were antecedents to that inaugural vision. False prophets had arisen in Babylon peddling their nauseating platitudes to the effect that Jerusalem would never be conquered by the Chaldeans and that those Jews in Babylon would shortly be heading home. At least two of the false prophets who were stirring up the captives against the Chaldean government were executed by being burned in a furnace (Jer. 29:21, 22). Jeremiah wrote a letter to the captives urging that they settle down and submit themselves to the will of God. The prophet from Anathoth predicted that the Babylonian empire would endure for seventy years, and only then would there be any hope of return to Palestine. This letter was sent shortly after the deportation of 597 B.C. Furthermore, in the fourth year of the captivity (594 B.C.) Zedekiah the puppet king of Judah had attempted to throw off the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar. When rumors of the conspiracy reached the ears of Nebuchadnezzar he summoned Zedekiah to Babylon to renew his vassal commitment (Jer. 51:59). All of this produced confusion in the camp along the Chebar. In the midst of this ferment Ezekiel was called to deliver God's infallible word to the exiles.

C. The Place of the Vision

The inaugural vision took place in *the land of the Chaldeans* (v. 3). Although originally the Chaldeans and Babylonians were ethnically distinct groups, at this stage of history the two terms were used interchangeably. The *land of the Chaldeans* is the southern Mesopotamian basin. It is not altogether certain when the Chaldeans began to filter into this region from the Syro-Arabian desert, but the Assyrian kings found the Chaldeans a formidable force under the leadership of Merodach-Baladan in the late eighth century. Under Nabopolassar (626-605 B.C.) the Chaldeans were able to extricate southern Mesopotamia from the grip of the Assyrians and found what was destined to

become the most powerful and wealthy empire which had heretofore existed on the face of the earth.

Ezekiel was *by the river Chebar* (v. 1) at the time God called him to the prophetic ministry. The Jewish captives were not in confinement, but were restricted to a certain area of the land. It is now known that the river Chebar was not actually a river, but an enormous irrigation canal. The remains of this canal are known as *Shatt en Nil*. The canal started from the Euphrates above Babylon, flowed southeasterly sixty miles through Nippur, and re-entered the Euphrates near Uruk. Evidence of one large Jewish settlement near Nippur has come to light. The "river Chebar" is known in Babylonian inscriptions as *Naru Kabari*, the grand canal.

He was *in the midst of the captives* (v. 1) when he received his majestic vision. What a mixed group they were! Some had given up on God because of the misfortunes which had befallen them. They had compromised with the materialistic culture of Babylon. Others clung desperately at the outset to the illusion that God would never let Jerusalem be destroyed—that God would shortly bring them back to their homeland.

Ezekiel was not the first to receive divine revelation during the Babylonian exile. Daniel had preceded Ezekiel into captivity in 605 B.C. and had begun his prophetic ministry in *the second year of Nebuchadnezzar* (603-602 B.C.; Dan. 2:1ff.). But whereas Daniel spoke only to government officials, Ezekiel spoke to the needs of the Jewish captives.

Some critics are unable to accept these statements regarding Ezekiel's location at face value. They think that because this prophet shows such familiarity with the Temple and with the situation in Jerusalem that he must have actually written this book in Palestine. Therefore, it should be underscored that here in the preface Babylon is stipulated as the place of his call, and time and again throughout the book it is mentioned as the place of his labors.⁷

7. See 3:11, 15, 23; 10:15, 20, 22; 11:24-25

D. The Manner of the Call Vision

In the preface of his book Ezekiel states in a general way what he will amplify in the rest of chapters 1-3. The vision began when *the heavens were opened*. Whether to the prophet's mental "eye" or to his physical eye, the heavens unfolded like curtains of a stage to reveal to him the divine glory.

The phrase *visions of God* could be legitimately understood in more than one way. Often the Hebrews would add the name of God to a noun to express greatness or majesty. Thus, Psalms 36:6 in the Hebrew refers to the *mountains of God* by which is meant *great mountains*.⁸ Thus, *visions of God* could be translated *great* or *majestic visions*. But Currey is correct when he observes that ". . . the visions were not only supremely majestic, but visions of the majesty of God."⁹ The Hebrew then may also be translated "divine visions," i.e., visions concerning God or devised by God.

By means of visions and dreams God communicated to individuals known as prophets in Old Testament times (Num. 12:6). The Israelite prophet (*nabhi*) was also known as a seer (*ro'eh* or *chozeh*). The term *ro'eh* is used of Samuel and Hanani (I Sam. 9:9; II Chron. 16:7). Isaiah still employed this term in reference to prophets in the eighth century (Isa. 30:10). The Chronicler uses the title *chozeh* for such prophets as Gad and Iddo (II Chron. 9:29, 29:25). The prophecy of Isaiah begins with the phrase, *The vision (chazon) of Isaiah . . . which he saw (chaza)* . . . Add to this data the numerous passages within prophetic literature where a prophet describes what *he saw*. From all of this one must conclude that the visionary experience was an important aspect of the prophetic consciousness in Israel.

These visions of God are further identified as being *the word of the LORD* (v. 3). This is the most frequently used expression in the Old Testament to affirm that a prophet had received

8. See also Ps. 80:10; 65:9.

9. Currey, *BC*, p. 18.

direct communication from God.¹⁰ The phrase is not to be restricted to the oral directions which came to Ezekiel in chapter two. Rather *the word of the LORD* embraces all the revelatory experiences of the prophet.

The problem of authority was crucial for Ezekiel. The somewhat shocking nature of his message required that his credentials be impeccable. For this reason Ezekiel makes the strongest possible claim that he was commissioned of God. The word of the LORD *came most assuredly*¹¹ to him. No doubt existed in his own mind that he had in fact received a heaven-sent vision. In the opening words of verse 3 Ezekiel insists that this book be read as prophecy. Those who communicated the divine will to Israel were said to be in possession of the word of God. The claim to bear the divine word is found often in Old Testament prophecy (cf. Amos 7; Hos. 1).

Prophets were not called to dispense their own opinions, nor to feed the fantasies of faithless men. They were called to declare the whole counsel of God. So it was that *the word of God* came to Ezekiel. The messages he preached were not of his own choosing—not necessarily of his own liking. That which he spoke forth was the word of God.

The phrase *word of the LORD* includes what was *seen in vision as well as what was heard*. The term *word (dabhar)* in the Old Testament has a much broader meaning than it does in modern English. The Old Testament use of the term *word* prepared the way for the grand revelation of John 1 that the eternal *Word* became flesh and dwelled among mankind.

God not only gave this captive priest a message, He also endowed him with the power to deliver that message. Such is the import of the sentence, *the hand of the LORD was there on him* (v. 3). Proclaiming the unpopular word of God is never easy. Add to that the relative youth of Ezekiel. Young men were to be seen, not heard. All wisdom resided in the *elders* of the nation! Thus Ezekiel needed the reassurance of the hand of

10. See 1 Sam. 15:10; 1 Kings 12:22; Isa. 38:4; Jer. 1:2; Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1.

11. Hebrew infinitive absolute.

the Lord. He needed that unseen hand to guide, strengthen and protect him.

Reference to the hand of the LORD (or God) is frequent in the Old Testament. This anthropomorphism refers to the authority, power or protection of the Lord. In reference to individuals the expression is used somewhat sparingly. The *hand of the Lord* is said to have come upon Elijah (I Kings 18:46) and Elisha (II Kings 3:15). In the former case the hand of the Lord bestowed upon the prophet unusual physical power and endurance; in the latter case, oracular power. In the Book of Ezekiel the expression is used four times besides the present passage to introduce a visionary experience (3:22; 8:1; 37:1; 40:1). In two passages *the hand of the Lord* refers to the divine constraining or sustaining power as it manifested itself in the physical stamina of the prophet (3:14; 33:22).¹² The evidence then points to the following definition for this expression: The *hand of the Lord* refers to the supernatural manifestation of divine power in the life of a prophet such as would enhance his physical abilities and enable him to see that which the unaided human mind could never grasp or ascertain. Whereas the term *visions of God* in verse 1 points to the mystical transcendence of the prophetic experience, the *hand of God* points to the divine immanence.

II. THE SUBSTANCE OF THE VISION 1:4-28

The call-vision of a prophet is of immense importance in understanding the prophet himself. The vision granted to Ezekiel was more symbolic than that of Isaiah or Jeremiah and is indicative of this man's more pronounced visionary and mystic nature. The account is replete with strange and even grotesque figures. Ancient Rabbis warned teachers not to expound the mystery of creation in the presence of more than one person, and the mystery of Ezekiel's chariot-throne not even to the one, unless he was unusually wise and discreet.¹³

12. Cf. Rev. 1:17; Dan. 8:18; 10:10.

13. Mishnah *Hagiga* 2, 1. Cited by Blackwood, *EPH*, p. 39.

Ezekiel beholds Yahweh's throne-chariot coming on a great storm cloud. The point of the vision is that God is arriving to be with His people. As one reads this visionary account he has a sense of awe, mystery, and irresistible power. If only this much can be learned from the account here given, the prophet will have accomplished his purpose. If the reader misses this in the reading of chapter 1, detailed analysis of the vision will be of little value.

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

A. The Storm Cloud 1:4

TRANSLATION

(4) And I looked, and behold a stormy wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth and a radiant splendor round about, and from its midst something that appeared like polished bronze from the midst of the fire.

COMMENTS

Two kinds of visions are found in the Old Testament. In the objective type vision, the prophet is led to discover some meaning in an object upon which he is meditating. Any other person present could have seen the same object; only the *significance* of the object is given through special revelation. In the second type of vision—the subjective type—the vision is purely internal. It is something that only the prophet experiences. Ezekiel's vision of the throne-chariot is doubtlessly of the subjective type.¹⁴

14. Taylor (*TOTC*, p. 54) suggests that it was while Ezekiel was meditating on a black northern storm cloud that this vision developed. "The physical and visible led into the spiritual and visionary." See also Blackwood, *EPH*, pp. 40-41.

The first sight to meet the eyes of Ezekiel was a *stormy wind*. Association of deity with storm phenomena and fire is quite common in Hebrew thought.¹⁵ The mighty thunderstorm is but the attendant of the throne of God. This storm must be a symbol of God's omnipotent power. Within six more years Jerusalem would be destroyed by this stormy wind. Chapters 4-24 recount in detail Ezekiel's description and prediction of that forthcoming judgment.

The stormy wind comes from the *north*. Why so? In other passages the Lord is depicted as going forth from Zion to accomplish His purposes. Probably the coming of the thunderstorm from the north has multiple significance. Perhaps this detail is designed to emphasize the universality of Yahweh. He was God of the captives in Babylon as well as of those who remained in Jerusalem. Then again, perhaps the violent thunderstorm coming from the north is to be connected with the enemy from the north concept of Jeremiah (1:14; 4:6). God would employ a ruthless foe from the north—the Chaldeans—to bring about the final destruction of Jerusalem. The Jews through the eye of flesh would be able to see nothing in that destructive storm but grief and despair; Ezekiel through the eye of faith sees God.¹⁶

Accompanying the stormy wind was a *great cloud*. The cloud may be a portent of impending calamity¹⁷ or perhaps better, a symbol of approaching deity. God would be present in the judgment which Ezekiel would learn was about to fall on Jerusalem.

Ezekiel does not dwell on the blackness of the cloud. He emphasizes rather its radiance. From that cloud *fire was flashing forth*. The Hebrew phrase is literally "a fire taking hold of

15. E.g., Exodus 3:2; 19:16-19; Ps. 18:7-15; 29:3-8.

16. Ellison (*EMM*, p. 22) sees in the reference to the north a reference to the Babylonian myth that the gods lived in the north. The storm cloud from the north would then mean that Yahweh had vanquished the pagan deities on the way. This interpretation seems a bit forced. Even more so is that contention of Currey (*BC*, p. 18) that *the north* was felt by the Jews to be the peculiar seat of the power of Yahweh, an interpretation based on an erroneous understanding of Psalms 48:2.

17. Fisch, *SBB*, p. 3.

itself," i.e., a succession of outbursts of flame.¹⁸ The *fire* here is probably lightning streaking across the blackness of the heavens. Those who see in this fire an indication that the Jerusalem Temple was to be burned¹⁹ are probably reading too much into this descriptive detail.

A *radiant splendor (nogah)* surrounded the black storm cloud. This dazzling sight is not to be explained with Taylor²⁰ as the brightness of the desert sun lighting up the edges of the cloud. Still less was the radiant splendor produced by the fire that was flashing forth from the cloud.²¹ It is rather the splendor of the glory of God which is being observed by Ezekiel in connection with the great cloud and stormy wind. It is almost impossible to talk about God for any length of time without mentioning light.

In the midst of the great cloud was *something that appeared like* (lit., as the eye of) *polished bronze* (Heb. *chashmal*). The Hebrew word occurs only in Ezekiel, here, in 1:27 and 8:2, and therefore some uncertainty exists as to its precise meaning. The Septuagint and Vulgate have *electrum*, a substance composed of silver and gold. Cooke, however, traces *chashmal* back to an Akkadian word meaning polished bronze.

B. The Cherubim 1:5-14

TRANSLATION

(5) And from its midst the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they possessed the likeness of a man. (6) And each of them had four faces and four wings. (7) And their feet were straight feet, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot, and they glistened like the appearance

18. Currey (*BC*, p. 19) understands this to mean that the fire formed a circle of light about the cloud.

19. Fisch, *SBB*, p. 3.

20. Taylor, *TOTC*, p. 54.

21. Fisch, *SBB*, p. 3.

of polished bronze. (8) Under their wings upon their four sides were hands of a man. Now as for the faces and wings of the four of them, (9) their wings were joined together, they did not turn when they moved, each went straight ahead. (10) And the likeness of their faces was as the face of a man, and the four of them had the face of a lion on the right, and a face of a bull on the left, and the four of them had the face of an eagle. (11) And their faces and their wings were separated above. Each had two which joined another, and two covering their bodies. (12) And each went straight ahead wherever the spirit was to go, they went; they did not turn as they went. (13) And as for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like coals of fire, like the appearance of torches. Fire²² was going to and fro between the living creatures. The fire had a radiant splendor and from the fire lightning was going forth. (14) And the living creatures were running back and forth like lightning bolts.

COMMENTS

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

According to the Hebrew text of 1:13, the likeness of the appearance of the living creatures was like *coals of fire*. Many scholars feel at this point the Septuagint (Greek) Old Testament preserves a more ancient reading: "In the midst of the living creatures was something that looked like burning coals of fire." However, the Hebrew rendering of the verse should be retained. So understood, the verse adds to the general description of the

22. The Hebrew actually uses a feminine pronoun, but the reference is obviously to the fire.

living creatures. They glowed like coals of fire or torches.²³

It is frequently asserted that these living creatures of Ezekiel are to be linked to the winged man-headed animals which stood guard over Mesopotamian temples. Ezekiel was living in a country on the walls of whose temples and palaces were strange mixed figures, human heads with the bodies of lions, and the feet of calves, and the like. These combinations were of course symbolical and this symbolism was no doubt familiar to Ezekiel. But the prophet is not constructing his cherubim in imitation of these figures. Rather the Spirit of God is revealing forms corresponding to the general rules of oriental symbolism.²⁴ This mode of representation was too common throughout the Near East to be ascribed to any one nation. The throne-chariot and guarding cherubim are but an extension of Temple symbolism—the ark and its winged attendants in the Holy of Holies.

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

The inaugural vision is highly symbolic. Several of the symbols are easily identified because of more or less common usage through the ages. *Gold, sapphire, and the polished bronze*, are familiar images of majestic glory. The *thunders, lightnings* and the *stormy cloud* are symbols of awful power and of judgment. The *clear brightness* is symbolic of God’s purity and truth, the *rainbow* of His mercy. As the fire, lightning and

23. The Hebrew word *lappid* is variously translated in English versions as *lamp*, *lightning*, *firebrand*, and *torch*. The word properly means, not the vessel which contains the light, but the light itself.

24. Currey, *BC*, p. 19.

cloud are marks of inanimate creation, so the four living creatures symbolize animate creation. The *wings* represent the power by which all creation rises and falls at God's commands; the *one spirit*, the unity and harmony of all of His works; the *wheels* the universality of God. The number four is the symbol of the world with its four quarters; the veiled bodies, the inability of all creatures to stand in the presence of God.

That the living creatures had their groundwork in the Old Testament cherubim there can be no doubt. Little is known about the angelic order of cherubim although they are frequently mentioned in the Bible. The description of the cherubim in Revelation 4 differs from that found here. Later in Ezekiel 41 the cherubim are depicted as having only two faces instead of the four which are mentioned in the present passage. The cherubim of the Mosaic ark and the Solomonic Temple probably did not resemble those which are here in view. This would account for the circumstance that when Ezekiel first saw these creatures on the bank of the Chebar he did not recognize them as cherubim. This identification he was able to make in 10:20 when he saw the creatures in connection with the Temple.

The cherubim as they appear throughout the Bible are *symbols* not *likenesses*. This is why the appearance of these creatures differs from passage to passage. In place of the four-faced, four-sided figures seen by Ezekiel, John saw each living creature having only one face. But if these living creatures are symbols, of what are they symbolical? The oldest and probably the correct explanation is that the living creatures are symbolic representations of heavenly beings.²⁵ This is not to say that the living creatures represented any four particular angels; nor should anyone jump to the conclusion that they will meet creatures in heaven resembling those which Ezekiel here sees. *These cherubim are symbols, not likenesses.*

25. The Jewish commentator Kimchi thought the four living creatures represented the four great empires symbolized by the various beasts of Daniel 7. Irenaeus saw in these creatures figures of the four Gospel evangelists. Grider (*BBC*, p. 538) thinks they represent the forces of Nebuchadnezzar.

What encouragement Ezekiel must have received as he reflected on this aspect of the grand vision. From the cherubim he learned many lessons and some profound theological truths. But the one lesson which probably most influenced Ezekiel in a very practical way was this: If heavenly beings serve the King, how much more so should the sons of men!

The symbolic import of the living creatures is not difficult to ascertain. Their facial features (see following discussion) suggest that they have the specific function of representing the earthly creation before the Lord. Yahweh the God of creation and redemption holds sway over all the earth. It is most appropriate that the throne-chariot of the heavenly Sovereign should be borne by those who represent the whole earth over which the Lord holds sway.

The interpretation of the details of the throne-chariot description is notoriously difficult. The Jewish Rabbis declared that if anyone could master the secrets of the *merkabah* (chariot) he would know all the secrets of creation. The difficulties involved here are not in the English translation. The problem lies in (1) the poverty of human language when it comes to describing the celestial and supernatural; and (2) the lack of spiritual imagination on the part of the interpreters of this book. In any case, it is the *message* of the throne-chariot and not the *mechanics* of it which is important.

1. *Their faces* (1:6, 10). Each of the living creatures had *four faces* (v. 6). Something of great importance is thus signified. Those creatures associated most intimately with God could see in *all* directions. The shape of the face differed on the four sides: the face of a man in front, of a lion on the right side, of an ox on the left side, and of an eagle behind (v. 10).²⁶ These faces symbolized the highest forms of life which are found in the various realms of creation. *Man* is supreme over all the creatures of God, and so is mentioned first. Man faced forward. The *lion* is king of wild beasts, the *ox* of domesticated animals,

26. According to Targum Jonathan, there were four faces in each direction, so that each creature had sixteen faces.

and the *eagle* of the birds of the heavens.²⁷ Thus the living creatures were representative of all living beings. The Jewish Rabbis commented:

Man is exalted among creatures; the eagle is exalted among the birds; the ox is exalted among domestic animals; the lion is exalted among wild beasts; and all of them have received dominion, and greatness has been given them yet they are stationed below the chariot of the Holy One.²⁸

The four faces appear again in Revelation 4:7 which is based on this passage.²⁹ In later Christian tradition the faces were associated with the writers of the four Gospels: Matthew (man), Mark, (lion), Luke (ox), John (eagle).

The living creatures formed a square. The human face of each creature faced outward. The effect would be that whichever way one looked at the four creatures, a different face was seen from each. All four faces were visible at the same time from any angle.³⁰

2. *Their wings (1:6, 9, 11)*. The creatures had four wings (v. 6).^{31, 32} For the sake of modesty, two of these wings were used to cover the naked bodies of these creatures. The other two wings were in the act of flying. They were so stretched out that the tip of each touched the wing tip of a fellow living creature on the right and on the left (v. 9). Thus is symbolized their unity of purpose. When the throne-chariot came to a stop the second pair of wings was let down (cf. 1:24). Thus the four living creatures and their extended wings formed a kind of hollow square. But although the creatures appeared at times to be connected to one another at the wing tips, yet *their faces and their*

27. Representations of the lion, ox, and eagle were common in Babylonian art, and so would be particularly suggestive to the mind of the exiles there. Four-faced statuettes of gods have also been found in Babylon.

28. Midrash *Rabbah Shemoth*, 23.

29. In Revelation each living creature had its own distinctive character. Here all four creatures had identical four-sided faces.

30. Taylor, *TOTC*, p. 55.

31. By way of contrast, the angelic seraphim of Isaiah 6 had six wings, two of which were used to cover the face, two to cover the feet (possibly a euphemism for pudenda), and two to hover in mid-air.

32. Reliefs and statuettes of four-winged creatures have been found in Mesopotamia.

wings were separated³³ above (v. 11), i.e., they rose distinct from one another.

3. *Their hands (1:8)*. In addition to the four wings, each creature had hands (v. 8). Some doubt exists as to whether each creature had four hands or two hands. Probably the latter is correct. These hands will be put to good use a bit later (10:7).

4. *Their legs (1:7)*. The *feet* of the creatures were *straight*. Probably in this verse the term *feet* is being used in the wider sense of *legs*. These legs are said to be *straight*, i.e., unjointed. Such at least is the old Jewish understanding of the word. The creatures then, did not bow, crouch or lie down. Throughout the vision they remained perfectly erect.

5. *Their feet (1:7)*. The feet of the creatures resembled the hoof of a calf. This probably means nothing more than that their feet were rounded.³⁴ this would enable creatures to move freely in every direction. The feet are said to *glisten (notsetsim)* like polished brass (v. 7).

6. *The fires (1:13)*. In the midst of the hollow square formed by the four cherubim Ezekiel observed a bright fire which seemed to move back and forth among the living creatures. Periodically lightning flashed forth from the interior of the "chariot."³⁵ This fire no doubt symbolized judgment which at that moment of history was in the center of God's concern.³⁶

7. *Their movements (1:9, 12, 14)*. Since each creature had a face on four sides, they did not turn around when their course was altered. The face toward the intended course moved forward in that direction (v. 9). Wherever they went they always moved

33. The Hebrew root *parad* is rendered *divided, separated, parted, dispersed, scattered, sundered* in the KJV. The KJV rendering *stretched* in this verse seems inappropriate.

34. Groping for significance in the feet like a calf, Taylor (*TOTC*, p. 55) suggests that the calf symbolizes nimbleness.

35. Verse 13 is extremely difficult. The Greek version would make the whole verse a description of what was in the midst of the living creatures. According to the Hebrew text, followed here, the first part of the verse contains two similes descriptive of the cherubim. The latter part of the verse describes a flashing fire that was *among* or *between* the cherubim.

36. Ellison (*EMM*, p. 24) thinks it is the spirit of God which is symbolized by the pulsating light coming from within the square formed by the cherubim.

forward, since each creature had a face in the appropriate direction³⁷ (vv. 9, 12). This detail may point to the resoluteness of purpose which these creatures manifested.

Apparently the living creatures were not capable of independent movement. The entire throne-chariot of which they were a part moved as a single unit. Under the impulse of the *spirit* (v. 12). Verse 20 speaks of "the spirit of the living creatures." Apparently God from His throne exercised an influence upon the spirits of the living creatures thus coordinating their movements. Initially the movements of the living creatures seemed to Ezekiel to be erratic. The creatures were seen *running back and forth like lightning bolts* (v. 14). The throne-chariot moved to and fro with the speed of lightning.

C. The Wheels 1:15-21

TRANSLATION

(15) Now as I saw the living creatures, behold one wheel on the earth beside each of the living creatures on its four sides. (16) The appearance of the wheels and their works was like the color of topaz and the four of them had one likeness; and their appearance and their works were as a wheel in the middle of a wheel. (17) When they went, they went toward their four sides, they did not turn about in their going. (18) As for their rims, they were high and awesome and their rims were filled with eyes round about the four of them. (19) And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them, and when the living creatures were lifted up from upon the earth, the wheels were lifted up. (20) Wherever the Spirit was to go, they went; thither was the spirit to go and the wheels lifted up opposite them for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. (21) In their going, they went, and in their standing still, they stood

37. A difficulty arises, however, in the fact that the fourfold face is not parallel in the rest of their bodies.

still. And when they were lifted up from upon the earth, the wheels were lifted up opposite them for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

COMMENTS

By, i.e., *under*, each of the living creatures was a *wheel* (v.15). These wheels were so constructed as to facilitate movement in any direction. They were omnidirectional wheels. In appearance these wheels resembled *topaz* (Heb., *tarshish*).³⁸ Each wheel actually consisted of two wheels, i.e., *a wheel in the middle of a wheel*. The two wheels were probably solid discs which bisected each other at right angles (v. 16). This would produce a ball-bearing-type effect which would allow movement of the wheels in any direction without being turned (v. 17). Apparently there was no steering mechanism connected to these wheels. The symbolism of this detail is more clear than the mechanics. The wheels are directed by the Spirit of God. Amid all the uncertainties and tragedies of life, the Spirit of God is at work providentially directing all discordant aspects of life.

The rims (*gabbehen*) of the wheels were *high*, i.e., the wheels were huge in comparison to the entire chariot.³⁹ Owing to the fact that they were full of *eyes*, the rims were *terrifying* (v. 18).⁴⁰ The eyes may have been no more than dazzling spots which added to the brilliancy of the wheels. But it seems more likely that they had a symbolical meaning. The eye in the ancient world was a symbol of intelligence. God sees and knows what is happening throughout His world, including the camps of Jewish captives in Mesopotamia.

The wheels of the throne-chariot were not functional. In fact,

38. Opinions differ on the identity of this stone. Jasper and beryl have been suggested. The ancient versions have *chrysolite*, whatever that may have been.

39. Some have seen in the word *high* the power of raising the throne chariot. Something like hydraulic wheels may be intended.

40. The RSV emends the text of verse 18 so that it reads: *The four wheels had rims and they had spokes*. The Hebrew text in verse 18 is difficult, but this in no way justifies the arbitrary change of the RSV.

the only reason the wheels are mentioned is so that the chariot imagery could be maintained. That the wheels were not essential to the movements of the throne-chariot is seen in the fact that the vehicle travelled in the air and not on the ground. Ellison⁴¹ suggests that the wheels symbolize inanimate nature just as the four cherubim represent the living creation. In ancient Jewish teaching the wheels were thought to symbolize some order of heavenly beings.⁴² The significance of the wheels is really quite simple. They are obviously symbols of movement. God is not restricted to heaven, nor to any particular spot on earth. The *wheels* thus symbolize the omnipresence of the Almighty.

Verses 19-21 emphasize the mobility of God's throne-chariot. The wheels themselves had no capacity for independent movement. They always moved in conjunction with the living creatures (v. 19). The creatures in turn were under the control of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God was in the creatures, and the spirit of the creatures,⁴³ as it were, was in the wheels (v. 20). There is no indication that the wheels were attached to the living creatures. To emphasize the co-ordination of the wheels and creatures, verse 21 repeats and amplifies the thought that when the creatures moved in any direction, the wheels moved with them.

The main point being emphasized in this description of the mobility of God's throne-chariot is this: God is omnipresent. He is not earth-bound. The effortless mobility of God's throne-chariot is a way of depicting the grand theological theme of God's omnipresence.

D. The Platform 1:22-25

TRANSLATION

(22) And over the heads of the living creatures was something like a platform, gleaming terribly like ice, stretched forth over

41. Ellison, *EMM*, p. 25.

42. See the pseudepigraphic Book of Enoch 61:10; 70:7.

43. A singular is used in verse 20 in a collective sense as in 10:20.

their heads above. (23) And under the platform their wings were straight one to another. Each one had two wings covering his body on either side.⁴⁴ (24) And I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of great waters, as the sound of the Almighty as they went, the sound of noise like the sound of an encampment. When they stood still they let down their wings. (25) And from above the platform which was over their head came a voice when they stood and let their wings down.

COMMENTS

Over the heads⁴⁵ of the creatures was what appeared to be a platform (*raqia'*).⁴⁶ It is not certain how this platform was supported, whether by the wings of the cherubim or by some other means.⁴⁷ The platform was gleaming like *terrible ice* (*qerach*). The ice was terrible in the sense of being awesome because of its glittering brightness (v. 22). In this dazzling platform the glories of heaven are symbolized. In Revelation 4:6 this platform becomes a "sea of glass." Many commentators feel that this expanse (KJV, *firmament*) was dome-shaped. But there is really no proof of this in the word itself, nor in the context here. The entire persons of the living creatures including their outstretched wings were *under the platform*. Each creature had one pair of wings stretched straight out, and another pair modestly covering their bodies (v. 23).

The audio portion of the vision is referred to in verses 24-25. The four pairs of outstretched wings vibrated powerfully as the throne chariot moved. Three similes are employed to try to depict the awesome sound produced by the theophonic chariot.

44. Literally, *Each one had two covering on this side and each one had two covering on that side, their bodies*.

45. KJV has *upon* the heads, but the RSV, ASV, and NASB rendering *over* is to be preferred.

46. Wrongly translated *firmament* in KJV. The Hebrew word suggests a thin, flat area, perhaps of hammered metal. In Genesis 1:6 and elsewhere the word is used of the expanse of the heavens.

47. Ellison (*EMM*, p. 24) feels it is better to regard the wings of the cherubim as forming a protective square around the throne. Cf. Rev. 4:6.

The noise was like that produced (1) by *great* (or many) *waters*; (2) by the voice of the Almighty, i.e., rolling thunder,⁴⁸ and (3) by an army on the move. When the movement of the chariot ceased, the living creatures lowered their wings (v. 24) and consequently the dreadful noise ceased.

The movement of the throne-chariot was directed by a *voice* which came from above the platform. This voice must be that of God.⁴⁹ No words are attributed to Him at this point, but the author here prepares the way for the later words of that One who was enthroned above the living creatures (v. 25).

E. The Throne 1:26-28

TRANSLATION

(26) And above the platform which was over their heads was what appeared to be a sapphire stone, the likeness of a throne; and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness of the appearance of a man upon it above. (27) And I saw as the color of polished bronze, as the appearance of fire, as an enclosure to it round about, from the appearance of His loins and upward; and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw the appearance of fire, and there was a radiant splendor round about Him. (28) As the appearance of a bow which is in a cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the radiant splendor round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice speaking.

COMMENTS

With obvious hesitation the prophet describes what he saw *above* that platform. There he saw what resembled a throne

48. Cf. Job 37:4, 5; Ps. 29:3, 5; Rev. 10:3.

49. Currey (*BC*, p. 22) thinks the reference is to the voices which were praising God above the tumult in 3:12.

of sapphire.⁵⁰ What Ezekiel saw here may be compared to the vision of Moses who saw under God's feet "a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness" (Ex. 24:10). The throne is an obvious symbol of universal sovereignty.

He who sat upon the throne had the *likeness of the appearance of a man* (v. 26). Ezekiel is careful to place as much distance as possible between that divine person and a mere man. The upper portion of this human-like figure flashed like polished bronze. These bright flashes resembled fire (lightning?). Similarly, the lower half of the figure flashed like fire. A radiant splendor characterized the whole being (v. 27). This brightness was multi-colored, much like the beautiful colors of a rainbow. This rainbow is more than simply a token of glory and splendor. It is a token of mercy and promise as well. Ezekiel was to preach about the coming storm of judgment; but he was to look beyond that dark hour to the dawning of a new day and the resurrection and restoration of the people of God.

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

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

50. Some think the *lapis lazuli* stone is intended. In either case, the throne was made of a most precious stone.

God's presence could be experienced in a foreign land.

Anthropomorphism—describing God in human terms—is quite common in the Old Testament. The use of this literary device has occasioned the charge that the concept of God in the Old Testament is primitive and unsophisticated. However, anthropomorphism serves a useful function. It aids in describing the indescribable; but it does more than that. Anthropomorphism underscores the basic theological proposition of the Old Testament, viz., that God is *living*. Furthermore, anthropomorphic description causes men to appreciate even more the truth that man bears in his person the divine image. In such theophanies as has been described in Ezekiel 1 no form but the human form was appropriate to represent the Lord.

Ezekiel had a great deal of trouble describing what he saw. He was, to use the language of one authority, “struggling with the impossibility of expressing in words the object of his vision.”⁵¹ Apparently human language is just not sufficient to explain heavenly things. Four times in the chapter Ezekiel uses a word translated *likeness* (*demut*). The word at once suggests deference for divinity and difficulty in describing things heavenly. Currey's comment is to the point.

For the vision of the prophet was rather to the mind, than to the bodily eye, and even inspired language was inadequate to convey to the hearer the glory which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, and which only by special revelation it hath entered into the heart of man to conceive.⁵²

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

51. Currey, *BC*, p. 24.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

down right blasphemous! The visionary nature of Ezekiel's experience must be taken seriously. These verses constitute a kind of moving, changing dream the fantastic features of which both reveal and obscure the divine glory. Davidson is right when he writes:

The cherubim, wheels, firmament, and throne are all subordinate, they have no meaning of themselves, they merely help to suggest what God is who thus manifests himself.⁵³

Ezekiel's inaugural vision must be compared to other manifestations of the divine glory to Moses at the bush (Ex. 3), to Moses, Aaron and the seventy elders (Ex. 24:9), to Isaiah (Isa. 6), to Daniel (Dan. 7:9), and subsequently to the apostle John (Rev. 4:2). The visions have various features in common, especially the burning fire and sapphire stone.

In contemplating God under the form of a man Ezekiel helps pave the way for that grand revelation of God in Christ Jesus. Paul describes Jesus as *the image of the invisible God* (Col. 1:15) and *the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person* (Heb. 1:3). John declares that *the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14). The same apostle interprets Isaiah's grand vision as referring to Christ when he declares: *These things said Isaiah when he saw His glory and spoke of Him* (John 12:41). In the light of these facts, Currey is correct when he argues

We are therefore justified in maintaining that the revelation of the divine glory here made to Ezekiel has its consummation or fulfilment in the person of Christ, the only begotten of God

...⁵⁴

The whole vision of the throne-chariot and the divine Presence had a marked effect upon Ezekiel. He fell to his face. He was thus prepared to hear the word of the Lord (v. 28). The experience of Ezekiel was akin to that of Isaiah (Isa. 6) and Daniel (Dan. 7:9ff.).

53. Davidson, *CB*, p. 12.

54. Currey, *BC*, p. 25.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between verse 1 and verses 2-3 of the book?
2. What does the name Ezekiel mean?
3. What is known of Ezekiel's father?
4. What distinction can be made between the roles of prophet and priest in the Old Testament?
5. How long did Ezekiel's ministry last? How does his ministry relate chronologically to that of Jeremiah?
6. What various interpretations for the *thirtieth year* (v. 2) have been proposed? What view is correct?
7. Why are dates in Ezekiel given in terms of the captivity of King Jehoiachin?
8. Compare the ministries of Daniel and Ezekiel in Babylon.
9. What symbolism is connected with the vision of the throne-chariot of God?
10. How do the cherubim seen by Ezekiel differ from those seen by John in the Book of Revelation?
11. What theological truths are conveyed in the symbolism of the wheels of the throne-chariot?
12. What consolation would the call-vision have afforded Ezekiel personally? the captives?
13. How would you respond to those who argue that Ezekiel saw a spaceship in the opening chapter of the book?

Chapter Three

THE CALL AND COMMISSION

2:1 — 3:27

Heavenly visions were not granted to Biblical saints merely to excite their (and our) curiosity, but rather to incite them to proclaim the divine word. Chapters 2 and 3 contain the commission which Ezekiel in connection with his inaugural vision recorded in the preceding chapter. As in the case of Jeremiah, the commissioning came in stages separated presumably by some time intervals which for the most part cannot be determined. At each stage of the process Ezekiel was given time to assimilate the message and adapt himself before the commissioning continued.

One of the basic characteristics of the Book of Ezekiel becomes clear in this section. Ezekiel had a propensity for repetition. In the various accounts of his commissioning certain standard phrases and thoughts are repeated with only slight modification. The material in chapters 2 and 3 can be discussed under the following four heads: (1) the call to service (2:1-7); (2) the preparation for service (2:8—3:15); (3) the responsibilities of service (3:16-21); and (4) the restrictions on service (3:22-27).

I. THE CALL TO SERVICE 2:1-7

Following his mind-boggling visionary experience, Ezekiel heard the call of God to prophetic service. He was told in no uncertain terms where and how he was to serve. In this paragraph Ezekiel is (1) strengthened (2:1-2); (2) warned (2:3-5); and (3) charged (2:6-7).

A. Ezekiel Strengthened 2:1-2

TRANSLATION

(1) And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak to you. (2) And the Spirit came into me as he spoke

unto me and it caused me to stand upon my feet and I heard one speaking unto me.

COMMENTS

The Lord as usual took the lead in the commissioning of the prophet. It was His voice (1:28) rather than that of one of the cherubim which Ezekiel heard giving him the first command he ever directly had received from God (v. 1).

The title *son of man* occurs over eighty-five times in the Book of Ezekiel. In most cases it precedes a command of God. In Hebrew thought and language *son of man* is equivalent to *man*. The term "son" often is used to denote membership in a class. Thus a *son of man* would be a member of the class of man, a mortal. The designation emphasizes the human frailty of Ezekiel as over against the awesome might and majesty of God. Though he had been privileged to see the majestic, heavenly vision of God's throne-chariot, he was nevertheless nothing more than a human being. Within a few years Daniel would use this title in a technical sense of that divine-human one who would receive a kingdom from the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:13). Jesus' application of the title *son of man* to Himself seems to be based more on Daniel's usage than on Ezekiel's.

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

Even as the Lord issued this command to Ezekiel *spirit* came into him. In the light of 3:24 it is best to understand this spirit as the Spirit of God. The Spirit came into the prophet compelling him and enabling him to comply with the command just issued.

1. Davidson, *CB*, p. 15.

That Spirit supplemented and revived Ezekiel's physical powers, like a fresh breath of life.² What a blessed truth is intimated here. Frail and feeble man can be empowered and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God supplies the power to perform His special service.

B. Ezekiel Warned 2:3-5

TRANSLATION

(3) And he said unto me, Son of man, I am sending you unto the children of Israel, unto rebellious nations who have rebelled against Me, and they and their fathers have transgressed against Me until this very day; (4) and the sons are hard of face and stout of heart. I am sending you unto them and you shall say unto them, Thus says the Lord GOD! (5) But as for them, whether they will hear or refuse (for they are a house of rebels), then they might know that a prophet is in their midst.

COMMENTS

In this paragraph God sets forth the difficulties which Ezekiel would confront in his ministry, the duty which would be his as God's spokesman. He likewise seeks to encourage Ezekiel in the discharge of his ministry.

Ezekiel was to be God's representative to the *children of Israel*. In earlier prophets the term *Israel* is used of the Northern Kingdom which was carried away captive in 722 B.C. The *kingdom* of Israel, as distinct from the kingdom of Judah, had long since ceased to exist by the time of Ezekiel. Thus *Israel* here is not the Northern Kingdom. The term is used two ways in the Book of Ezekiel. Sometimes Ezekiel employs the name Israel

2. Feinberg (*PE*, p. 23) sees the entrance of the Spirit as forming the basis of Ezekiel's prophetic inspiration.

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

Ezekiel's mission was ultimately to the whole contemporary generation of Israelites, both those who were in Judah and those who were in exile. To be sure his ministry had impact back in Judah, at least in the period between 593 and 587 B.C. But verse 11 indicates that his immediate audience was near at hand—his fellow exiles. However, Ezekiel does not clearly distinguish between Israelites in Judah and those in Babylon. Often he seems to ignore the miles that separate the two groups.

The audience is described as *rebellious nations who have rebelled against Me*. The plural *nations* may be a reference to Israel and Judah.³ However, the term *nations* (*goyim*) usually is restricted to the heathen peoples as over against God's people. Perhaps the word is here used contemptuously. Israel and Judah have become, by virtue of their rebelliousness against God, no better than heathen nations. The plural also points to the fact that the children of Israel at this time are not *one nation*, but are scattered and disunited.

In the word *rebellious* which recurs in the early chapters of the book there may be an allusion to the insane and suicidal rebellions which fool-hardy patriots were continually plotting. Nebuchadnezzar was the God-ordained ruler of the world, and to rebel against him was to be in rebellion against the will of God. Over a dozen times Ezekiel refers to his auditors as a *rebellious house*, lit., house of rebellion.

As God evaluated the history of His people, He saw little or nothing to commend. Four negative qualities had characterized God's people through the years. They were rebellious, sinful,

3. Fisch (*SBB*, p. 9) thinks the two *nations* intended were the two tribes Judah and Benjamin who formed the Southern Kingdom after 931 B.C. In Genesis 35:11 Israel's tribes are called *nations*.

impudent, and stubborn.

The present generation had *rebelled* against the Lord. They had refused to adhere to strict monotheism. In their apostasy the present generation was but following the example of their fathers, for they too had *transgressed* against the Lord. This deplorable disobedience had continued to that very day (v. 3).

The *sons*, i.e., the present generation, are further described as being *hard of face and stout of heart*. The first phrase describes the brazenness of the hardened sinner who displays no shame, who has forgotten how to blush. The second phrase describes that stubborn, unyielding disposition which continues in the path of error in spite of repeated warnings and harsh chastisements.

Ezekiel's mission field did not look promising! God wanted him to have no illusions about this work. There was little prospect for success. The important thing, however, was that Ezekiel was to preach only the word of God. His message was to be characterized by and punctuated with the phrase *thus says the Lord God* (v. 4). The Hebrew here is *'adonai YHWH*, "My Lord Yahweh." Ezekiel frequently makes use of the double term. In English versions when the word LORD or GOD is written in all caps it is an indication that the personal name of God—Yahweh—is being used.⁴

Ezekiel was not required to be successful, only faithful. The important thing was that these people would come to realize that a prophet had been in their midst (v. 5). They would be forced to recognize Ezekiel as a true prophet when his predictions of calamity came upon them.

4. The four letter personal name of God in the Old Testament was YHWH. For centuries this name was not pronounced on account of reverence for it. Readers would substitute the Hebrew *'adonai* (Lord) for YHWH. When the Hebrew word *'adonai* preceded the sacred name, they substituted *'elohim* (God). By capitalization the English translations have alerted the modern student to the use of the personal name in the original.

C. Ezekiel Charged 2:6-7

TRANSLATION

(6) But as for you, son of man, do not fear them nor be afraid of their words; for thorns⁵ and thistles are with you, and you are sitting upon scorpions. Do not fear their words, and do not be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. (7) But speak My words unto them whether they hear or refuse for they are rebellious.

COMMENTS

Unlike Moses and Jeremiah, Ezekiel had no opportunity to protest his inability and timidity. God moved to forestall such excuses with earnest exhortation: *Do not fear them nor be afraid of their words*. Ezekiel would face terrible opposition. Four times in verse 6 God tells his prophet not to be afraid.

Such an exhortation is in order because his hearers are *thorns and thistles*. This preacher must have tough hide to endure the digs, scratches, abrasions and stinging sarcasm which a hostile audience heaps on him. Dwelling among those thorns and thistles are *scorpions* with deadly stings. There would be threats to his life. He would be pierced through on many occasions by this ungrateful and irresponsible crowd. At such times he must remember that this kind of conduct is entirely in character as far as these exiles are concerned for *they are a rebellious house*. For this reason Ezekiel must not *fear their words* or *be dismayed* (lit., shattered) *at their looks* (v. 6).

This section of explanation and exhortation closes with renewed exhortation to be faithful to his preaching ministry regardless of the audience reaction (v. 7).

5. The Hebrew word is not elsewhere found in the Bible and is of uncertain meaning. Context favors the traditional rendering *briers* or *thorns*.

II. THE PREPARATION FOR SERVICE

2:8—3:15

Following the call to service, God begins a process of education to prepare this man for the assigned task. Three steps can be distinguished in this educational process. (1) The prophet needed to assimilate the message of God (2:8—3:3); (2) he needed assurance of divine power (3:4-9); and (3) he needed a correct assessment of his future congregation (3:10-15).

A. Assimilation of the Word 2:8—3:3

TRANSLATION

(8) And as for you, son of man, hear that which I am about to speak unto you. Do not be rebellious like the rebellious house. Open your mouth, and eat that which I am about to give you. (9) And I saw, and behold a hand was extended unto me, and behold in it the roll of a book. (10) And he spread it before me, and it was written on front and back. And there was written on it lamentations, mourning and woe. (1) And He said unto me, Son of man, eat that which you discover; eat this roll and go speak unto the house of Israel. (2) And I opened my mouth, and he fed me this roll. (3) And he said unto me, Son of man, your belly shall eat and your inward parts shall be full with this roll which I am giving unto you. And I ate it, and it became in my mouth like honey for sweetness.

COMMENTS

A strange command is issued to Ezekiel in verse 8. The Lord prepares the prophet for this command by a warning not to be rebellious like the house of Israel. Then he was told to *eat* that which God was about to give him. Once again God forestalls any reluctance on Ezekiel's part by these words of warning. Disobedience here would mark Ezekiel as no better than the rebellious house of Israel to which he was to preach (v. 8).

The stage was set for this initial test of obedience. A *hand* came forth to him from the throne-chariot. The hand was either that of one of the cherubim, or that of the One on the throne itself. The hand contained a *roll of a book*, i.e., a scroll (v. 9).⁶ Scrolls were made of animal skins or papyrus. By sewing many pieces of these materials together, a scroll of twenty feet or more in length might be constructed. Three things are said about this scroll.

1. The scroll contained *writing*. The ancients regarded the written word as far more definite and unalterable than the spoken word. The writing on the scroll was God's authoritative Word for the children of Israel. The writing was on the scroll *before* Ezekiel received it. The message he would preach originated with God. It was a written word—a fixed and unchangeable divine declaration.

2. The scroll was somewhat unusual in that it contained writing on both sides. Normally scrolls were inscribed on only one side. Is there symbolic significance in this fact? Perhaps it simply means that God had a lot to say to His people through Ezekiel. On the other hand, maybe the scroll was completely inscribed so as to eliminate the possibility of Ezekiel adding anything to the divinely received message.⁷ Then again, perhaps the writing on front and back symbolized the abundance of the calamities which would befall Jerusalem.^{8, 9}

3. The content of the scroll consisted of *lamentation, mourning and woe* (v. 10).¹⁰ Until the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Ezekiel preached a message of doom such as might be characterized as lamentation, mourning and woe. The scroll thus set forth prophetically what would shortly befall Jerusalem and Judah.

6. Cf. Jeremiah 1:9 where in vision God stretched forth His hand and put His Word in Jeremiah's mouth.

7. Ellison, *EMM*, p. 28.

8. Currey, *BC*, p. 27.

9. Unlikely is Fineberg's suggestion (*PE*, p. 26) that the front side of the scroll symbolizes truths of a more obvious nature, the backside those of a more concealed nature.

10. Ehrlich suggests that *lamentation, mourning, and woe* was the heading of the scroll. Cited in Fisch, *SBB*, p. 12.

The command came to *eat this roll*. The word of God must be internalized, digested and assimilated by that one who would serve as God's messenger.¹¹ Thus the eating of the scroll would symbolize the reception of the word. Coming on the heels of the command to eat the scroll is the command to *go speak unto the house of Israel* (3:1). Immediately following the reception of the word there must be the proclamation of it.

Ezekiel attempted to comply with the Lord's command. He took the first step. He opened his mouth. At this point the gracious God intervened and aided in the consumption of the document (v. 2). Further encouragement came from the Lord to the effect that Ezekiel should swallow and digest the scroll that he had been given. Ezekiel complied. Much to his surprise he found that this scroll tasted sweet like honey (v. 3). This sweetness in no way indicates that Ezekiel took some morbid delight in his message of doom. Rather the sweetness of the scroll lay in the fact that it was the Word of God.¹²

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

B. Assurance of Divine Power 3:4-9

TRANSLATION

(4) And He said unto me, Son of man, go unto the house of Israel and speak with My words unto them (5) For you have not

11. Thus while the passage clearly teaches verbal inspiration, it does not set forth mechanical dictation. The message had to be assimilated before annunciated in the prophet's own unique way.

12. Cf. Ps. 19:10; 119:103; Jer. 15:16.

been sent unto a people of obscure language and heavy tongue, but unto the house of Israel. (6) Not unto many people of obscure language and heavy tongue whose words you cannot comprehend. Surely if I had sent you unto them, they would hearken unto you. (7) But as for the house of Israel, they are not willing to hearken unto you, because they are not willing to hearken unto Me; for all the house of Israel are strong of forehead and hard of heart. (8) Behold I have made your face strong against their face and your forehead strong against their forehead. (9) Like a diamond¹³ harder than flint I have made your forehead. Do not fear them and do not be dismayed before them, for they are a rebellious house.

COMMENTS

The command to go to the captives with the word is repeated in verse 4: *Go . . . speak*. Here it is said that he is to preach with *My words*. He is to convey God's message to them in the very tongue in which he had received it. The exiles were beginning to use the Aramaic tongue of the Chaldeans, but they would still be familiar with the Hebrew.

Unlike Jonah, Ezekiel is not being sent to a people whose language was utterly incomprehensible. The expression *obscure language* means literally, *deep of lip*. The same expression is found in Isaiah 33:19 where it refers to a foreign language which cannot be comprehended. *Heavy tongue* is a tongue which is sluggish and dull (cf. Ex. 4:10), or one which is tiresome to understand. Many foreigners were in Babylon. Communication with them would not be easy.

Lack of communication between Ezekiel and his audience would not be due to any language barrier. It was to the *house of Israel* his own compatriots to whom he is sent (v. 5). But this in no way will aid the communication process. Foreigners would

13. The Hebrew word *samir* is rendered *diamond* in Jeremiah 17:1, *adamant* in Zechariah 7:12.

readily listen in spite of the problem of language (v. 6). But not the house of Israel. Sometimes the home missionary has a more difficult task than he who ventures into foreign lands to preach the Gospel in exotic tongues. Strange languages are more easily mastered than the technique of communicating with those with unbelieving hearts. The exiles would not be willing to listen to what Ezekiel had to say because they had no interest in hearing what God had to say. As a matter of fact, Ezekiel's chances of "getting through" to his audience would have been greater if he were speaking to people with a hard language rather than a hard heart (v. 6).

Nothing personal would be involved in Israel's rejection of the message of Ezekiel. The basic problem with the house of Israel was that they had no interest in hearing what God had to say. The people would show an aversion to Ezekiel simply because he was the bearer of the divine word. After all, these people were *strong* of forehead and hard of heart, i.e., impudent and stubborn (v. 7). Therefore, the opposition which Ezekiel was warned to expect was not to be regarded as unusual or directed against him personally. They were deaf to the voice of God which had spoken through various natural disasters, as well as through His human spokesmen. It was therefore unlikely that they would give any heed to Ezekiel.

The first hurdle which Ezekiel would have to overcome would be the natural fear which would arise over the prospects of preaching an unpopular message to an unsympathetic multitude. With such courage Ezekiel will be endowed by God. The Lord would make Ezekiel's face *strong against their face*, and his forehead *strong against their forehead* (v. 8). The latter figure is taken from horned animals which vie for supremacy by butting heads. Ezekiel would be able to match their obstinance with sanctified stubbornness of his own. He would be as zealous for truth as they were for falsehood. They were as hard as *flint*; he would be as hard as a *diamond*.¹⁴ Ezekiel's firmness would

14. The diamond is much harder than flint, and in fact was used to cut flint. See Currey, *BC*, p. 28.

cut like a diamond into the flint-like hearts of the men of Israel. Therefore, Ezekiel need have no fear nor be dismayed before that rebellious people (v. 9). How appropriate was this prophet's name, Ezekiel—"God strengthens" or "God hardens."

C. Assessment of the Congregation 3:10-15

TRANSLATION

(10) And He said unto me, Son of man, all My words which I shall speak unto you receive into your heart, and with your ears hear. (11) And go unto the captives, unto the children of your people and speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus says the LORD GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they desist. (12) Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the sound of great shaking—Blessed be the glory of the LORD from His place—(13) even the sound of the wings of the living creatures touching each other, and the sound of the wheels beside them, even the sound of great shaking. (14) And the Spirit lifted me up, and took me so that I came with bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; and the hand of the LORD was strong upon me. (15) And I came unto the captives at Tel-abib who were dwelling beside the river Chebar, and to where they dwelt.¹⁵ And I sat there seven days astonished in their midst.

COMMENTS

The first priority of any preacher is to be atune to the Word of God. God called upon Ezekiel to hear all the words which He would speak to him. He must not only hear them with the ears, he must also *receive* them into his heart. He must *understand*

15. Another reading, which involves a change in the Hebrew text, is: *and I sat where they were sitting.*

and *believe* the message he is to preach. *All My words that I shall speak* (v. 10) suggests that there would be future revelations which the prophet would also have to assimilate and subsequently announce. It is interesting to note that God would communicate to Ezekiel in *words*, not just in abstract thought and ambiguous visions. Here is *verbal* revelation.

Once Ezekiel understood the divine word and personally yielded to it, he would be prepared to undertake his mission to the Babylonian captives. He must *go* to them and *speak* to them that which God had spoken to him. He was not to be influenced by their reactions to his words. His job was to faithfully proclaim the word. He was to speak authoritatively. *A thus says the Lord* was to characterize all of his preaching. He was to preach on regardless of whether or not they gave heed. There may be a touch of irony in the expression *your* people, rather than *My* (God's) people (v. 11).

At this point the Holy Spirit *lifted* Ezekiel up to whisk him from this mountain top of visionary experience to the valley of prophetic service. This is the first of several places in the book where the prophet describes his supernatural transports. Ezekiel was still in the midst of his visionary experience. Neither psychic levitation nor physical transposition is being described here. In his vision Ezekiel experienced a subjective feeling of being airborne, much like the feeling one has in a dream of soaring through the air.

The prophet had been in the presence of the theophany—the visionary throne-chariot—during all that has been narrated to this point (1:4—3:12). When he was *lifted up* and *carried away* it seemed to Ezekiel that he was leaving the theophany behind.

Simultaneous with the Holy Spirit entering Ezekiel, the magnificent throne-chariot departed the scene. As it did so, *the sound of a great shaking* was heard. A voice pronouncing a blessing on the glory of the Lord accompanied the shaking noise. This voice is unidentified, but it is probably the voice which was heard from above the firmament in 1:24, 25. It is also possible that Ezekiel heard the voice of the cherubim praising

the Lord.¹⁶ The phrase *from His place* (v. 12) is problematical. It probably refers to the place where the glory of God revealed itself in the vision.¹⁷ To state the matter differently, the glory of the Lord yet remained in the place from which it was departing because *His place* is universal.¹⁸

The sound of great shaking of verse 12 is identified in verse 13. As the throne-chariot departed Ezekiel heard the whirring of the wings of the living creatures and the rumble of the wheels. When the throne-chariot was stationary, the living creatures did not touch each other. But when they were in flight the cherubim raised their wings so as to touch each other. See on 1:11.

After the departure of the throne-chariot Ezekiel describes what happened to him in these words: *the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away* (v. 14). This does not mean that Ezekiel was miraculously transported from one spot to another in Mesopotamia. Rather it means that Ezekiel, guided and impelled by the Holy Spirit, went forth among his countrymen. It is implied that the site of the vision was some distance from the exile settlement, for it is to the latter place that Ezekiel now returned.

In verse 14 Ezekiel describes his feelings as he departed the scene of his visionary experience. He went in *bitterness*,¹⁹ *in the heat of my spirit*. Anger, then, was the dominant emotion in his heart at this moment. But why did he feel this way? Was he resentful at having been thrust into such a terrifying task? Possibly. But it is more likely that the word of the Lord which had been eaten and digested had created within him a righteous anger against the sin of Israel.²⁰

16. Blackwood imagines that the throbbing pulsations of the cherubim *seemed* to chant this doxology.

17. Currey, *BC*, p. 28.

18. Another view is that *His place* refers to Jerusalem.

19. The Hebrew *mar* ("bitter") can express fierce temper, discontentment or wretchedness.

20. Fisch (*SBB*, p. 15) thinks the meaning is that Ezekiel was deeply distressed over having to deliver such a calamitous message. The *heat of my spirit* he explains as descriptive of the state of exaltation which he felt as the result of his vision. This interpretation is rather forced.

Not only was Ezekiel filled with God's indignation, he was conscious of being strengthened and guided by *the hand of the Lord* (v. 14).²¹ Even though the vision was over, he still felt that the unseen hand was very definitely upon him.

Following the visionary experience Ezekiel rejoined his fellow captives in Tel-abib, the chief center of the exiles in Babylon. The name *Tel-abib* means *heap of grain ears*, and the place probably got its name from the fertility of the area.²²

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

III. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SERVICE 3:16-21

TRANSLATION

(16) And it came to pass at the end of seven days that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (17) Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel. Hear the word from My mouth and give them warning from Me. (18) When I say to the wicked, You shall surely die, and you do not warn him nor speak to preserve his life, he is the wicked one who shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will seek from your

21. The purpose of the *hand of God* was not, as Fisch (*SBB*, p. 15) contends, to counteract the reluctance of the prophet.

22. Others interpret the name to mean "mount of the flood." The name has been resurrected for the name of the largest city in the modern state of Israel—Tel Aviv.

hand. (19) But as for you, when you warn a wicked one and he does not turn from his wickedness and from his wicked way, he in his iniquity shall die, but as for you, your life you have delivered. (20) And when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I place a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not warn him in his sin he shall die, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will seek from your hand. (21) But as for you, if you warn a righteous man that a righteous man does not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he has been warned and as for you, you have delivered your life.

COMMENTS

Beginning in verse 16 the focus shifts from the national to the individual aspects of Ezekiel's mission. In the midst of the general visitation which would fall upon the nation as a whole, each individual was to stand before the Lord to have his faith and works rewarded or punished. This passage underscores the basic moral principle that each man is individually responsible for his own conduct. Another principle enunciated here is that God's messengers must face up to the responsibility to warn all men of the consequences of their ways.

At the end of the seven days of silence, *the word of the Lord* came to Ezekiel, i.e., he had another revelation from God (v. 16). He learned in this revelation that God had appointed him to be a *watchman for the house of Israel*.²³ Watchman was not a new name for the prophet of God, but it was not common. Yet it is used at the beginning of Ezekiel's commissioning and is repeated and amplified at his recommissioning in 33:1-9. Evidently the term brings out a prominent feature of Ezekiel's ministry. Ellison puts his finger on this feature when he notes

23. Earlier usage of the Watchman concept: Isa. 21:6; 52:8; 62:6; Hab. 2:1; Jer. 6:17. A fuller description of the watchman phase of Ezekiel's ministry is found in chapter 33.

that Ezekiel was not merely to be God's messenger to the people in general; he was to be God's messenger to the individual in particular.²⁴ He was to be a personal evangelist as well as a public orator. While it is true that only the facts of his public ministry have been preserved, this in no wise nullifies the conclusion here reached. Ezekiel was to engage in a pastoral ministry such as priests in Old Testament times were supposed to perform.²⁵ The chief contribution of Ezekiel to Old Testament theology is his emphasis on individual responsibility.

In his capacity as Watchman Ezekiel was to wait and watch for the word from the mouth of God and warn the people of impending calamity (v. 17). The life and safety of a community was in the hand of a city watchman. So also the life and safety of the people of God was in the hands of Ezekiel. Four different cases are discussed so that Ezekiel might clearly assess his responsibility as Israel's Watchman.

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

Ezekiel is told that the penalty for the wicked is death. *He shall die in his iniquity* (v. 18). Most commentators see nothing more involved here than the end of physical life. It should be noted that it is not Ezekiel who here speaks; it is the Lord. The question is not, then, what was the level of understanding of the doctrine of retribution or the doctrine of the afterlife in the sixth century. Still less is the full meaning of the utterance to be determined by ascertaining how Ezekiel or his contemporaries may have interpreted the word *die*. The teaching of the Bible is that those who die unforgiven "die" for all eternity in a conscious

24. Ellison, *EMM*, p. 28.

25. See Lev. 10:11; Deut. 24:8; Mal. 2:7; II Chron. 17:7ff.

existence elsewhere known as the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15). That a *premature death* may also be involved cannot be denied. But to contend that premature death exhausts the meaning of the statement is to disregard the total Biblical teaching that eternal retribution follows the physical death of the wicked.

If the prophet fails to faithfully and forthrightly sound the alarm he will be held accountable for the death of that sinner—*his blood I will seek from your hand* (v. 18). Note the change in verse 18 from *them* to *him*—the individual. The teaching here harks back to the principle expressed in Genesis 9:5f. Just as the blood of a murdered man demanded retribution by the nearest kinsman on the murderer, so a man dying unwarned would be regarded virtually as the victim of murder committed by the unfaithful Watchman. Though this utterance is metaphorical, it nonetheless emphasizes the enormous responsibility which was Ezekiel's. Is the Christian responsibility to warn the lost of this generation any less?

2. *Case Two: Non-repentant wicked.* Nothing but good can result from the discharge of responsibility to warn the wicked. If he heeds the warning and alters his course of conduct he will live, i.e., save his soul. If he refuses, he will suffer the consequences of death. But the messenger thereby has done his duty and thus delivered his own life of blood-guiltiness (v. 19). An important principle of Old Testament jurisprudence is illustrated in this passage: The failure to save life corresponds to murder.

3. *Case Three: The straying righteous man.* On occasion Ezekiel would encounter a man whose basic orientation was righteous but who momentarily had strayed from the path of fidelity. Sometimes God permits a *stumblingblock* to be placed before such a one—some trial, some difficulty, some opportunity for sin. For an example of such a stumblingblock see 7:19 and 44:12. It is true that God tempts no man in order to bring about his destruction. But through His providence and permissive will He allows men to be tried that their faith may be found true. Stumbling was not inevitable. A moral choice

was always involved. Furthermore, God provided the Watchman to warn where the stumblingblocks were located.

In such difficulties those who were superficially pious might succumb and depart from the path of righteousness. In such an event the past righteous acts²⁶ of the man would not be remembered. To neglect to warn such a one would result in his death and the Watchman's guilt (v. 20).

4. *Case Four: The righteous man who heeds.* If a righteous man who had stumbled into sin repented he would thereby save his soul. In any case the Watchman is free from any responsibility so long as he sounded the alarm (v. 21).

IV. THE RESTRICTION ON SERVICE 3:22-27

TRANSLATION

(22) And the hand of the LORD came upon me there, and He said unto me, Rise, go out into the plain, and there I will speak with you. (23) And I arose and went out unto the plain, and behold there the glory of the LORD was standing as the glory which I saw beside the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. (24) And the Spirit came on me and made me stand upon my feet, and He spoke to me, and said unto me, Go shut yourself up in the midst of your house. (25) And as for you, son of man, behold fetters will be placed upon you, and you shall not go out in their midst. (26) And your tongue shall cleave unto the roof of your mouth so that you will be dumb and you shall not become to them a man of reproof for they are a rebellious house. (27) But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say unto them, Thus says the Lord GOD. The one who hears, let him hear, and the one who desists let him desist; for they are a rebellious house.

26. The verb is plural. In the marginal notes of the Hebrew Bible the Masoretic scribes suggest that the noun should also be read as a plural.

COMMENTS

The protracted period of commissioning comes to an end in this paragraph.^{27, 28} Following the lesson at Tel-abib the *hand of the Lord*, i.e., the power and guiding influence of God,²⁹ came upon Ezekiel. He was told to go out *into the plain*. There God would teach Ezekiel yet another lesson about his ministry (v. 22). The word *plain* means literally “valley,” the area between two mountains. This may well have been a site frequented by Ezekiel in his periods of solitude.³⁰ It may well have been in this same “valley” that Ezekiel later received his vision of dry bones (37:1).

Ezekiel complied with the divine command. When he reached the designated spot he saw a second vision of the *glory of the Lord*. The vision was very much like that which he had seen by the Chebar. While modern commentators seem to focus on the various aspects of the heavenly throne-chariot—the wheels and living creatures—Ezekiel sums up the whole of that vision by his reference to the One who rode the chariot—the glory of the Lord. As on the earlier occasion, Ezekiel reacted to this majestic manifestation by falling on his face (v. 23). Again the Holy Spirit entered into Ezekiel giving him the strength and confidence to stand on his feet.

Ezekiel now received a new command. He was told to shut himself within his house (v. 24). There he would be bound with fetters (v. 25). No evidence exists that Ezekiel was ever literally bound by his auditors. The *fetters* must be symbolic or metaphorical of self-imposed (or God-imposed) restraint. It would

27. According to the great Jewish commentator Kimchi, none of the incidents in chapters 1-11 were performed, but were only suggested to Ezekiel in his vision. According to this view, 3:22-27 serves as introduction to chapters 4-24.

28. Some commentators postulate a time gap between 3:21 and 3:22 during which Ezekiel conducted a ministry as a Watchman. The chronology of the book does not allow for a significant interval at this point.

29. Cf. Blackwood (*EPH*, p. 54) who thinks the *hand of the Lord* refers to an inward, spiritual experience. Blackwood follows Davidson in contending that Ezekiel's trip to the plain did not involve any *physical* motion.

30. Taylor, *TOTC*, p. 72.

appear that Ezekiel's movements outside his house were to be severely restricted, if not actually curtailed.

Divine restrictions were placed upon the speech of Ezekiel as well as on his movements. His tongue would cleave unto the roof of his mouth. Because of the rebelliousness of the house of Israel the prophet should and would be silent. During that period of self-imposed (or God-imposed) dumbness he would not serve as a *man of reproof* to them. This ministry of silence seems to have been intended to demonstrate to the exiles that they were indeed a *rebellious house* (v. 26).³¹

The interpretation of the present paragraph is extremely difficult. The problem lies not so much in what is said — though that is difficult enough — but in the timing of it. How can the previous commands to preach the word be squared with the thought that Ezekiel was to be dumb? How can his being bound with cords be harmonized with subsequent chapters which show him moving about freely? Those who have wrestled with these questions may be divided into two broad categories.

First, there are those who think in terms of a literal period of silence. Even among those who hold to a literal period of silence at least four different positions have been taken:

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

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

3. David Kimchi offered the intriguing suggestion that the silence was divinely imposed so as to prevent Ezekiel from speaking until he had received the entire revelation which God

31. Keil (*BCOT*, I, 65) suggests that the silence also was designed to help prepare Ezekiel for the successful performance of his ministry.

reveals in chapters 1-11. In other words, he was not to speak prematurely.

4. Finally, there are those who suggest that the silence was the first of a series of prophecies which Ezekiel acted out.

A second broad category of commentators see the fetters on Ezekiel as symbolic or metaphorical. These scholars see the restraint upon the prophet as a symbol of the extreme and bitter opposition of his fellow exiles to his prophesying. Ezekiel was to preach, but the exiles would not listen. Since no real communication would take place, it would be as though Ezekiel were dumb. Still others interpret the entire passage as saying simply that Ezekiel would refuse to speak to his neighbors about ordinary matters. He would speak only when he had a divine revelation.

In view of this plethora of interpretations, what can be said about the true import of this passage? Taken at face value the words seem to mean that Ezekiel would only communicate with his fellow exiles at such times as he had a divine communication to share with them.³² From time to time God would commit to His Watchman a revelation which was to be passed on to the captives. Ezekiel was to preface every spoken word with *Thus says the Lord* (v. 27).

The silence of Ezekiel was to last for a limited time. When Jerusalem fell six years later the restraints were removed from the prophet (33:22).³³ This was, to use the language of Taylor, *ritual dumbness*. Ezekiel did not suffer from catalepsy or some nervous disorder. Rather the idea is that he was to speak only when under a divine compulsion to do so.

The reaction of men to these God-given pronouncements would confirm men in their attitude toward God. Men would either hear and obey it, or they would ignore and despise it (v. 27). In the former case they would find grace and favor; in the latter, condemnation and judgment. By his preaching and non-preaching Ezekiel was again and again to confront his auditors with the life and death alternatives.

32. The dumbness was therefore unlike that imposed on Zechariah the father of John the Baptist (Luke 1:20).

33. There are two references along the way to the prophet's silence—24:27 and 29:21.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In what way did the Holy Spirit aid Ezekiel (2:2)?
2. Did Ezekiel actually consume a scroll?
3. What is meant by the title *son of man*? What did Jesus mean by applying this title to himself?
4. In what respect are those who hear God's word today like the audience to whom Ezekiel preached?
5. Why did God tell Ezekiel so frequently not to be afraid?
6. If Ezekiel's ministry would largely be futile, why did God send him to preach?
7. What may have been symbolized by the fact that the scroll was written on front and back?
8. How can you account for the sweetness of the scroll?
9. How can you account for the communication problems which Ezekiel would face in his ministry?
10. In what ways did God prepare Ezekiel to meet the hostile audiences in Babylon?
11. Why was Ezekiel "bitter" when he was caught away from the presence of the throne-chariot?
12. Why did Ezekiel sit in silence seven days among the captives of Tel-abib?
13. Explain the teaching of Ezekiel regarding the individual responsibility of man.
14. What kind of death is threatened against those who fail to heed the warnings of God's Watchman?
15. What is the origin of the Watchman concept in the Old Testament?
16. In what sense and for what purpose does God place a stumblingblock in the path of righteous man?
17. In what sense was Ezekiel to be dumb and bound with fetters?

Chapter Four

DRAMATIC PARABLES

4:1 — 5:4

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

These dramatic parables were performed in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity. At that time any thought of Jerusalem's overthrow would, according to any human prognostication, be highly improbable. Zedekiah ruled in Jerusalem as Nebuchadnezzar's vassal. With his lands diminished and his military strength exhausted it would scarcely be imagined that he would be so stupid and careless as to provoke his overlord. Yet Ezekiel joined Jeremiah in affirming that destruction was the ultimate fate of Jerusalem and dispersion the fate of her inhabitants.

I. THE PARABLE OF JERUSALEM'S SIEGE 4:1-3

TRANSLATION

(1) But as for you, son of man, take to yourself a tile and place it before you and inscribe upon it a city, Jerusalem. (2) And lay siege against it, and construct a mound about it, and set against it encampments, and place battering rams round about. (3) And as for you, take to yourself an iron pan and place it as a wall of

1. Early examples of the use of symbolic prophecy are I Samuel 15:27f.; I Kings 11:29ff.; 22:11; II Kings 13:14-19.

2. E.g., Isaiah 20:2; Jeremiah 13:1-7; 19:1, 2; 27:2-3.

iron between you and the city; and set your face against it and it shall enter a state of siege, and you shall besiege it. It is a sign to the house of Israel.

COMMENTS

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

Ezekiel was instructed to *lay siege* against the city he had drawn (v. 2). By a common figure the prophet is here represented as doing that which he portrays. Perhaps he drew on the tile the plan of a siege. On the other hand, it may mean that he was to model the various siege weapons around the brick. A third possibility is that the armament of the besieging troops was represented on other tiles.

Four common siege techniques are named:

1. *Assault towers* (KJV, forts). The Hebrew is actually singular. The term *dayeq* denotes the towers manned by archers by which a besieged city was attacked. Sometimes these towers were of enormous height, as much as twenty stories.³ Such towers are frequently depicted in Mesopotamian art. According to II Kings 25:1 assault towers were used in the final siege of Jerusalem.

2. *Mounds (solela)*. Banks of soil heaped up to the level of the walls of the besieged city. Such mounds could serve as observation posts, and, if close enough to the walls, ramps for the

3. Currey, *BC*, p. 32.

battering rams.

3. *Camps (machanot)*. Military detachments which surrounded the city.

4. *Battering rams (karim)*. Iron-shod beams transported by a wheeled tower.⁴ Often the battering ram was found in the lower part of the siege towers mentioned above.

The prophet was to place an *iron pan* between himself and the inscribed tile. This would be a kind of flat plan—virtually no more than a sheet of metal—such as was used for baking a thin cake of bread (cf. Lev. 2:5). This pan represented a *wall of iron*. Some see here a symbol of Jerusalem's wall in which the Jews put so much trust. Others take the pan to symbolize the iron-like severity of the siege against the city. There would be no escaping from that doomed place. Still others see the pan as depicting the impenetrable barrier which had arisen between God (as represented by Ezekiel) and Jerusalem. Still others see in the pan another siege implement—the shield which attackers would erect as protection for archers.

With his symbolic objects in place, Ezekiel was to perform a symbolic action. He was (1) to set his face against the city; and (2) lay siege to it. The prophet was to assume the part of the attacking army. Since Ezekiel was God's representative, his actions would underscore the point that God was fighting against Jerusalem. Perhaps the "laying siege" (RSV, "press the siege") indicates the gradual movement of the clay models of siege instruments nearer and nearer the doomed city.⁵

The tile diagram and the objects pertaining to it were designed to be a *sign to the house of Israel* (v. 3). Ellison pictures Ezekiel silently acting out these parables much to the chagrin of the growing numbers who assembled each day to watch these antics. When the crowd was ready to listen, Ezekiel gave the verbal explanation of his actions (5:5—7:27).⁶ The term *house of Israel* here embraces both those Jews who were in exile and those who remained in Judah.

4. Blackwood, *EPH*, p. 58.

5. Ellison, *EMM*, p. 33.

6. *Ibid.* Others think that Ezekiel never actually performed these parables, but only described to the captives vividly what he had seen in vision.

II. PARABLE OF ISRAEL'S SIN 4:4-8

TRANSLATION

(4) And as for you, lie upon your left side, and set the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it. The number of days in which you lay upon it you shall bear their iniquity. (5) For I have appointed to you the years of their iniquity, according to the number of days, three hundred ninety days. So shall you bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. (6) When you have finished these days, then lie a second time upon your right side, and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days; one day for each year I have appointed you. (7) So unto the siege of Jerusalem you shall set your face, and your shoulder shall be uncovered, and you shall prophecy against it. (8) And behold I have placed bands upon you, and you shall not turn yourself from one side to the other until you have completed the days of your siege.

COMMENTS

In 4:1-3 Ezekiel impersonated Jerusalem's enemies; his role is now reversed. Here Ezekiel symbolizes the apostate people of God. He is to lie first on his left side, then on his right side, *to bear the iniquity* of the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The Oriental habit was to face eastward when indicating points of the compass.⁷ Facing east one has north on his left side and south on his right. Hence the left side represented the house of Israel, the Northern Kingdom which had been carried captive in 722 B.C. The right side symbolized the house of Judah, the Southern Kingdom which was in its dying days at the moment Ezekiel received this revelation. The number of days which the prophet spent on each side symbolized the number of years which each kingdom had stood under the condemnation of God.

A few observations about this action parable need to be

7. Feinberg, *PE*, p. 33.

made before the difficult question of the numbers found here is taken up:

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. Such great diversity of opinion exists as to the *terminus a quo* of the figures here given that dogmatic assertions are out of place.

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

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

Ezekiel was to lie on his left side 390 days. If the Hebrew text be retained as is, there seems to be only one possible *terminus a quo* for this period, viz., the division of the Hebrew kingdom in 931 B.C. Allowing for round figures—something very common in prophecy—the 390 years would terminate with the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. Through that entire period the citizens of the Northern Kingdom were under the wrath of God because

of their apostate activities.⁸

From what point are the 40 years of Judah's punishment to be counted? The figure 40 is reminiscent of the period of Israel wandering in the wilderness. It seems more in accordance with the other signs in this book to suppose that these years represent not that which had already transpired, but that which was yet to be. From the final deportation of Jews to Babylon in 582 B.C. (Jer. 52:30) until the fall of Babylon and the end of the Babylonian exile in 539 B.C. is a period of 42 years. The prophet is probably referring to this period with the symbolic number 40, the period during which God's people, because of their sin, would be denied access to the Promised Land.

Another view worthy of note is that of Currey who sees in these figures a purely symbolic significance. The two figures *combined* yield 430 years. This may be a representation of the future in terms of the past. Just as Israel was 430 years in Egyptian bondage, so would they now be in bondage in Mesopotamia.⁹ A correlation may also exist between the 40 years punishment assigned to Judah and the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness during the Exodus from Egypt.¹⁰

In his prone position Ezekiel was *to bear the iniquity* of the two kingdoms. The term *iniquity* in the Old Testament can refer to the sin itself or the punishment that comes upon that offense. In the present passage the term seems to have the latter connotation. Ezekiel is to symbolize through his personal suffering of physical restraint the punishment of God's people in being cut off from the Holy Land and the Temple. This symbolic suffering is by no means to be equated with the vicarious suffering

8. Many modern writers prefer to follow the Greek text which gives 190 as the figure here. From the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. until the time of Ezekiel's vision was about 150 years. Add to this the 40 years mentioned in 4:6 and the figure 190 is reached. However, it is more likely that the Greek translators deliberately altered the text. There is no logical explanation of how any accidental change in the text could have occurred here.

9. Currey, *BC*, pp. 33-34. Hosea had predicted already that Ephraim would again suffer the misery of bondage in a strange land. See Hosea 8:13; 9:3.

10. Ellison, (*EMM*, p. 34) argues for this connection.

which is set forth in Isaiah 53.

During the entire time that he was lying on his side Ezekiel was to fix his gaze upon the tile which depicted the besieged city of Jerusalem. The fixing of the gaze indicates steadfastness of purpose. He was to have his arm uncovered like a warrior prepared for battle (cf. Isa. 52:10). By these actions he would be *prophesying* against Jerusalem (v. 7).

Verse 8 underscores the discomfort which Ezekiel must have experienced while carrying out this symbolic act. He was not to turn from one side to another. There may be a hint of special divine aid in the statement *I lay bands upon you*.¹¹

Some scholars find difficulty in fitting the 430 days of this action parable into the chronology of the early ministry of Ezekiel. Ellison argues that this action parable must be fitted into the year and two months which elapsed between 1:2 and 8:1. According to the Jewish system of reckoning time, this would be equivalent to 413 days.¹² Ellison therefore argues that the 40 days on the right side must have been concurrent with the last 40 days of the 390 days on the left side.¹³ However, the text certainly gives the impression that the 430 days of prostration were consecutive—390 on the left side followed by 40 on the right side. In the fulfillment of this prophecy the 40 years of Judah's punishment was in fact concurrent with the last 40 years of Israel's punishment. But in the symbolic action performed by Ezekiel the days seem to be consecutive. Therefore, one must conclude either (1) that during the period between 1:2 and 8:1 a month had been intercalated (see note 12); or (2) that the symbolic prostration extended beyond the time stipulated in 8:1. Of course, if the prophet's prostration occurred only in a vision as some scholars contend, it would not be necessary to fit the 430 days into the chronology of Ezekiel's life.

11. Taylor (*TOTC*, p. 81) takes the expression literally, and pictures Ezekiel's body trussed with cords during his daily period upon his side.

12. The Jewish year was a lunar year of 354 days. Periodically an extra month was intercalated so as to bring the lunar calendar into harmony with the seasons. If the year which elapsed between 1:2 and 8:1 was such a leap year, the maximum number of days would be 442.

13. Ellison, *EMM*, p. 34.

III. THE PARABLE OF JERUSALEM'S FAMINE 4:9-17

TRANSLATION

(9) Now as for you, take to you wheat and barley, and beans and lentiles and millet and fitches, and put them in a vessel, and prepare them for food for yourself, according to the number of days in which you are lying upon your side, three hundred ninety days and you shall eat it. (10) And your food which you shall eat shall be twenty shekels in weight for a day. Once each day¹⁴ you shall eat it. (11) And as for water, you shall drink the sixth of a hin by measure. Once each day you shall drink it. (12) And as a barley cake you shall eat it, and with human dung you shall bake it in their presence. (13) And the LORD said, In this way the children of Israel shall eat their unclean food among the nations where I will drive them. (14) Then I said, Ah, O Lord GOD! Behold my soul has not been polluted, and a corpse or that which was torn in pieces I have never eaten from my youth until now, nor has abominable meat come into my mouth. (15) Then He said unto me, See, I have appointed for you cattle dung instead of human dung, and you shall prepare your food with it. (16) And he said unto me, Son of man, behold I am about to shatter the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and they shall eat food by weight and with concern, and water by measure and in dismay they shall drink, (17) because bread and water will be scarce. And they shall be dismayed one with another, and shall waste away under their punishment.

COMMENTS

How could Ezekiel be commanded to make bread while lying bound upon his side? Several commentators think that this

14. Literally, from time to time. A similar phrase is found in I Chronicles 9:25 which makes it clear that it refers to a recurring action which was to take place at the same time each day. See Taylor, *TOTC*, pp. 82-83.

inconsistency is proof positive that all of these symbolic actions transpired in vision where such a thing would be possible.¹⁵ However, if the prophet's immobilization occupied only a part of each day as suggested above, no inconsistency is apparent. Once Ezekiel had performed his daily demonstration—lying facing the model of the besieged city—he apparently would arise and perform the other symbolic acts which related to the siege.

Ezekiel's symbolic diet during the days of his "siege" was designed to set forth two basic thoughts: (1) the scarcity of food which would exist in Jerusalem during the final siege; and (2) the impure food which those exiled from Judah would be forced to eat. Six instructions were given to the prophet about his diet.

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

2. These various grains were to be placed *in one vessel*. In the Law of Moses it was forbidden to *sow the ground with mingled seeds* (Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:9). Though not specifically condemned, the mixing of these grains and seeds in flour would seem to be banned under the same principle.¹⁶ In a city under siege and in foreign exile the Jews would not be able to be so scrupulous about their diet.

3. The dietary restrictions are to be in force during the 390 days of bearing the iniquity of the people of God (v. 9). Here again the question of the duration of Ezekiel's symbolic siege

15. E.g., Blackwood, *EPH*, p. 60; Fisch, *SBB*, p. 21.

16. Taylor, (*TOTC*, p. 82), does not feel that any ritual defilement was involved in mixing these grains.

of Jerusalem is raised. Verse 9 seems to suggest that the prophet would lie upon his side only 390 days. What happened to the 40 days he was to lie upon his right side? Many modern scholars assume that the 390 days are inclusive of the 40 days. However, this interpretation runs counter to the explicit statement in verse 6 that Ezekiel was to lie on his right side *after* he had finished the 390 days on his left side. One must conclude either (1) that the dietary regulations of this paragraph were to be observed only during the time when Ezekiel was on his left side; or (2) that the dietary restrictions were observed during the 40 days on the right side as well even though the text does not explicitly so state. Any other interpretations would put verse 9 at variance with verse 6. God's people were to be exiled from the sacred temple precincts for 390 years, the Northern Kingdom from 931 to 539 B.C., and the Southern Kingdom for the last 40 years of that period. The point that Ezekiel is trying to establish is that God's people would eat unclean food as exiles in foreign lands. This point he established during the 390 days on his left side. Continuing this phase of the demonstration during the period he lay on his right side would have been superfluous.

4. The *quantity* of his food was limited. Ezekiel's diet during the 390 days was to consist of *twenty shekels* of food (v. 10) and the *sixth of a hin* of water (v. 11). This amounts to about ten ounces of food and a quart of water daily. In a hot climate this limitation on water would be very oppressive. This probably corresponds to the water of affliction mentioned in I Kings 22:27; and Isaiah 30:20. The fact that food was *weighed* rather than measured indicates the most extreme scarcity (cf. Lev. 26:26; Rev. 6:6).

5. The prophet was to partake of his unpalatable meals literally, *from time to time* (v. 10). The Rabbis interpreted this phrase to mean once in a twenty-four hour period. Currey concurs, feeling that the instruction is to partake of the food at the appointed interval of a day and at no other time.¹⁷

6. This meager food was to be eaten *as barley cake* (v. 12). He

17. Currey, *BC*, p. 35.

would eat his meal with all the relish that one would customarily give to barley cakes.

7. The food was to be eaten *in their sight* (v. 12). Thus would they come to understand it as a sign of what had befallen them already, and of what would yet befall their brethren in Jerusalem.

8. One of the usual calamities of a siege is lack of fuel. To further dramatize siege conditions Ezekiel was to prepare his food with unclean fuel. The prophet was first told to use human *dung* (v. 12) as cooking fuel, that which was revolting as well as ceremonially impure and defiling (cf. Deut. 23:12ff.). Barley bread was prepared on hot stones (I Kings 19:6), which were to be heated by human excrement. For the moment the ceremonial law was to be overridden so as to make a moral point.

The significance of the disgusting instruction regarding the use of human dung for fuel is given in verse 13. Those Israelites who yet lingered in Jerusalem would be forced *to eat unclean food among the nations* where God would drive them (cf. Hos. 9:3). Foreign lands were regarded by the Israelites as unclean.¹⁸ Even those who attempted to maintain the dietary code would be eating unclean bread because the ritual firstfruits of the harvest would not be able to be offered in the Temple of the Lord.¹⁹ In addition to the specific prediction being set forth in this action parable, Ezekiel is making a significant point: Israel's position as a separate, sanctified people would be destroyed during the Babylonian exile.²⁰

This command to prepare his food with human dung as fuel shocked the conscientious young priest who obliquely requested relief from this phase of the object lesson. Even in exile where it would be most difficult to obtain "kosher" food Ezekiel had faithfully observed the dietary law. He had practiced his faith. The first words that Ezekiel speaks in this book are an emotional outburst, *Ah Lord God!* The godly prophet was not so much concerned with that which displeased his taste as that which offended his conscience.

18. Fisch, *SBB*, p. 23.

19. Cf. Amos 7:17; Daniel 1:8.

20. Feinberg, *PE*, pp. 34-35.

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

Ezekiel cites three examples of how he had faithfully observed the Old Testament law. (1) He had not eaten of a *corpse*, i.e., an animal which had not been properly slaughtered. Such meat was forbidden (Lev. 17:15; Deut. 14:21). (2) He had not eaten *that which was torn in pieces*, i.e., an animal which had been killed by a wild beast. Such were forbidden to the Israelite because the blood had not been properly drained. (3) Abominable meat (*piggul*) had never come into his mouth. In its more restricted sense the Hebrew term refers to sacrificial flesh rendered unfit by disregard for the laws of sacrifice.²¹ In a broader sense, the term is used of any forbidden food.²²

The gracious Lord acquiesced in the request of His prophet. He permitted Ezekiel to substitute animal dung for the prescribed human dung (v. 15). Cow dung was a common fuel in Palestine, much as buffalo chips was on the American plains. Dried cow dung was not as physically disgusting as human dung. So in the case of Ezekiel there was a mitigation of the defilement; but still defilement remained, and in exile the people of God were subjected to it.

The second application of the food parable is set forth in verses 16-17. Shortly God would *shatter the staff of bread in Jerusalem*. Bread was then and is still known as the staff of life because man is so dependent upon it (cf. Lev. 26:26; Ps. 105:16). The inhabitants of that doomed city would be forced to *eat food by weight* and drink water *by measure*. The food and water would be so scarce as to give rise to grave concern and even dismay (v. 16). Faced with this lack of food the populace

21. More precisely, meat of an offering, if kept to the third day was forbidden to be eaten by the priests as abominable (Lev. 19:7).

22. Cf. Leviticus 7:18; Isaiah 65:4.

would gradually *waste away*. This they would experience because they were *under the punishment*²³ of the Lord (v. 17).

IV. PARABLE OF THE NATION'S FATE 5:1-4

TRANSLATION

(1) And as for you, son of man, take to yourself a sharp sword, for a barber's razor, take it, and cause it to pass over your head and your beard, and take to yourself balances, and divide them. (2) A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city when the days of the siege are fulfilled. And take a third part, smite with the sword around about her. And a third part you shall scatter to the wind. And I will unsheath a sword after them. (3) And take a few in number, and bind them in the hem of your garment. (4) And from them take again, and cast them into the midst of the fire and burn them; from it a fire shall go out into all the house of Israel.

COMMENTS

During the days of his symbolic siege of Jerusalem, Ezekiel performed another act. He shaved his head and beard with a sharp sword which he used like a barber's razor.²⁴ The sword symbolizes the invading Chaldean army. Ezekiel symbolizes the land of Judah. Though shaving of the head was forbidden in the Law (Lev. 19:27f.; 21:5), the act was universally practiced as a sign of mourning (Isa. 3:24; 22:12). The coming invader would scrape the land bare (cf. Isa. 7:20), and bring upon it disgrace and mourning. Here again Ezekiel was commanded to violate the ceremonial law so as to make a prophetic application. Such shaving was forbidden to a priest like Ezekiel and ordinarily

23. Could also be translated, *in their iniquity*.

24. Grammatically it is difficult to determine whether Ezekiel took a sword or a razor-sharp knife symbolizing a sword. In either case the message here is the same.

meant the loss of priestly status and position. The hair of the priest was a mark of his consecration to God's service (Lev. 21:5; 19:27).

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

Ezekiel's shorn hair symbolizes the population of Jerusalem; the manner of the disposal of the hair indicated the various fates which awaited those rebellious Jews. A third of the hair was to be burned *in the midst of the city*, i.e., on the tile which depicted the city of Jerusalem.²⁵ These hairs symbolized those who would die in the horrors of warfare — fire, sword, famine and pestilence — when the city was besieged.²⁶

Another third of the hairs were to be smitten with the sword *round about her*, viz., the city. This symbolized the fate of those who tried to escape the city either during or after the fall. A prime example is King Zedekiah and his associates (cf. II Kings 25:4ff.).

The last third of the hairs was to be scattered to the wind. The hairs symbolize those who would be dispersed to foreign lands. Though they had escaped the holocaust at Jerusalem they would not find peace for *I will unsheath a sword after them* (v. 2). Jeremiah predicted the same fate for the exiles (Jer. 9:15), as did Moses before him (Lev. 26:33).²⁷

In this bleak passage there is another hint of hope. A few of the hairs — presumably those that had been scattered to the wind — were to be retrieved and bound in the hem of Ezekiel's garment (v. 3). A remnant of those carried off to exile would survive. Yet their situation would be desperate. From the hairs retrieved, Ezekiel was to take some and cast them into the fire. The fire here may represent persecution through which some of the Jewish remnant would die. On the other hand, the fire may

25. Another view is that the actual city of Jerusalem is meant. If all these action parables are *visionary* this could be a possible interpretation.

26. For a similar prophecy of a much later time, see Zech. 13:8-9.

27. Cf. Jeremiah 40-44 and the trials which befell the Jewish remnant in Egypt.

represent the fire which would destroy *Babylon*, and would represent the fate of some who refused to heed the prophetic admonition to flee *Babylon*.²⁸

Thus the general drift of this parable is clear. Ezekiel foresees the total destruction and dispersion of Jerusalem's populace. But true faith would survive in a faithful remnant.

The expression *from them fire shall go out into all the house of Israel* (v. 4) is difficult. Perhaps the thought is that even the faithful remnant in *Babylon* would suffer new hardships because of the suicidal rebellion launched by the leadership in *Jerusalem*.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the purpose of the action parables performed by the prophets of old? What would be the modern-day reaction to such antics?
2. Identify and describe the various kinds of siege operations to which Ezekiel alludes in this section.
3. What was symbolized by the pan which Ezekiel set up between himself and his sketch of *Jerusalem*?
4. What was Ezekiel symbolizing by lying first on his left side and then on his right?
5. From what point in time are the 390 years of *Israel's* punishment to be counted? What forty years was *Judah* punished for its iniquity?
6. Were the 390 days and the 40 days of immobilization concurrent or consecutive?
7. How can you explain the fact that Ezekiel performed various symbolic acts during the period of his immobilization?
8. How might one answer those who contend that there is no

28. The remnant theme can be traced through the following references: II Kings 25:22; Isa. 6:13; 10:22; Jer. 23:3; Ezekiel 6:8-10; 9:8; 11:13; Zech. 13:8-9.

way to fit the 430 days of immobilization into the chronology of Ezekiel's early ministry?

9. What was Ezekiel representing by the diet he consumed during the days of his symbolic siege?
10. Were the dietary regulations in effect only during the first 390 days, or during the entire period of 430 days?
11. How did the Lord indicate His thoughtful concern for Ezekiel in the matter of the cooking fuel?
12. What was Ezekiel to do with the hairs of his head to symbolize the various fates awaiting the Jews? What element of hope is found here?

Chapter Five

PROPHETIC DISCOURSES

5:5 — 7:27

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

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

I. REBELLION AND RETRIBUTION 5:5-17

In 5:5-17 the four symbols found in 4:1 — 5:4 are directly and forcefully explained. That these paragraphs are meant as an interpretation of the foregoing is indicated by the direct assertion, *This is Jerusalem*. After briefly reciting the sin of Jerusalem (5:5-6), the prophet enunciates two dreadful threats against the city (5:7-12). He then describes the results of the judgment (5:13-15), and closes this discourse with yet another direct threat (5:16-17). This first discourse describes the privilege, perversity and punishment of Jerusalem.

A. The Sin of Jerusalem 5:5-6

TRANSLATION

(5) Thus says the Lord GOD: This is Jerusalem! In the midst of the nations I have placed her, and lands are round about her.

(6) She has rebelled against My judgments for evil more than the nations, and against My statutes more than the lands which are round about her; for they have refused My judgments, and in My statutes they have not walked.

COMMENTS

Ezekiel through the siege signs of 4:1 — 5:4 has made it clear that disaster was going to overtake the inhabitants of this besieged city. It remained only for Ezekiel to make known the identity of the city. The sense of drama is sustained as the prophet tersely announces, *This is Jerusalem*.

Ezekiel's thesis in verses 5-6 is that Jerusalem's sin against God was grievous. He argues his point in four ways.

1. Jerusalem's sin was grievous because of the position which she occupied. God had placed Jerusalem in the *midst of the nations* (v. 5). This is no manifestation of Jewish pride, but an indication of the basic premise of Old Testament religion, viz., the election of Israel. Geographically, Canaan was in the midst of the great civilizations of the ancient Near East. The habitation assigned to the chosen people was carefully chosen by the Lord. The peoples of God were to be the great witness to monotheism in that ancient world. But Jerusalem was unfaithful to her mission. The ancient Jews thought of God as inexorably connected with physical Jerusalem. The continued physical existence of the walls and buildings known as Jerusalem was not what concerned God, but rather the mission and message of that city. This concept the contemporaries of Ezekiel found hard to accept.

2. Jerusalem's sin was grievous in view of the fact that she had received special divine revelation in the form of *judgments* and *statutes*. The Rabbis taught that *judgments* (*mishpatim*) pertained to a man's duty to his fellowman while *statutes* (*chukkim*) spelled out his duty to God.¹ Certainly greater light

1. Carley (*BPE*, p. 38) sees the distinction being that *judgments* were conditional laws (casuistic law) and *statutes* were unconditional commands or prohibitions (apodictic law).

involves greater responsibility before God. An Egyptian and an Israelite may commit the same overt act; but the deed was a far greater crime for the Israelite because Israel had divine law and light.

3. The grievousness of Jerusalem's sin is indicated by the verbs of verse 6. She had *rebelled* (*temer*) against, and her population had *rejected* (*ma'asu*), the judgments of God. They refused to *walk in* the statutes of God.

4. The *wickedness* of Jerusalem was worse than that of heathen nations round about (v. 6). The judgments of God are always relative to the light and privilege granted to a people. This thought is amplified in the following verses.

B. The First Threat 5:7-10

TRANSLATION

(7) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Because you are more tumultuous than the nations which are round about you—in My statutes you have not walked, and My judgments you have not done, nor have you done according to the judgments of the nations which are round about you; (8) therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold I, even I, am against you, and I will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations. (9) And I will do in you that which I have not done and the likes of which I will not do again, because of all your abominations. (10) Therefore, fathers shall eat sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments in you, and I will scatter all your remnant to every wind.

COMMENTS

1. *The basis of the threat (5:7).* Because Jerusalem was more *tumultuous* than surrounding nations (v. 7) she would have to have the judgment of God. The word translated *tumultuous*

(*hamanchem*) is of uncertain meaning.² It seems to be connected with the noun *hamon* which means *a tumultuous crowd*. They raged in their opposition against God. Such a description is appropriate to these lawless ones who rejected the judgments and statutes of the Lord. In fact, Judah had not even measured up to the standards of heathen nations—*nor have you done according to the judgments of the nations round about you* (v. 7). Judah had sunk even deeper into wickedness than pagan nations. The thought here may be that of Jeremiah 2:10f., viz., that the heathen were more loyal to their non-gods than was Israel to the God of creation.

2. *The specifics of the threat (5:8-10)*. Five specific details concerning the forthcoming judgment of God are set forth in 5:8-10.

(1) The future judgment is the work of the sovereign ruler of Judah (v. 8a). Yahweh is 'adonay, sovereign. It is He who has become the adversary of Judah. The formula *I am against you* seems to be derived from the background of hand to hand combat. The dreadful thought that God has entered into mortal combat against Jerusalem is underscored by the emphasis on the first person pronoun—*I, even I, am against you*. This great sovereign God not only declares in verse 8 His hostility toward Jerusalem, He announces His intention to execute judgments in the midst of that city (v. 8). The last expression is repeated in verse 10.

(2) The future judgment will take place *in the sight of the nations* (v. 8). Repeatedly Ezekiel emphasizes this thought.³ Judah had publicly profaned the honor of God, and thus the Holy One of Israel must be publicly vindicated. The death of Judah would be a hideous example to others.

(3) The judgment would be unprecedented. The abominations of Judah were without precedent; so also would be the manifestation of God's judgment (v. 9). Modern students find it easy

2. KJV, *ye multiplied more than the nations*; ASV, *ye are turbulent more than the nations*.

3. See Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22, 41; 22:16; 28:25; 38:23; 39:27.

to criticize the spiritual blindness and obduracy of Israel in refusing to believe the prophetic threats that Jerusalem would be overthrown. This verse should serve to explain in part the bewilderment and incredulity which this message of destruction produced. There was no precedent to prepare for the disaster. Currey observes that

The punishments of God are cumulative. The calamities of the Babylonian were surpassed by the Roman siege (Matt. 24:21), and these again were but a foreshadowing of still more terrible destruction at the last day.⁴

(4) The judgment would result in horrible barbarisms. In the extremities of the forthcoming siege cannibalism would be practiced in Jerusalem. That children would be devoured during that brutal period had been prophesied already.⁵ The gruesome fulfillment is recorded in Lamentations 4:10. But Ezekiel here goes beyond previous threats in that he predicts that *sons shall eat their fathers*. "Human plight can know no greater depths."⁶

(5) The judgment would involve the scattering of God's people. In verse 10 Ezekiel alludes to those Jews who would flee from the Babylonian invasion as well as those who would be carried off to Babylon or sold into slavery in distant lands.

C. The Second Threat 5:11-12

TRANSLATION

(11) Therefore as I live (oracle of the Lord GOD) surely, because My sanctuary you have defiled with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will cut you short, and My eye will spare not, nor shall I have pity. (12) A third part of you with pestilence shall die, and with famine they shall be consumed in your midst; and a third part shall fall by the sword

4. Currey, *BC*, p. 37.

5. Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:53; Jer. 29:9.

6. Feinburg, *PE*, p. 38.

round about you; and a third part I shall scatter to every wind, and a sword I shall unsheath after them.

COMMENTS

1. *The basis of this threat (5:11a)*; This dire threat is in order because the inhabitants of Jerusalem had defiled God's Temple with their *detestable things* and their *abominations*, i.e., their idolatrous paraphernalia. History records how King Manasseh erected an idol in the Temple precincts (II Kings 21:7) and Ahaz replaced the divinely ordained altar with an Assyrian model (II Kings 16:11). Because of such brazen presumption God would *cut short* Jerusalem without mercy (v. 11). There is no evidence that the Israelites were overtly more wicked than neighboring peoples. But they had violated the first and most basic commandment in that they rendered allegiance to that which was less than God.

2. *The specifics of the threat (5:12)*. In verse 12 Ezekiel alludes to the symbolic act which he performed with his shaven hair (5:1-4). A third of the populace would be consumed by pestilence and famine in the midst of the city. A third would fall by the sword round about the city, and a third would be scattered in every direction. This latter group would include both those who might manage to escape to surrounding nations and those who would be carried into foreign exile. Divine retribution would continue to pursue these folks even on foreign soil. The *sword* which God would unsheath after these refugees and exiles symbolizes the persecution which they would continue to experience. The horrors of the Babylonian siege were but the beginning of sorrows of the nation. The prophecy may reach beyond the limits of the Babylonian era. Ezekiel may here be foretelling the continuous misery which the once favored people of God would experience.

D. The Results of the Judgment 5:13-15

TRANSLATION

(13) Then My anger shall end, and My wrath I shall cause to rest in respect to them and shall be comforted; and they shall know that I the LORD have spoken in My zeal when I have finished My wrath on them. (14) And I shall make you a desolation and a reproach among the nations which are round about you, before every one who passes by. (15) And it shall be a reproach, and a taunt, a lesson and an astonishment to the nations which are round about you when I execute against you judgments in anger and wrath and in furious rebukes; I the LORD have spoken it.

COMMENTS

Three results of Jerusalem's judgment are mentioned in these verses:

1. Only when Jerusalem was in ruins and her few survivors scattered abroad would God's indignant wrath be assuaged. The strongly anthropomorphic expression, *My wrath I shall cause to rest in respect to them* is used in three other places in the book.⁷ Evil actions have tragic results. In this first discourse the only note of hope is that once Jerusalem is destroyed the righteous anger of God would be satisfied.

2. Through the fulfillment of the predicted punishment they would recognize that the calamity was initiated by God and was not due to mere chance.

3. The retribution against Jerusalem would earn for the people of Judah the contempt of all neighboring nations and passers by as well (v. 14). The ruins of the once proud capital of Judah would serve a *reproach*, *taunt*, a warning *lesson* and a source of *astonishment* to the neighboring nations. At this

7. Ezekiel 16:42; 21:22; 24:13.

point Ezekiel mentions only this one good which will result from the fall of Judah. From the tragedy of Israel the nations will learn that Yahweh is in control of history and that He is a righteous God.

E. The Third Threat 5:16-17

TRANSLATION

(16) When I send against them the evil arrows of famine that are for destruction which I shall send against you to destroy you; and I shall increase famine upon you and I shall shatter your staff of bread; (17) and I will send against you famine and wild beasts and they shall bereave you; and pestilence and blood shall pass through you; and I will bring a sword upon you. I the LORD have spoken it.

COMMENTS

In the third threat of this discourse Ezekiel enumerates six calamities which will befall Judah!

1. God was about to send against His people *the evil arrows of famine*, i.e., blasting, mildew, locusts and other plagues which would lead to a scarcity of food.

2. On top of this God would *increase the famine*. He would withhold the rain. Thus would He *shatter the staff of bread* (v. 16; cf. 4:16).

3. In addition to famine, God would send other disasters against His wayward people. The land would become so depopulated that *wild beasts* would be a problem. They would especially attack children and thus would the wicked mothers and fathers be bereaved.

4. *Pestilence*—plagues against man and beast—would also take their toll.

5. Others would die by violence as *blood* would pass through

their midst.

6. Finally, they would face the *sword* of divine retribution, the Chaldean enemy.

It should be noted that three times in this first discourse Ezekiel stressed the fact that *I the Lord have spoken* (vv. 13, 15, 17). It is not the existence of the Lord that is being stressed, but the identity of the speaker as Yahweh. It is really *Yahweh*, the God of revelation and redemption, who has made these threats. He is a God who reveals Himself in acts as well as in words. In fact His acts accredit and validate His words. The dire threats of this chapter were certain to befall Judah.

In summarizing the first discourse, three stages of backsliding can be observed: (1) the Jews had rebelled against the ordinances of God in their hearts (v. 6); (2) they ceased to walk in God's statutes in the outer life (v. 6); and finally, (3) they were so brazen that they defiled God's sanctuary (v. 11). With regard to Jerusalem's punishments again a threefold progression is observable: (1) God was against His people (v. 8); (2) God would execute judgments on His people (v. 8); and finally (3) those judgments would be executed in anger and wrath (v. 15).

II. DISOBEDIENCE AND DESOLATION 6:1-14

In his second discourse Ezekiel zeroes in on the places of idolatrous worship which were located in the mountains and valleys of Judah. These pagan sanctuaries, once known for their shady trees, would become desolate. There is throughout this chapter a frequent change from *their* to *your*, and from *your* to *their*, when the same persons are spoken of. This is quite in the manner of Ezekiel. The sermon contains three points of emphasis: (1) a dire prediction (6:1-7); (2) a confident expectation (6:8-10); and (3) a distressing lamentation (6:11-14).

A. A Dire Prediction 6:1-7

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying: (2) Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel and prophesy against them, (3) and say, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD. Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the mountains and hills, concerning the ravines and valleys: Behold I, even I, am about to bring against you a sword, and I will destroy your high places. (4) And your altars shall be made desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken; and I shall cast down your slain before your idols. (5) And I will put the carcasses of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones around your altars. (6) In all of your dwelling places the cities shall become waste, and the high places shall become desolate; that they may be laid waste, and your altars may bear their guilt, and your idols be broken, and cease to be, and your incense altars be cut down, and your works wiped out. (7) And the slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

This *word of the Lord* (v. 1) directed Ezekiel to *set his face* toward and *prophesy* against the mountains of Israel (v. 2). Apparently the prophet actually assumed a posture which demonstrated determination and anger; i.e., he faced westward as he spoke these words.⁸ Just as the anonymous prophet of I Kings 13 addressed an oracle to the illegitimate Bethel altar, so Ezekiel speaks directly to the *mountains of Israel*. It is as though the people of Judah were so hopelessly meshed in idolatry that Ezekiel might as well speak to the mountains of the land. These mountains are not to be understood as geographical

8. Cf. 13:17; 20:46; 21:2.

symbols of the land of Judah, but rather as theological symbols. The mountains were the places where Israel practiced idolatry. This oracle, then, goes beyond the previous discourse in that it asserts that the judgment would include the pagan shrines scattered throughout the land as well as in Jerusalem. The distraught exiles on the monotonous plains of Babylon might pine for the beloved Judean hills. But those mountains were contaminated and doomed.

While the mountains were directly addressed, the message pertains to the *hills*, *ravines* and *valleys* as well. All of these areas had been contaminated by the presence of pagan *high places*. Remains of such high places have been discovered at Taanach, Gezer, and Petra. An altar, standing stones, a wooden pole symbolic of Asherah, and a laver were standard features of Canaanite high places. Hezekiah in the eighth century and Josiah in the seventh century made determined efforts to remove these theological cancers from the nation. But unfortunately later kings tolerated and/or encouraged pagan practices (II Kings 18:4; 23:5). Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel testify to the resurgence of this corrupt worship following Josiah's valliant reform effort.

The Lord would bring the *sword* of destruction against the pagan high places (v. 3). The term *sword* (*chereb*) can denote any kind or all kinds of destructive instruments. Here the term is symbolic of the invading forces of Nebuchadnezzar which would bring death, destruction and desolation to the land. The sexual license and child sacrifice which marked the pagan worship were an abomination to God and hence had to be judged.

When the judgment of God fell, the pagan high places would be desecrated and destroyed. The sacrificial *altars* and smaller *incense altars*⁹ would be destroyed. The corpses of the slain Israelites would not even be accorded the dignity of burial. They

9. Small limestone altars with "horns" too small for offering any sacrifice other than incense have been found in Palestine.

would be left to rot before their helpless *idols*¹⁰ (v. 4). Their bones would be scattered around the altars. Death defiled (cf. Num. 9:6-10; II Kings 23:14, 16). Hence the altars would be made *desolate*, rendered permanently unclean and unsuitable for worship (v. 5). A similar threat was made by Jeremiah (Jer. 8:1f.). They had defiled the land with their idols; they would yet further defile it by their dead bodies. The fragrance of incense offered to pagan deities would be replaced by the stench of rotting bodies.

In characteristic emphasis by repetition, Ezekiel underscores the threat against the idolatrous shrines in verses 6-7. Here the people are directly addressed rather than the mountains. In all of their dwelling places the cities would become waste and their high places desolate. *Altars, idols and incense altars* would be destroyed. The work of their hands, i.e., their idols, would be *wiped out*¹¹ (v. 6). The slain of Judah would fall throughout the land, and no idol would be able to prevent the massacre. In that terrible day when man-made gods proved impotent, the sovereignty of the Lord would be admitted by all.

The expression *you shall know that I am the Lord* (v. 7) is characteristic of Ezekiel and occurs some sixty times in the book. It is virtually the theme of the whole work. The motivation in all God's dealings with Israel is that He be recognized as the only God. Throughout the book this expression summons the listeners to judge that it was Yahweh who had intervened, or was about to intervene, with His wrath or with His aid.

10. The term for idols here (*gillulim*) is one of contempt. Ezekiel may have coined this term which means something like "block-gods." The term is found thirty-nine times in the book. See Feinberg, *PE*, p. 41.

11. The same order had been given regarding the Canaanites who occupied the land before Israel. Since Israel had adopted the ways of Canaan, they and their worship would now come under the same divine edict.

B. A Confident Expectation 6:8-10

TRANSLATION

(8) But I will leave a remnant, in that you shall have those who escaped the sword among the nations when you are scattered among the lands. (9) And those of you who escape shall remember Me among the nations where they have been taken captive, that I was shattered by their adulterous heart which turned aside from Me, and by their eyes which committed adultery after their idols; and they shall loath themselves in their sight for the evils which they committed, for all their abominations. (10) And they shall know that I am the LORD; not in vain have I said that I would do this evil to them.

COMMENTS

Not all would die in the carnage and bloodshed which would befall Judah. A *remnant* would survive on foreign soil (v. 8). In the midst of the thundering severity of God's wrath the prophet underscores the tenderness of God's mercy. The *nation* is rejected and is doomed for extinction; faithful individuals would be spared. These godly souls would become the prototype and the nucleus of the New Testament Israel of God.¹² The nation would die in 587 B.C., but faith would live on. Four facts about the remnant are brought out in these verses:

1. This remnant would remember the Lord among the nations where they had been taken captive. The word *remember* implies more than the recollection of past events. The exiles would seek to restore their relationship to God by repentance.

2. When they remember the Lord, the remnant for the first

12. Key passages for the study of the remnant theme in the Old Testament are: Isa. 1:9; 10:20; Jer. 43:5; Zeph. 2:7; 3:13; Zech. 10:9; Romans 9:6-13; 11:5.

time would come to realize the anguish¹³ which their loving Father had experienced when they with adulterous hearts turned away from Him to cast their lustful eyes upon pagan idols. Those wanton hearts would be changed. In the fires of punishment and persecution the surviving remnant was purged of impurity.

3. The remnant would come to *loath themselves* for the evils which they committed. They would then regard all their idols as *abominations* (v. 9). *Abomination* is a favorite term of Ezekiel for a practice which led to religious impurity. He uses this term mainly of idolatry, but sometimes of adultery.

4. The remnant will know in that day that Yahweh is sovereign God. His word had not been spoken in vain (v. 10). The ultimate aim of the national chastisement was to produce a faithful remnant. God's purpose would thus be accomplished.

C. A Distressing Lamentation 6:11-14

TRANSLATION

(11) Thus says the Lord GOD: Clap your hand and stamp your foot, and say, Alas, because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, with sword, famine and pestilence they shall fall. (12) He who is far off shall die with the pestilence; and he who is near shall fall by the sword; and he that remains and is besieged shall die in the famine; then I shall bring to an end My wrath against them. (13) And you will know that I am the LORD when their slain ones shall be in the midst of their idols round about their altars, upon every high hill, in the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree and under every leafy oak, the place where they presented a sweet savor to all their idols. (14) And I shall stretch out My hand against them, and I

13. Literally, *I have been broken or shattered*. The RSV has followed some of the ancient versions by rendering, *when I have broken their whorish heart*.

will make the land a desolation and waste more than the wilderness of Diblah in all their dwelling places; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

With a dramatic action Ezekiel was to underscore what he had just said.¹⁴ He was to clap his hand and stamp his foot. These were gestures expressive of intense emotion and excitement generated either by intense joy or sorrow.¹⁵ There is no reason to assume that Ezekiel would be exulting over the impending fall of Judah. This prophet hated the evil practiced by his people but he did not long for their destruction. Like Jeremiah he commiserated with the people of Judah in their misfortune (cf. 11:13). It was with a broken and aching heart that Ezekiel spoke to and about his people.

The prophet's gesture of distress was accomplished by the customary wail, *Alas!*¹⁶ Because of all the evil abominations (idolatry) of Israel the nation would fall with *sword, famine and pestilence* (v. 11). The one *far off* from the scene of battle would die by pestilence; the one near the battle, by the sword. Those in the besieged capital would die of famine. Distance would make no difference. Wherever they were the inexorable and relentless wrath of God would overtake them (cf. Zech. 1:6). There would be no escape. With these terrible calamities the wrath of the Lord would come to an end (v. 12).

For the third time in this chapter the prophet underscores the dramatic impact which these judgment works would have on the hearts and minds of the surviving remnant. When they saw their slain comrades lying about their once sacred altars within sight

14. One must always reckon with the possibility that this oracle was not delivered on the same occasion as the preceding verses.

15. Others have interpreted Ezekiel's actions as indicating malicious satisfaction, joy, triumph as well as horror, indignation and sorrow.

16. Ellison (*EMM*, p. 37) proposes the rendering *Ha*. "Ezekiel is called upon to rejoice that the accumulated evil of centuries is to be swept away."

of their lifeless idols they would finally come to confess the sole sovereignty of God.

In order to emphasize the extent of the godless worship, Ezekiel enumerates the different locations where Canaanite rites were practiced. Their hilltop sanctuaries and mountain top retreats—the shady bowers where once the fertility orgies of Baal and Asherah were practiced—those sacred spots where the sweet savor of incense was offered before images—all alike would be desecrated (v. 13).

The hand of the Lord would be stretched out against the land and it would become a desolate waste. The reference to Diblah in verse 14 is difficult to interpret. Some translate, *from the wilderness to Riblah* (RSV), and see here a reference to the extent of the disaster. From the edge of the southern wilderness to Riblah on the Orontes river is a distance of 150 miles. This understanding necessitates two changes in the Hebrew text.¹⁷ The second approach is to see in this phrase a comparison. The land of Judah will become a greater desolation than Diblah. The location of Diblah is uncertain.¹⁸

The discourse closes with a fourth assertion that this divine judgment would serve to turn people to the Lord (v. 14).

III. CHAOS AND CALAMITY 7:1-27

Chapter 7 is a sermon in the form of a lamentation. It is characterized by frequent repetitions designed to underscore the certainty and severity of the coming calamity. The chapter is written in what has been called poetic prose. The sentences are choppy, broken, and oozing with emotion. Division of the material into discussion units is admittedly arbitrary. But it would seem that the prophet first announces the coming calamity (vv. 1-9) and then describes it (vv. 10-27).

17. The change of *d* to *r* as the first letter of the place name, and addition of the article to the word *wilderness*. The interchange of *d* and *r* is attested in Num. 1:14 and 2:14.

18. A Diblathaim on the eastern border of Moab is attested in Numbers 33:46-47 and Jeremiah 48:22, ASV.

A. The Calamity Announced 7:1-9

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came to me, saying: (2) And as for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD concerning the land of Israel: An end! the end has come upon the four ends of the land. (3) Now is the end upon you, and I will unleash My anger against you, and I will judge you according to your ways; and I will bring upon you all of your abominations. (4) And My eye shall not have pity upon you, nor shall I have compassion; but your ways I shall bring upon you while your abominations shall be in your midst; and you shall know that I am the LORD. (5) Thus says the Lord GOD: A disaster, a unique disaster, behold it comes. (6) An end has come, the end has come! It has awakened against you; behold, it comes. (7) The turn has come upon you, O inhabitant of the land; the time has come, the day of tumult is near, and not joyous shouting upon the mountains. (8) Now I will shortly pour out My wrath upon you and I will finish My anger against you when I have judged you according to your ways; and I will bring upon you all your abominations. (9) My eye will not pity, nor will I have compassion; I will bring upon you according to your ways, and your abominations shall be in your midst; and you shall know that I the LORD am a smiter.

COMMENTS

Echoing the prophetic declaration of Amos 8:2 regarding the Northern Kingdom, Ezekiel announces that *an end* has come to the *land of Israel*. Since the *nation* Israel had long since been destroyed, Ezekiel must be using the term *Israel* in its ancient sense of the theocratic people. In this period of history the *land of Israel* was equivalent to the Kingdom of Judah. The end or destruction would come *upon the four ends of the land*, i.e., the devastation would be geographically total. No city or village would escape (v. 2).

Ezekiel contends that *now is the end upon you*. The anticipated destruction is close at hand (v. 3). Doubtlessly the prophet refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. This destruction would not be a mere accident of history. It would be a manifestation of the anger of God (v. 3). God would *unleash* His anger. The destruction would be a just act of retribution. The people would be judged according to their *ways*, i.e., their conduct. God would bring upon them all their abominations; i.e., He would hold them accountable for their association with abominable idols (vv. 3, 4, 8).

In this destructive judgment God would not manifest mercy or compassion toward the nation of Judah (v. 4). The meaning is that God would carry out His pre-announced intention to destroy Jerusalem and He would not relent. There is, of course, mercy for the remnant of the nation as other passages clearly show. In a sense the exercise of justice was itself an act of mercy, since its aim was purification from sin and restoration or harmony between God and man.¹⁹

The judgment would fall on Jerusalem while their abominations (idols) were still in the midst of the city (v. 4). They would cling to their idols to the bitter end. No further evidence need be presented to prove that the actions of God were justified.

Through the horrible destruction the surviving Jews would come to realize that it was truly Yahweh, God of covenant and redemption, who had made these dire threats (v. 4).

The disaster facing Judah was unique and unprecedented (lit., *one disaster*). The *one* catastrophe which overshadowed all the rest was the destruction of the Temple (v. 5). This disaster would not only be *an* end, it would be *the* end (v. 6).

The judgment is described as the *turn* in verse 7. The meaning of the noun *tsephira* is uncertain. Modern translations seem to prefer to render it *doom*.²⁰ However, the basic idea here may be something round,²¹ hence a cycle or turn. The turn of events

19. Fisch, *SBB*, p. 34.

20. RSV, NASB. This translation is based on a cognate Arabic noun. The KJV translates it *morning*.

21. Cf. Isaiah 28:5 where *tsephira* is rendered *crown*.

had come to Judah. To use a modern idiom, the tables were about to be turned. Judgment inevitably follows sin as day follows night.

The predicted end would *awaken*. The long dark night of prophetic threat was about over; the day of the Lord was about to dawn. A play on words here in the Hebrew cannot be reproduced in English. The end (*hakets*) has awakened (*hekits*; v. 6).

That coming day would be a *day of tumult*, i.e., clamor and confusion (v. 7). This tumult would not be the *joyous shouting upon the mountains* that one might hear in connection with a harvest festival (Isa. 16:10; Jer. 25:30) or idolatrous worship. This tumult would be the din and confusion of military invasion. In the popular mind the day of the Lord was a day of triumph over national enemies. Beginning with Amos, the prophets blasted away at this concept. The day of the Lord more properly referred to God's triumph over all unrighteousness whether in Israel or among the Gentiles.

Verses 8-9 are virtually a repetition of verses 3-4 with some variation to give added emphasis to the warning. God's anger against Judah would be complete once he had recompensed them for their ways (v. 8). No compassion or mercy would be shown toward the *nation* in the day (v. 9).

They would come to know, i.e., realize by personal experience, that Yahweh is a God who *smites*. The shallow theological notion of an indulgent deity would have to be abandoned in that day (v. 9).

B. The Calamity Described 7:10-27

In describing Judah's coming day of visitation Ezekiel stresses four points: (1) the social disruption (vv. 10-13); (2) the military dismay (vv. 14-18); (3) the economic distress (vv. 19-22); and (4) the political disorder (vv. 23-27).

1. *Social disruption (7:10-13)*

TRANSLATION

(10) Behold the day! Behold it comes; the turn has come forth; the rod has blossomed, arrogance has budded. (11) Violence has risen up for a rod of wickedness; none of them (shall remain) and none of their multitude, and none of their wealth nor any wailing among them. (12) The time has come, the day has arrived; as for the buyer, let him not rejoice, and as for the seller, let him not mourn; for wrath is upon all its multitude. (13) For the seller shall not return unto that which is sold, although they be yet alive; for the vision concerns the whole multitude which shall not return; neither shall they strengthen themselves, a man whose life is in his iniquity.

COMMENTS

The judgment rod of God — Babylon — had blossomed into an arrogant superpower (v. 10).²² The *violence* practiced by the Jews had *risen up for a rod of wickedness*; i.e., the evil practices of the Jews had created the rod which will smite them.²³ In that day the whole population would be affected. None would escape. They would either perish or be carried away into exile. Nothing would remain of the *multitude* of the people or their *wealth*.²⁴ So great would be the loss that survivors would not *wail*²⁵ over the dead (v. 11).

That coming day would result in a complete socio-economic

22. Others think the rod in verse 10 is the royal house of Judah which had blossomed and budded with arrogance.

23. Cf. Isaiah 10:5 where Assyria is called the rod of God's anger; and Jeremiah 50:31 which underscores the arrogance of Babylon.

24. KJV *nor any of theirs*, i.e., none of their offspring would be left alive. This translation is possible but not preferable.

25. Some recent versions render the Hebrew *noah* as *eminency*. It is best to follow the older commentators in relating the word to *nehi*, = *wailing*.

upheaval. Selling an inherited piece of property was normally an occasion of deep grief in the Old Testament world. But the seller of real estate would no longer be concerned with such sentimentality. On the other hand, the one who purchased that property would have no reason to rejoice. In the day of God's wrath land holdings would be immaterial. Both the wealthy land buyer and the poverty-stricken seller would be faced with deprivation and death (v. 12). Never would the land seller be able to repossess his inheritance even though he might live through the judgment (lit., *though their life be yet among the living*). Jubilee observance where all property reverted to original owners would not be possible in the land of exile. According to the vision which Ezekiel had received, the Jews would be driven from their homes never to return during their lifetime (v. 13).

At first sight this prophecy seems to contradict Jeremiah 32:15, 37, 43 which states that properties would be bought and sold in Judah again following the exile. However, Ezekiel is speaking of his contemporaries. *They* would not live to reclaim their family inheritances. The men who lived a life of iniquity would not be able to strengthen themselves so as to withstand punishment (v. 13). Those driven out would not return, and those who remained in the land would die in their sins.

2. *The military dismay (7:14-18)*

TRANSLATION

(14) They have blown the trumpet and all is made ready, but none is going to the battle; for My wrath is against all its multitude. (15) The sword is without and the pestilence and the famine within; the one who is in the field shall die by the sword, and the one who is in the city, famine and pestilence shall consume him. (16) And should fugitives escape, they shall be upon the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them moaning, each in his iniquity. (17) All hands shall droop, and

all knees shall run with water. (18) And they shall gird themselves with sackcloth, and terror shall cover them; shame shall be upon every face, and baldness upon all their heads.

COMMENTS

Organized resistance to the coming invasion would fail. Sin had destroyed the moral courage of the nation, the will to resist. Preparation for war had been made, but the troops had not the strength nor courage to withstand the enemy. The alarm trumpet sounded, but the terrified troops refused to enter into battle (v. 14a). God's wrath saps their powers of resistance. Courage flees before the forces of God. Their fear is justified, however, because the wrath of God had gone forth *against all its multitude*, i.e., army. Death would stalk the whole land. The sword of the Chaldean army would cut off all escape beyond the walls of Jerusalem. Within the city itself famine and pestilence (disease) would take their toll (v. 15).

The "no escape" of verse 15 is immediately qualified in the following verse. The few refugees who would escape the city would take to the mountains to escape death. Like *doves of the valley* they would occupy the lofty heights and deep ravines. There they would bemoan their fate as they realized that the disaster was the result of their iniquity (v. 16). Despair would render the fugitives helpless. *All hands shall droop* in dismay and helpless exasperation. The knees would *run with water*, i.e., because of their fear those refugees would not be able to control their kidney functions²⁶ (v. 17).

The refugees would openly manifest their dismay. *Sackcloth* would be worn upon the body, but they would act as though they were covered with terror (*pallatsut*). Heads would be shaved. *Shame (busha)* would be etched on every face—shame because of what had happened; greater shame because of why it had happened (v. 18).

26. Others interpret the phrase metaphorically as expressive of complete paralysis of strength. Still others think the reference is to sweat caused by fear.

3. *The economic distress (7:19-22)*

TRANSLATION

(19) They shall cast their silver into the streets, and their gold shall become an unclean thing; their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD; they shall not satisfy nor shall they fill their inward parts; because their iniquity has become a stumblingblock. (20) And as for their beautiful adornments, they appointed them for their pride; and they made the images of their abominations, their detestable things with it; therefore I have given it to them for an unclean thing. (21) And I will place it in the hand of strangers for spoil, and to the wicked of the earth for booty; and they shall profane it. (22) And I shall turn My face from them, and they shall profane My secret place, and robbers shall come into it and they shall defile it.

COMMENTS

Worldly wealth would be worthless in that day. *Silver* and *gold* came to be regarded as an unclean thing, (lit., something defiled by menstrual impurity, Lev. 20:21). The precious metal only proves cumbersome to those who are fleeing for their lives. In that day of Yahweh's wrath men would not be able to purchase deliverance, nor food for their bellies (v. 19).

Worthless wealth! How tragic! Yet how appropriate. Silver and gold had proved to be *iniquity* and a *stumbling block* to the nation (v. 19). Their wealth had been the cause of their sin (cf. Hosea 2:10). These precious metals and *their beautiful adornments* (i.e., jewelry) they had fashioned into objects of pride and images of their abominable and detestable gods. They had committed the same sin as the Sinai generation in fashioning a graven image of their jewelry. Because they had so abused God's gifts, the Lord would bring them into circumstances in which these precious substances would be regarded as filthy and unclean (v. 20).

The wealth of Judah would become the possession of *strangers*, i.e., the invading army. In the hands of the *wicked of the earth* these riches, once devoted to sacred, albeit illegitimate, services would be profaned (v. 21).

Not only would the Jews be deprived of their material support, they would also be denied spiritual support. God would turn His face from them. The turning of God's face from the people is the reverse of the priestly blessing which invoked God to "make His face shine upon" them (Num. 6:25f.). The Temple would provide no protection. The invader would *profane* God's *secret place*, i.e., the holiest part of the Temple. The sacred precincts would be pillaged, plundered and *defiled* by these greedy thieves (v. 22). God had no desire to keep mere outward forms of worship when that worship had become perverted by the devices of wicked men.

The despoliations of Judah and the Temple were a necessary part of God's plan for reclaiming a remnant of Israel. With material possession gone and the Temple in ruins the people of God were forced to cast themselves completely on the Lord. As it turned out, "the death of material security turned out to be the resurrection of faith."²⁷

4. *The political disorder (7:23-27)*

TRANSLATION

(23) Make the chain; for the land is full of bloodshed, and the city is full of violence. (24) Therefore I have brought the worst of nations, and they shall possess their houses, and I shall make to cease the pride of the strong and their sanctuaries shall be profaned. (25) Horror is coming! and they shall seek peace and there is none. (26) Calamity upon calamity shall come, and rumor shall be upon rumor; and they shall seek a vision from

27. Blackwood, *EPH*, p. 70.

the prophet, and instruction shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders. (27) The king shall mourn and the prince shall be clothed with astonishment, and the hands of the people of the land shall become feeble; according to their way I will deal with them, and according to their judgments I will judge them; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

Apparently here Ezekiel performed yet another symbolic act. He made a chain²⁸ which symbolized the coming exile (v. 23).²⁹ This punishment is necessary because Judah was full of bloodshed and violence³⁰ (v. 23).

God would employ *the worst of nations* against Judah. This is one of the rare instances when Ezekiel speaks derogatorily of the Babylonians. In 28:7 and 30:11 he refers to the Babylonians as *the terrible of the nations*. But his language here is not so much intended to abuse the invaders as to show how low Israel had fallen. The people of God must indeed be wretched for God to send against them men who make no pretense of maintaining just and right behavior. The ruthless invaders would *possess their houses*. By means of this invader God would *make to cease the pride of the strong*; i.e., He would humble the proud rulers of Judah, especially the monarchy and priesthood. The *sanctuaries* of Judah, both the pagan and the proper, would be profaned by these invaders (v. 24).

Efforts to placate the foe and arrange some peaceful accommodation would fail. There would be no escape from this horrible fate (v. 25). The false prophets had assured them that peace was possible. They would now discover that those optimistic predictions were unfounded. The future judgment would become progressively worse. *Calamity upon calamity*

28. The translation is uncertain. The Greek version reads: "they shall make confusion"; the Syriac, "they shall pass through the bricks."

29. Cf. Jeremiah 27:2; Nahum 3:10.

30. The Hebrew reads literally, *judgment of bloods*, which may mean capital crimes.

and *rumor upon rumor* (v. 26). News of one blow will immediately be followed by news of another.

In their desperation people would turn at last to their spiritual leaders for guidance, but will find none (cf. Lam. 2:9). The false *prophets* who had for so long misled the people with their made-to-order “visions” would have nothing to say in that hour when their optimistic prognostications would prove to be false. The *priests* would have no *instruction*, the *elders* no useful political *counsel* in that day (v. 26). The crisis would leave them without direction from their religious and national leaders (cf. Jer. 18:18). If the reference in verse 26 is to *faithful* spiritual leaders, then the idea is this: They had for so long rejected the words of God’s spokesman. Now in the hour of judgment God would no longer communicate with them through these godly men.

The political as well as the spiritual leaders would be unable to cope with that day. The *king* would only be able to *mourn* as he saw his people suffering and his crown slipping from his grasp. Other members of the ruling class—the prince—would be *clothed with astonishment*; i.e., they would be dumfounded in the face of what would transpire.

Without guidance from spiritual leaders and leadership from the royal family the *people of the land*³¹ would be incapacitated by fear. They would be helpless to defend themselves, for their hands would become feeble (v. 27). The judgment would be a just recompense. God would deal with His people as they had dealt with others. He would judge them as unmercifully as they had judged one another.

When all these predictions had come to pass all the survivors would know that Yahweh had really spoken these ominous words.

31. The phrase *people of the land* has various meanings in the Old Testament. Here the phrase probably refers to the general populace.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What factors made the sin of Judah so grievous?
2. In what sense was Jerusalem “in the midst of the nations” (5:5)?
3. What horrible barbarisms would accompany the fall of Jerusalem?
4. In what sense would a *sword* continue to pursue the refugees even on foreign soil?
5. What would be necessary before the righteous anger of God could be satisfied?
6. What are *the evil arrows of famine* which God would send against Jerusalem?
7. In what ways had the Jews defiled God’s sanctuary in Jerusalem?
8. Why was Ezekiel told to prophesy against the *mountains* of Israel?
9. In what ways does Ezekiel in this section indicate the futility of idolatry?
10. How many times does the expression *you shall know that I am the Lord* occur in the book? What does this expression reveal about the purpose of God?
11. What hopeful picture of a remnant did Ezekiel paint?
12. How does Ezekiel describe the anguish which God experiences over the apostasy of His people?
13. Why the clapping of the hands and stamping of the feet in 6:11?
14. Ezekiel says that those who sell land would never be able to reclaim it. How can this be reconciled with the prediction of Jeremiah (32:15, 17, 43) that land would once again be bought and sold in Canaan?
15. Why did Ezekiel make a chain in 7:23?
16. How does Ezekiel describe the Chaldeans who would overthrow Jerusalem?
17. How would the coming calamity affect the spiritual leaders of the nation?

Chapter Six

VISIONS OF JERUSALEM'S JUDGMENT

8:1 — 11:25

In chapters 8-11 Ezekiel recounts a new series of visions. The purpose of these visions is to show that the divine judgments against Judah were completely justified. A year and two months have elapsed since the call vision (cf. 1:3 and 8:1). At the time this series of visions was received Ezekiel was in the 413th day of his symbolic siege of Jerusalem.¹ He was at this time lying on his right side depicting the judgment for Judah's iniquity. These visions of Jerusalem's judgment were most appropriate at this time. This section of the book can be divided into three major units: (1) the degradation of Jerusalem (8:1-18); (2) the destruction by the Lord (9:1 — 10:22); and (3) the declarations by the prophet (11:1-25).

I. THE DEGRADATION OF JERUSALEM 8:1-18

After describing his visionary transmigration to Jerusalem (vv. 1-4), Ezekiel relates the terrible abominations which were being practiced in the Holy City (vv. 5-16). He concludes this section with a brief announcement of judgment (vv. 17-18).

A. The Ascent of the Prophet 8:1-4

TRANSLATION

(1) And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month when I was sitting in my house, and the elders of Judah were sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell upon me there. (2) And I saw, and behold the

1. The assumption here is that the year which elapsed was an ordinary year of twelve months and not a leap year of thirteen months. If a leap year was involved, then Ezekiel had this visionary experience twelve days after he ended his symbolic siege of Jerusalem.

likeness of the appearance of a fire;² from the appearance of His loins and downward — fire; and from His loins and upward like the appearance of brightness, like the luster of glowing metal. (3) And He stretched forth the form of a hand, and took hold of me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me between earth and heaven, and brought me to Jerusalem in divine visions unto the entrance of the gate of the inner court which faces north where the seat of the image of jealousy which causes jealousy was located. (4) And behold the Glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision which I saw in the plain.

COMMENTS

At the time Ezekiel received these visions a company of *elders of Judah* was sitting before him. Apparently these leaders had retained their rank and prestige in the exilic community.³ They were sitting *before* Ezekiel as his students. Perhaps they had come specifically to enquire about the state of affairs in the homeland. The initial rejection with which Ezekiel met seems now to have given way to respect, at least among these elders. His antics of the previous year were fascinating, and auditors were drawn as by a magnet to Ezekiel's house. Perhaps these men had been coming for months. During the course of the prophetic lesson, the *hand of the Lord* fell upon Ezekiel (v. 1).

In his trance-like state Ezekiel saw again the divine personage who had appeared to him initially atop the heavenly throne-chariot. In the earlier account Ezekiel described the one he saw as having *a likeness as the appearance of a man* (1:26). The upper part of the body of the figure had the brilliance of *chashmal*, the lower the appearance of fire (1:27). In the present passage Ezekiel has taken a step back from anthropomorphism by focusing only on the dazzling appearance of *fire* and

2. Some ancient versions read *man* here.

3. Plumptre (*PC*, p. 143) suggests that these elders were actually visitors from Judah.

chashmal which characterized the lower and upper parts of the visionary body (v. 2). The glory of the Lord is seen now in the glow of fire, without the milder, more hopeful brightness of the rainbow mentioned in 1:28. The absence of the cherubim in the present passage should also be noted. What he sees is but a *likeness* of the ineffable glory, an image of the Unseen.

Carefully avoiding anthropomorphism, the prophet describes how the divine figure put forth *the form of a hand* out of that blazing glory. Ezekiel felt as though he were being lifted up by a lock of his hair. At the same time he felt the Spirit gently lifting him from the earth to mid air. Both the *hand* and the *Spirit* are metaphors for Him who can neither be imagined nor described.⁴ The actions of the *hand* serve to underscore the reality of Ezekiel's feeling of physical removal from his home.⁵

No physical transmigration of Ezekiel to Jerusalem takes place in this passage. God, of course, could have transported Ezekiel to Jerusalem in the body.⁶ But the words *in divine visions* (lit., *visions of God*)⁷ prove that all that follows took place mentally (v. 3). Further indication that these experiences were in the realm of the visional is found in the nature of what he saw in Jerusalem—much of this cannot be taken literally—and by actions which would hardly have been physically possible (e.g., 8:8). Thus Ezekiel was transported in spirit, not in body to Jerusalem.

To understand the visions of chapter 8 one must be familiar with the geography of the Temple area. Solomon's Temple stood on Mt. Moriah along with the royal palace complex. The Temple had its own courtyard (called the inner court) as did the palace. But the entire complex of buildings on Mt. Moriah was surrounded by a walled courtyard known as the great court or

4. Blackwood, *EPH*, p. 72.

5. A conscious imitation of the present passage can be found in the apocryphal story of Bel and the Dragon, verse 36.

6. Cf. I Kings 18:12; II Kings 2:16; Acts 8:39.

7. The word is not the same as that commonly used by Daniel (*chazon*) and often by Ezekiel (8:13; 12:22, 23 etc.). The word here is *mareh* which implies a more direct act of intuition. See Plumptre, *PC*, p. 144. The word is again used in 11:24 and 43:3.

outer court. See the accompanying diagram.

There are two views as to what Ezekiel is seeing in chapter 8. Some think he is seeing what is going on in Jerusalem at that very moment. This would mean that various forms of *public idolatry* were being tolerated in Jerusalem during the reign of Zedekiah. The problem with this view is that no public apostasy during the reign of Zedekiah is attested in the books of Kings, Chronicles or Jeremiah. In fact, Jeremiah 44:18 seems totally incompatible with the notion that pagan practices had been officially introduced following Josiah's reformation. But whereas the existence in Jerusalem of the various forms of pagan worship here mentioned cannot be confirmed, still the decline after Josiah (Jer. 7:1-15) and the political pressures of those desperate days quite conceivably could have led to the adoption of such foreign religious practices.⁸

Another view is that chapter 8 is a symbolic picture of the false beliefs that held sway in Jerusalem "though they may have had only a restricted public expression."⁹ The four abominations here mentioned represent what is known to have been the false religious tendencies during the last century or so before the exile. According to this view each of the abominations mentioned represent the religious deviations of a different section of the Jerusalem community.¹⁰ Whichever view regarding the abominations of chapter 8 is correct, this much is certain: the Holy City had been desecrated by the most reprehensible pagan abominations.

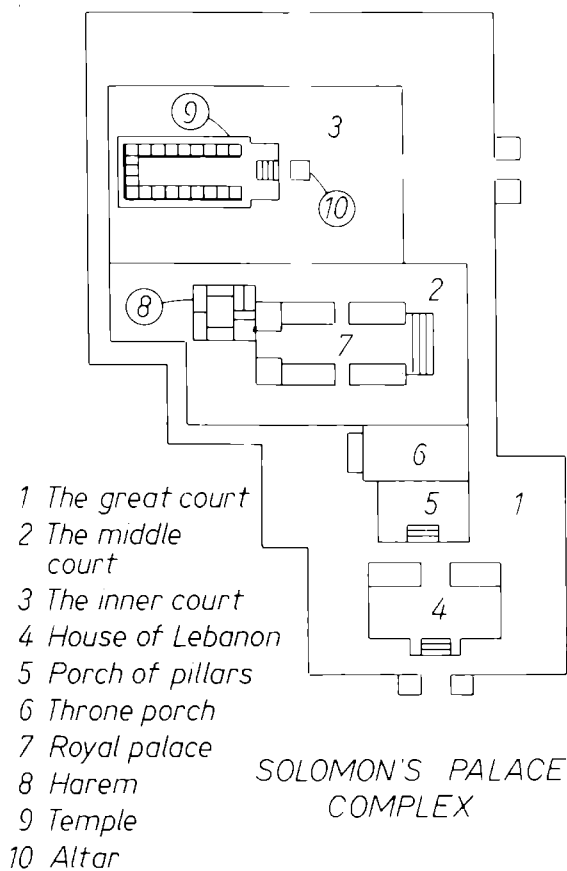
The fact that Jeremiah did not inveigh so heavily against pagan influences in the Temple should not cause scholars to question the evidence here as does Yehezkel Kaufmann.¹¹ Ezekiel's account has the ring of sober reality. Robert Pfeiffer, himself a critical scholar, regards the Temple visions as the most

8. Carley, *BPE*, p. 51.

9. Ellison, *EMM*, p. 41.

10. The image of jealousy related to the king and people; the animal worship related to the elders; the weeping for Tammuz involved the women and the sun worship had attracted the priests and Levites. See Taylor, *TOTC*, pp. 96-97.

11. Kaufmann, *RI*, pp. 426-36.



genuinely historical part of the book of Ezekiel.¹²

Ezekiel found himself in the familiar precincts of the Jerusalem Temple after his visionary transmigration. To be more precise, he was set down in the outer court in front of the northern gate¹³ which led to the inner court. It was one of the most conspicuous spots about the Temple. Prior to the reforms of King Josiah this had been the *seat of the image of jealousy* (v. 3).

On the very spot where once the image of jealousy had stood, Ezekiel saw the *glory of God*. This is the same vision of God's presence which he had seen previously in the *plain* (3:23) and at the river Chebar (1:1ff.). Because of the reforms instituted by Josiah the glory of God had not yet completely abandoned the Temple. When Ezekiel arrived at the Temple in his vision the Lord had already deserted the Holy of Holies, and Ezekiel observes His glorious presence at some unspecified part of the outer court (v. 4).

B. The Abominations of Jerusalem 8:5-16

TRANSLATION

(5) And he said unto me, Son of man, set, I pray you, your eyes to the way of the north, and behold, north of the altar gate was this image of jealousy in the entrance. (6) And He said unto me, Son of man, do you see what they are doing?—the great abominations which the house of Israel are doing here that I should go far away from My sanctuary? But you shall yet see greater abominations. (7) And He brought me unto the entrance of the court; and I looked, and behold, a hole in the wall. (8) And He said unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall. And I dug in the wall, and behold, a door. (9) And He said unto me,

12. Pfeiffer, *IOT*, p. 538.

13. *The door of the gate of the inner court* is called the gate of the altar in v. 5. It may be the upper gate of 9:2, the higher gate of Jer. 20:2, the upper gate of II Kings 15:35, and the new gate of Jer. 36:10.

Go in, and see the evil abominations which they are doing here. (10) So I went in, and I saw, and behold, every form of creeping thing and detestable beasts and all the idols of the house of Israel portrayed upon the wall round about. (11) And standing before them were seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan was standing in their midst, each man with his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense was going up. (12) And He said unto me, Son of man, have you seen that which the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the darkness, each in his chamber of imagery? for they are saying, The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land. (13) And He said unto me, Again you shall see yet greater abominations which they are doing. (14) And He brought me unto the door of the gate of the house of the LORD which was upon the north; and behold, there the women were sitting weeping over Tammuz. (15) And he said unto me, Son of man, do you see this? You shall again see yet greater abominations than these. (16) And He brought me unto the inner court of the house of the LORD, and behold, at the door of the Temple of the LORD between the porch and the altar were about twenty-five men, with their backs towards the Temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east; and they were worshiping the sun toward the east.

COMMENTS

1. *The image of jealousy (8:5, 6).* Ezekiel was told to look to a place outside the Temple courtyard—within the great court—and there he saw another image of jealousy. The original image of jealousy mentioned in verse 3 may have been the graven image of Asherah which King Manasseh had erected (II Kings 21:7). Such an image was an outrage. Israel's God was provoked by all images (Ex. 20:3-5). The presence of the image in the vicinity of the Temple provoked the Lord to jealousy; i.e., the desire to vindicate His own exclusive rights.

This image was associated with popular religion, for it was

located *outside* the north gate of the Temple in the great public court. The old Canaanite paganism was flourishing in Jerusalem though perhaps without official support. The image was probably the Canaanite goddess Asherah. It may be that they were thinking of this goddess as the wife of Yahweh.¹⁴ If so, the image of jealousy would represent a Canaanization of Israelite worship. This debased concept must have dominated the popular mind in Jerusalem although the image had not been officially reinstated in the Temple. Divine interrogation called the prophet's attention to men worshipping before the image. Such practices justified, yea compelled, God's withdrawal from the Temple (v. 6).

2. *The secret animal cult* (8:7-13). Ezekiel was now led onward as through successive stages of an inferno of idolatry.¹⁵ He was first escorted through the door of the gate which opened from the inner to the outer court. His court was surrounded by chambers or cells (Jer. 35:4). There he discovered a hole in the outer wall of the Temple (v. 7). This hole he was told to enlarge until he could crawl through it. Digging is still a metaphor for searching out the truth. Inside the side chambers of the Temple he saw a door which was used by those who were involved in illicit worship (v. 8). The divine voice commanded Ezekiel to pass through the door so that he might observe firsthand the abominations secretly being practiced by the leaders of the nation (v. 9).

How shocked Ezekiel must have been when he walked through that door! The religious perversion was worse than he had ever imagined. Upon the walls of that chamber the prophet saw the representation of all manner of creeping things (small animals)¹⁶ and beasts (larger domestic animals). The figures on

14. Cf. I Kings 15:13; II Kings 21:7. In the fifth century Jewish cult at Elephantine in Egypt, Yahweh was represented as having a wife. In most pagan cults the chief deity had a consort.

15. Plumptre, *PC*, p. 144.

16. *Creeping things* (Heb., *remes*) designates *all* animals in Genesis 9:3, water animals in Psalms 104:25. However, usually the word indicates all creatures which appear to the observer to move close to the ground.

the walls are said to be *detestable* either because they were animals declared to be unclean in the Law or because of the use to which they were being put as objects of veneration. It would appear that some of the leaders of Judah had adopted the Egyptian custom of animal worship.¹⁷ Various Egyptian cults made idols of the cat, the crocodile, the hawk, the scarab beetle and other animals. This abomination may have come into Judah during the brief period when King Jehoiakim had been a vassal of Pharaoh Necho (608-605 B.C.). At the very time when Ezekiel is said to have had this vision, King Zedekiah in Jerusalem was making political overtures to Egypt. Perhaps this vision is setting forth the idea that some of Judah's leaders were looking to Egypt for spiritual and political support.

Standing before the engraved images were seventy elders of the nation. The figure seventy is probably to be understood in contrast to the twenty-five of verse 16. Perhaps both figures are to be taken symbolically. Virtually *all* the elders were involved in this idolatry, whereas a smaller percentage of the priests had taken the final plunge into apostasy in verse 16. The seventy here are probably not to be understood as any official governing body.¹⁸ Acting as their own priests, these leaders were offering to those pictorial gods the incense which none but the sons of Aaron were to offer and which none but Yahweh was to receive.

Jaazaniah is singled out for special mention because of the prominence of his family. He was the son of Shaphan, the scribe who played such an influential role in the reform efforts of Josiah (II Kings 22:10f.). Jaazaniah¹⁹ must have been the

17. Cooke, (*ICC*, p. 94) points out that certain aspects of Babylonian religion would fit this description equally well. Ellison (*EMM*, p. 42) thinks Ezekiel is referring to all the foreign cults, especially from Assyria and Babylonia that had poured into the country in the time of Ahaz and Manasseh, but which had influenced mainly the ruling classes.

18. From the earliest times Israel had a ruling body of seventy men. See Exodus 24:1; Numbers 11:16. In the intertestamental period this body came to be known as the Sanhedrin.

19. Another Jaazaniah, the son of a certain Jeremiah, appears in Jeremiah 35:3; yet another, the son of Azur, in Ezekiel 11:1.

proverbial black sheep of this otherwise godly family²⁰ (v. 11).

In the actions of the seventy elders there is a combination of "secrecy and despair."²¹ These men were ashamed openly to go back on the covenant made under Josiah, but they had opened their hearts to the idolatries and memories of the past. Obviously they were not successful in hiding their abominations, for Ezekiel five hundred miles away knew what they were doing.

Were the images literally upon the walls of the Temple chambers? Probably not. The wall engravings were the outward symbols of the idol worship engraved upon the hearts and lives of the elders.²²

The tour of the inner Temple chambers ended with a question and a declaration by the Lord. To underscore the tragedy of this scene the Lord asked the prophet if he had observed that which was taking place in those private chambers. Two additional details are added in verse 12. The elders were practicing the pagan rites *in the darkness*. Furthermore, it is pointed out that the pagan rites were being performed individually as well as collectively by the elders, *each in his chamber of imagery*. Apparently each worshiper had his own private cubicle where the Egyptian rites were performed.²³

The Lord who knows the hearts of all men revealed to Ezekiel the inner attitudes of those apostate elders. They affirmed (in their heart, if not openly) that the Lord (Yahweh) did not see their actions. By this they meant either (1) that God was not omniscient; or (2) what is more likely, that God was totally disinterested in the affairs of His people. The very name of their leader, Jaazaniah — *the Lord is listening* — should have warned them that God heard their blasphemous boasts.

It was also the conviction of these apostate elders that the

20. Two other sons of Shaphan, Gemariah and Ahikam, apparently were pious Israelites (Jer. 36:10; 39:14).

21. Ellison, *EMM*, p. 43.

22. Blackwood, *EPH*, p. 74.

23. Others interpret *each in his chambers of imagery* to refer to the imaginations of those concerned; still others, to the homes of the worshipers.

Lord has forsaken the land of Judah²⁴ (v. 12). To them Yahweh was no more than a local deity who had abdicated. They were free to do as they pleased without fear. They saw in the tragedies which so recently had befallen the land abundant proof that God had abandoned His people. Why continue to worship a God who would not care for His people? Such is the logic of the carnal mind. Sorrows should not cause a man to question whether God has forsaken him, but rather whether he has forsaken God.

The first phase of Ezekiel's sight-seeing tour of the Jerusalem Temple ended with the assurance that other abominations were yet to be observed (v. 13).

3. *The Tammuz cult (8:14-15)*. The prophet was next conducted into the inner court in front of the northern gate of the Temple. There he observed a group of women *weeping for Tammuz* (v. 14). This is the only reference to this ancient Babylonian cult in Palestine. Whereas the name Tammuz may have been a new importation, the cult itself was ancient in Palestine. Tammuz (or Dumuzi) was the son and/or lover of Ishtar. He was a vegetation god who was thought to die and go to the nether world each year in the fall, only to make his return to the land of the living in the spring. As the vegetation withered and rivers dried up, the annual death of Tammuz was lamented with public dirges. Women joined Ishtar in mourning a dead lover in the intense drought of summer. The fourth month of the Hebrew calendar still bears the name Tammuz. Ezekiel's vision, it will be recalled, dates to mid August when Palestine is parched by the summer sun. Tammuz worship survived into the Middle Ages and vestiges of it can still be observed among the Yezidis of Kurdistan.²⁵

Tammuz worship involved sexual rites promoting the fertility of fields and herds. The worst immoralities were associated with the worship of this god. Fertility cult theology was diametrically

24. Here is the first of a series of popular half-proverbs — thirteen all told — which are cited in Ezekiel. See 11:3; 12:22; 18:2, 19; 33:10; 37:11.

25. Fisch, *SBB*, p. 44.

opposed to the Mosaic and prophetic concept of God. The God of the Bible controlled nature. He was quite independent of a heavenly consort and of stimulation by the sexual activity of His people. Yahweh was the eternally self-existing One who was absolutely holy and who demanded holiness as a condition of those who would approach Him.

Women seem to have led out in religious exercises in this period of Bible history.²⁶ Women were the most conservative element in Oriental religious life. If the women of the nation had fallen into the cesspool of filthy idolatry and false theology, could there be any hope for the nation? As terrible as it was to find the women of Judah participating openly in such perverse practice, the prophet was still to observe greater abominations (v. 15).

4. *The worship of the sun (8:16)*. In the final phase of his Temple tour Ezekiel was brought again into the inner court. This time, however, he was brought from the northern gate to the eastern side of the Temple between the porch and the sacrificial altar. This was a sacred area to which only the priests had access. There Ezekiel discovered twenty-five men facing the rising sun and worshipping before it. Facing eastward, their back would be toward the Temple of the Lord.²⁷ This was not merely the debasing of Yahweh worship by linking it with pagan ritual. This was the outright rejection of Yahweh and the enthronement of the Babylonian god Shamash, the sun god.²⁸ By their actions these men were proclaiming that the gods of Babylon had defeated Yahweh. That created object which should have reflected the glory of God was actually detracting from His glory.

It is reasonable to assume that those participating in this sun worship were priests and/or Levites. In 9:6 they are called *elders* so they must have held senior standing. Ezekiel estimated that

26. According to II Kings 23:7 women wove hangings for Canaanite female deity Asherah. Jeremiah conducted a lively debate with some apostate female worshipers in the land of Egypt (Jer. 44:9, 15-19).

27. Normally priests prayed facing the Temple.

28. Moses had warned against this worship (Deut. 4:19). Josiah had attempted to eliminate it from the land (II Kings 23:4, 5).

about twenty-five were participating in the sunrise service. If there is any significance in this number it may be as follows: twenty-four of the men may represent the twenty-four priestly courses (I Chron. 24:4-19) with the high priest at their head.²⁹ The thrust of the passage would be that apostasy prevailed in the ranks of the priesthood as well as among the tribal leaders and women.

C. The Announcement of Judgment 8:17-18

TRANSLATION

(17) And He said unto me, Have you seen, son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they are doing abominations which they have done here? for they have filled the land with violence and they have provoked Me still more, and behold they are putting the branch to their nose. (18) Therefore also I will deal with them in fury; My eye will not have compassion nor will I take pity; when they cry in My ears with a loud voice I will not hear them.

COMMENTS

Judah was ripe for judgment. The abominations practiced throughout the land were viewed by most as a *light thing*. But to the Lord they were a provocation. *Do you see this, son of man?* suggests that Ezekiel was a little uncertain in his own mind as to the necessity of the judgment which he had been preaching (cf. Jer. 5:1-3).

The breakdown in devotion to God led to social chaos. They had *filled the land with violence*. Proper theology must undergird proper morality. Such social injustice only provoked the

29. Feinberg, *PE*, p. 52.

Lord that much more. "If the root of faith is severed, there can be no fruit of righteousness."³⁰

Commentators vie with one another in the ingenuity with which they attempt to explain the charge that *they are putting the branch to their nose* (v. 17). Is it some otherwise unattested idolatrous act? or is it some obscene gesture of contempt? The expression has not yet been satisfactorily explained. One proposal is that a bundle of Tamarisk branches was held up to the nose at daybreak, as hymns were sung to the rising sun.³¹ Certainly some grossly offensive act is intended. Rabbinic tradition lists this phrase among the few deliberate emendations of the ancient scribes. The original reading was, "They put the branch to *MY* nose."

On the basis of the evidence presented in chapter 8 God had no alternative but to deal with these people in fury. *Compassion* and *pity* as far as the nation was concerned was out of the question. Prayer would be useless. No matter how loudly they cried He would not hear them (v. 18). The day of grace was over; the day of wrath had come.

II. DESTRUCTION BY THE LORD 9:1—10:22

The visions which are recorded in chapters 9 and 10 follow logically the terrible indictment of the previous chapter. A four-fold development is evident in the visions at this point: (1) he first sees Jerusalem destroyed by slaughter (9:1-11); and then (2) by fire (10:1-8). His attention is then drawn again (3) to the divine throne-chariot (10:9-17); and finally (4) to the departure of the divine presence from the Jerusalem Temple. (10:18-22).

30. Blackwood, *EPH*, p. 76.

31. Such a custom is reported by Strabo (XV:3, 14) as being observed by the magi when engaged in prayer.

A. Jerusalem Destroyed by Slaughter 9:1-11

TRANSLATION

(1) And a great voice called in my ears, saying, Bring nigh the overseers of the city, each one with his weapon of destruction in his hand. (2) And behold, six men were coming from the way of the upper gate which faced northward, each with his weapon of destruction in his hand. And one man was among them clothed in linen, with a scribe's writing case at his side. And they came and stood beside the bronze altar. (3) And the glory of the God of Israel was going up from upon the Cherub which was over it unto the threshold of the house. And He called unto the man clothed in linen who had the scribe's writing case at his side. (4) And the LORD said unto him, Pass over in the midst of the city, in the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the brows of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations which are done in the midst of her. (5) And to these others He said in my hearing, Pass over in the city after him and smite; do not let your eyes look with compassion, and do not have pity. (6) Slay utterly old, young man and maiden, and child and women; but do not approach any man who has the mark upon him; and begin at My sanctuary. Then they began with the elders who were before the house. (7) And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with slain; go forth, and they went forth and smote in the city. (8) And it came to pass when they were smiting and I was left that I fell upon my face and cried out, and said, Ah Lord GOD! Will You destroy all the remnant of Israel when You pour out Your wrath upon Jerusalem? (9) And He said unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is filled with blood, and the city is full of perversion; for they say, The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see. (10) And as for Me also, My eye shall not have compassion, nor will I show pity. Their way I will bring upon their head. (11) And behold the man clothed in linen who had the writer's case at his side, reported, saying, I have done as You commanded me.

COMMENTS

Whereas the vision in chapter 8 was symbolically descriptive, the one in chapter 9 is symbolically predictive. Here Ezekiel saw in dreadful symbolic detail what would befall Jerusalem six years later in the catastrophe of 587 B.C. The prophet's attention was first attracted to a loud voice summoning the divinely appointed executioners to discharge their duty. The voice came from the human form seen as a theophany in the midst of the divine glory. Each of these agents of judgment was to come prepared for the dreadful deed with a *weapon of destruction in his hand* (v. 1).

Six *men* answered the summons. Jewish tradition is probably correct in identifying these men as angels.³² These angels symbolized the armies of Babylon which would crush Jerusalem. They therefore came from the north, the usual attack route against Jerusalem. Each angelic agent carried a *weapon of destruction* in his hand (v. 2). The Hebrew word implies an instrument used for crushing into fragments. Probably a battle-ax or mace is intended.³³

A seventh angelic agent was in the midst of the first six. He was *clothed in linen*, the material used for priestly garments and for the clothing of others in authority. Daniel once encountered an angel wearing linen (Dan. 10:5f.). Hence white linen is the apparel of the hosts of heaven as well as priests on earth. The material is probably intended to symbolize purity. This angel of mercy had a *scribe's writing case* (not an inkhorn as in KJV) at his side (v. 2). A scribe carried his pens and receptacle for mixing ink in a case at his side. Sometimes these cases were made of silver and elaborately and beautifully engraved. Most writing at this time was done with a reed pen on papyrus or parchment.³⁴

32. Cf. the "men" (angels) who visited Sodom (Gen. 19:1). Blackwood (*EPH*, p. 77) supposes that the six represent Babylonian generals.

33. The same Hebrew word is used in Jeremiah 9:2. A cognate word in Jeremiah 51:20 is translated *battle-ax* and the Septuagint gives that meaning here.

34. There is probably a connection between this angelic scribe and the oft-recurring thought of the book of life and death in heaven. See Exodus 32:32; Psalms 69:28; 139:16; Isaiah 4:3; Daniel 12:1; Phil. 4:3.

All seven angelic agents of God entered the Temple courtyard and stood beside the bronze altar (v. 2). Both judgment and salvation proceed from the altar of God. The angels are seven in number because that is the number of perfection or completeness throughout the Bible. No connection is to be made between the number seven here and the seven evil spirits or seven planet gods among whom was Nabu the heavenly scribe, in Babylonian mythology.³⁵

Ezekiel next saw the glory of God move from over the cherubim in the Holy of Holies. In the Old Testament God is said to be enthroned above the cherubim which were molded over the ark. The glory of God moved over the threshold of the house as if to direct the action of the heavenly ministers. The Lord first dispatched the man clothed in linen who carried the scribe's writing case (v. 3). He was told to place a mark upon the brows of all the men of Jerusalem *who sigh and cry* over all the idolatrous practices done in the city (v. 4). How many concerned citizens there may have been cannot be determined. However, six angelic agents were needed to execute the act of judgment while only one was needed to administer the mark of salvation. Conditions were so terrible in Jerusalem at this time that those who were faithful to the worship of Yahweh could only show their faithfulness by lamentation over the national apostasy.

The *mark* to be placed on the brow of the faithful was a *tav*, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In ancient Hebrew script the letter *tav* was a cross mark. As early as the church father Origen³⁶ the significance of this was noted. Those who were saved bore the sign of the cross. A mere coincidence? Or was Ezekiel seeing something here far more profound than he could ever have imagined?³⁷ This passage is the background for the scene in Revelation 14:1 where the redeemed wear the name of Christ on their foreheads.

35. The notion of seven angels is further developed in Tobit 12:15 and Revelation 15:6.

36. Also this interpretation was advanced by Tertullian. (*Adv. Marcion* 3:22)

37. Jewish interpreters suggest that since *tav* is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, it here denotes completeness. *Tav* is also the first letter of the word *torah* (law).

The six executioners were to follow the angel of mercy through the city dealing a deadly blow to all who did not bear the mark (*tav*) upon their forehead. They were to exercise absolutely no compassion (v. 5). The destroyer of Exodus 12:13 was to deal the death blow to the firstborn of all the land of Egypt. Here all segments of the population were to experience the judgment—old and young, male and female. Only those with the seal of salvation were to be spared.

The judgment was to *begin at My sanctuary*. The *elders* who had turned their backs upon the Temple to perform the rites of Shamash the sun god (8:11) were to be the first to experience the wrath of God. It is fitting that the punishment should commence in the spot where the guilt had culminated (v. 6). The Temple was intended to be a place of peace and refuge from violence. But now the God of that Temple ordered the courts to be defiled with the bleeding corpses of those who had polluted that place with idolatrous rites. The final order was given: *Go forth*. The six executioners obediently began their dreadful mission (v. 7).

Ezekiel was not a passive witness in this visionary experience. He saw the slain falling all about him there in the Temple courtyard. At last only the angels of judgment and the prophet were left in that spot. As the executioners turned about to carry the slaughter into the rest of the city, Ezekiel fell on his face in mighty intercessory prayer. *Ah, Lord God!* he cried in desperation. Anxiously he asked the Lord if He would completely destroy *the remnant of Israel* in this outpouring of divine wrath (v. 8). The question is in reality an oblique request that God spare what was left of the once proud nation of Israel. Northern Israel had fallen in 722 B.C. Her citizens had been dispersed throughout the length and breadth of the Assyrian empire. Several thousand of the inhabitants of Judah already had been carried away by Nebuchadnezzar in the deportations of 605 and 597 B.C. Now Ezekiel asks if the remaining people of God will also be wiped out. The question is in reality an oblique request that God spare what was left of the once proud nation of Israel.³⁸

38. Cf. the intercessory prayers of Amos in response to the visions of the destruction of Israel (Amos 7:1-6).

The anguished appeal of the prophet is forthrightly answered in verses 9-10. The sovereign God is not compelled to justify His actions to man, and it is a pure act of grace when he chooses to do so. Here the Lord cites four reasons why the destruction of the state of Judah was an absolute necessity.

1. God declared that *the iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great* (v. 9). The evil had gone too far.³⁹ The coupling of the names Israel and Judah should be noted. That which justified the yet future destruction of Judah also justified the past judgment against Israel.

2. The land of Judah was *full of blood*, i.e., the violence which leads to bloodshed. No doubt the reference is to the mistreatment of the poor and helpless.

3. Jerusalem was *full of perversion (muteh)*, i.e., the wresting of judgment (v. 9). The miscarriage of justice probably led to the bloodshed mentioned above. To Ezekiel, social evils were merely the by-product of a basically wrong relationship between God and man.

4. The people of Judah had lost confidence in the Lord and had begun to utter blasphemous charges against Him. *The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see* (v. 9). A similar proverb is cited in 8:12. The faith of the people had been shaken by recent calamities because their faith was built upon a faulty theological foundation. Prosperity was the reward for faithful religious ritual. Misfortune could only be interpreted in the light of the proposition that God was either *powerless* or *pitiless*. He either could not prevent what was happening, or else He simply did not care. Such is the logic of doubt.

Because of this blatant theological perversion God would be forced to deal with His people in wrath. He could show no compassion or pity in dealing with these sinners lest His absolute holiness be called into question. He had no choice but to bring down *their way upon their head*, i.e., recompense them for their conduct (v. 10).

39. This note is sounded many times in the exilic period: Ezekiel 11:13; 14:14; Jer. 17:16; 11:14; 14:11; 15:1, etc.

This vision concludes with the report of the agent of mercy. The blessed scribe had done this work (v. 11). Those who truly had remained faithful to God in the midst of national corruption had been sealed with the sign of promise and hope. In his despair the prophet had forgotten about those who were to receive the mark upon their foreheads. They were the true remnant. In effect God answered the intercessory prayer of Ezekiel by allowing him to overhear the report of the angel of mercy. The true Israel of God would in fact survive the calamity which was about to befall Jerusalem.

B. Jerusalem Destroyed by Fire 10:1-8

TRANSLATION

(1) Then I looked, and behold, upon the platform which was above the head of the cherubim there appeared something like a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne. (2) And He spoke unto the man clothed in linen and said, Go in between the wheels⁴⁰ under the cherubim⁴⁰ and fill your hands with coals of fire found between the cherubim and scatter them over the city. And he went in my sight. (3) Now the cherubim were standing on the right of the house as the man entered; and smoke filled the inner court. (4) And the glory of the LORD had arisen from over the cherubim and was over the threshold of the house. And the house was filled with the cloud, and the courtyard was filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD. (5) And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard to the outer court, like the voice of almighty God, when He spoke. (6) And it came to pass when He had commanded the man clothed in linen, saying, Take fire from between the wheels, from between the cherubim, that he went and stood beside the wheels. (7) And the cherub put forth his hand from

40. A singular noun used in the collective sense.

between the cherubim unto the man who was between the cherubim and he lifted up and gave unto the hands of the man clothed with linen. And he took it and went out. (8) And the cherubim appeared to have the form of a man's hand under their wings.

COMMENTS

At the close of chapter 8 the stage is set for a graphic description of the destruction of Jerusalem. The man clothed in linen has completed his God-assigned task of marking the faithful for salvation (9:11). It is time for the six executioners to expand their work from the court of the Temple to the rest of Jerusalem. Yet in all of chapter 10 these agents of God are not mentioned. They disappeared from the scene. Only the man clothed in linen remained. But to this beneficent character a new role was assigned. He now became the agent of fiery judgment. Jerusalem is to be destroyed by sword and by fire, and these two aspects of the judgment are successively portrayed to the prophet in chapters 9 and 10.

Again the throne-chariot of the Lord appears before the prophet's mind. He saw the *platform* over the heads of the cherubim upon which stood the sapphire-like throne of the Almighty (v. 1; cf. 1:26). The throne was initially empty, awaiting the moment when the Lord would once again occupy it (cf. 10:18). The relationship between the glorious presence of God and the throne in these chapters is a bit difficult to follow. The following tabulation of references may assist in tracing this aspect of the vision.

LOCATION OF THE GLORY OF GOD				
In the Holy of Holies	At the Temple Threshold	In the Holy of Holies	At the East Gate	Mountain East of the City
On the Throne	Separate from the Throne	On the Throne	On the Throne	On the Throne
8:4	9:3; 10:4	10:18	10:19	11:23

For the first time it comes to light in 10:1 that the *living creatures* in Ezekiel's throne vision (1:5ff.) were *cherubim*. It is useless to speculate as to why Ezekiel waited until this point to make this identification. The delay is surely not due to the fact that Ezekiel would not have known what cherubim actually looked like until he saw the interior of the Temple.⁴¹ Surely as a member of a priestly family he would have received such information.

The cherubim are assigned a variety of roles in the Old Testament. They first appear in connection with the Garden of Eden where they guarded the entrance to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). In Solomon's Temple they served as attendants and guardians of the Holy of Holies (I Kings 6:23). They were depicted on the lid of the ark of the covenant with their heads bowed and their faces looking downward towards the mercy seat as if in silent adoration (Ex. 25:18-20). In a number of passages the Lord is described as being enthroned on (or above) the cherubim.⁴² Here Ezekiel sees the cherubim in their traditional role as guardians as they protect access to the holy fire. In at least one passage God is said to ride on a cherub (Ps. 18:10). This is very much like the function performed by cherubim in Ezekiel's vision where these heavenly beings bear up the throne of God and provide locomotion for the entire complicated structure.

The real connecting link between the previous and the present chapter—the man with the linen garment—appears in verse 2. Ezekiel now heard the voice of the Almighty speaking again to this anonymous angel.⁴³ In 9:3 the divine Presence departed from the throne-chariot and stood at the threshold of the sanctuary. Here again the divine Presence is connected with the throne-chariot.

The man in linen garb was instructed to go into the midst of the wheels of the throne-chariot and pick up with both hands

41. As suggested by Taylor, *TOTC*, p. 104.

42. I Samuel 4:4; II Samuel 6:2; II Kings 19:15; Psalms 80:1, etc.

43. Later writers attempted to identify the man in the linen as Gabriel or Raphael.

the hot coals which he found there (cf. 1:13). Hot coals apparently symbolize judgment and purgation (Isa. 6:6f.). That both hands are to be employed in the task points to the severity of the anticipated judgment. The agent was to scatter the coals over the wicked city of Jerusalem. As the vision continued Ezekiel actually saw the linen-clad man begin to carry out those instructions (v. 2).

The symbolic import of this part of the vision is obvious. The judgmental fire which was to fall on Jerusalem would come from the Holy One of Israel. The tragic theology of the day denied that God could ever turn against the city in which He was enthroned between the cherubim. The Babylonian exiles could not or would not hear. Desperately the prophet proclaimed the incredible truth that Yahweh would purge Jerusalem. Six years later when Jerusalem received that awful baptism of fire only a few recognized it as being the fire of God. Those few had been prepared by the preaching of men like Ezekiel.

Verses 3-5 parenthetically describe in vivid detail the situation in the Temple at the moment the linen-clad man proceeded to execute the command of the Lord. Five points are made:

1. The *cherubim were standing on the right* (i.e., south) side of the Temple, far removed from the ritualistic abominations being practiced on the north side of that house (cf. 8:14).

2. *The cloud*⁴⁴ which accompanied the divine Glory filled the *inner court* (v. 3) and the house (i.e., the Holy Place; v. 4).

3. That deep and dark cloud filled the inner court and house because the *Glory of the Lord had risen up* and was now over the threshold of the house. This is the first stage of the divine departure from that place (v. 4; cf. 9:3). The cherubim had been left behind to perform a significant task, viz., to give the divine messenger of destruction his means of destroying the city.

4. Because of the presence of the Glory of the Lord, the outer court was filled with ineffable radiance (*nogah*; v. 4).

5. From within the Temple, *the sound of the wings of the*

44. This cloud is mentioned also in I Kings 8:10, 11 and Isaiah 6:1, 2. The Jews called this cloud the Shechinah.

cherubim could be heard *even to the outer court*. The sound resembled *the voice of God Almighty* (El Shaddai).⁴⁵ Psalm 29 equates the voice of Yahweh with the roar of thunder. Probably Ezekiel intends the same comparison here. Normally the wings of the cherubim were motionless and made no sound. But in this vision as in the first one of the book (1:24) they made a loud noise when God spoke. Nevertheless, the voice of God was not thereby drowned out, for it was heard both by Ezekiel and the linen-vested minister. The thundering pulse of those angelic wings signaled the imminent departure of those heavenly creatures.

Verse 6 continues the narrative from verse 2 following the parenthetical interjection of verses 3-5. The divine voice had bidden the linen-clad angel to enter among the cherubim and take hot coals from between the wheelwork or chariot (*galgal*).⁴⁶ Without any hesitation the man made his way to one of the magnificent wheels which moved in conjunction with the cherubim.

Before the man dressed in linen could fill his hands with hot coals, one of the cherubim—presumably the one closest to Ezekiel—put forth his hand into the fire, drew forth hot coals and placed them in the hands of the “man.” This was possible, verse 8 parenthetically explains, because there appeared under the wing of each of the cherubim the form of a man’s hand. Perhaps the lesson here is that even an angelic messenger like the man clothed in linen had to keep his distance from the awful throne of God. As guardians of the fire it was appropriate that one of the cherubim should actually give the fire to the destroying angel. Having received those coals of judgment fire, the man with the linen garment *went out* (v. 7) from the Temple to execute the command to set fire to the city (cf. v. 2). This visionary and symbolic representation of the burning of Jerusalem found fulfillment in 587 B.C.

45. The name El Shaddai expresses the fact that God rules over all nature. The name was more common in the early stages of Old Testament history. See Exodus 6:3.

46. The word is singular and collective and means literally, “the whirling thing.” It is used elsewhere of the wheel of a war chariot (cf. Isa. 5:58). It has been suggested that the word *could* be translated *chariot* in this context.

C. The Throne-Chariot of God 10:9-17

TRANSLATION

(9) And I looked, and behold, four wheels beside the cherubim, a wheel beside one cherub, and another wheel beside another cherub, and the appearance of the wheels was as the color of a tarshish stone. (10) Now as for their appearance, the four had the same likeness as when a wheel is in the midst of a wheel. (11) When they moved, they moved unto their four sides; they did not turn as they moved, but to the place which the head turned, they followed; they did not turn as they moved. (12) And all their body, their backs, their hands and their wings, and the wheels were full of eyes round about, the wheels which the four had. (13) As for the wheels, to them one was calling in my presence, O wheel. (14) And each one had four faces. The first face was the face of the cherub, the second the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. (15) And the cherubim were lifted up. This was the living creature which I saw at the river of Chebar. (16) And when the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them, and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to rise above the earth, these same wheels did not turn from beside them. (17) When these stood, they stood, and when they were lifted up, they lifted themselves up, for the spirit of the living creature was in them.

COMMENTS

One might expect to find in the remaining verses of chapter 10 a graphic description of the conflagration which was to befall Jerusalem. But such is not the case. Instead the prophet again describes the throne-chariot which had occupied his attention in chapter 1. The variations in the two descriptions serve to underscore the visionary and symbolic import of the entire narrative.

1. A tarshish colored wheel appeared along side each of the four cherubim (v. 9).

2. The four wheels were identical, each appearing to consist of a wheel within a wheel (v. 10; cf. 1:16).

3. The wheels were such that they could move in any direction without benefit of a turning mechanism (v. 11; cf. 1:17). Which-ever direction *the head*, i.e., the cherub,⁴⁷ looked, the wheel followed. The cherubim were the principal driving force of the chariot. The spirit of the living creatures (cherubim) was in the wheels, and that gave unity to the whole operation.

4. Whereas in chapter 1 the *rings* of the wheels were full of eyes (1:18), here the eyes are everywhere. The entire bodies of the cherubim, their backs, hands and wings as well as the wheels are covered with eyes (v. 12).⁴⁸ Multiplied eyes are here, as always in Scripture, symbolic of omniscience.⁴⁹

5. The elaborate wheels were identified in the hearing of Ezekiel as being the chariot (*haggalgal*). He recognized that as the correct name for the mysterious and complex visionary object (v. 13).

Attention shifts in verse 14 from the wheels to the cherubim. As in chapter 1, each cherub had four faces. Three of the faces are the same as those seen in chapter 1—the man, the lion, the eagle. But the face of the ox (1:10) is now described as *the face of the cherub*. In chapter 1 this face was third in order while here it is first. In the previous vision the creatures were called by the general term *living creatures*. Ezekiel now realized that they were cherubim. The ox-like face which looked straight forward is thus assumed to be the primary or real face of each cherub. The definite article—the face of *the* cherub—possibly indicates that this was the form that had given the coals of fire in verse 7.

Ezekiel then observed the cherubim—the living creatures of

47. Others take *the head* to refer to the front wheel.

48. Others limit verse 12 to the wheels and thus maintain the harmony between chapter 1 and the present vision. The term *backs* is taken to mean rings or felloes (as in 1:18) and the *hands* are understood as axles. But what part of a wheel could be designated as a *wing*?

49. Zechariah saw seven eyes on the Messianic stone set symbolically before the high priest Joshua (Zech. 3:9). The living creatures of Revelation were covered with eyes (Rev. 4:6).

chapter 1 — *mount up* (v. 15). The method by which the throne-chariot became air-borne is described in verses 16-17. The main point here is that the wheels moved in conjunction with the flight of the cherubim (vv. 16, 17; cf. 1:19, 21).

D. The Departure of the Divine Presence 10:18-22

TRANSLATION

(18) And the glory of the LORD went out from over the threshold of the house and stood over the cherubim. (19) And the cherubim lifted their wings and they went up from the earth in my presence; when they went out, the wheels were beside them; and it stood at the entrance of the eastern gate of the house of the LORD, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. (20) These were the living creatures which I saw under the God of Israel by the river Chebar; and I knew that they were cherubim. (21) Each had four faces, and each had four wings, and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. (22) And the likeness of their faces were the faces which I saw beside the river Chebar, their appearances and themselves; each went straight forward.

COMMENTS

The throne-chariot was ready for the Royal Rider. The glory cloud took its place again upon that throne, and the departure began (v. 18). The departure route was by way of the east gate of the Temple, where for a time the throne-chariot stood (v. 19). The east gate was the most important gate since it faced the front of the Temple. The temporary stand at the eastern exit has no further significance other than to dramatize the divine departure. The departure clears the way for the destruction of the city. Through this same gate Ezekiel would later see the *glory of the Lord* return to His Temple (43:4).

In the last three verses of chapter 10 Ezekiel underscores the fact that the throne-chariot which he saw here in the Temple was the same which he had seen in his first vision by the river Chebar. The living creatures⁵⁰ were cherubim (v. 20) each of which had four faces, four wings and the *likeness of man's hand under their wings* (v. 21). The faces of the creatures in both visions were the same as was the fact that the heavenly vehicle could move straight forward in any of the four directions which the four faces faced (v. 22).

III. DECLARATIONS BY THE PROPHET 11:1-25

Chapter 11 sets forth two declarations by the prophet in his vision. The first (11:1-13) denounced the leaders in Jerusalem. The second brought comfort to the exiles in Babylon (11:14-21). To these declarations is attached a note about the conclusion of this vision (11:22-25).

A. The Jerusalem Leaders Denounced 11:1-13

TRANSLATION

(1) And a spirit lifted me up, and brought me unto the eastern gate of the house of the LORD, the one that faces east, and behold, in the entrance of the gate twenty-five men. And I saw in their midst Jaazaniah ben-Azur and Pelatiah ben-Benaiah, princes of the people. (2) And He said unto me, Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity, and give wicked counsel in this city; (3) who say, It is not near, let us build houses.⁵¹ It is the pot, and we are the meat. (4) Therefore, prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man. (5) And the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and said unto me, Speak! Thus says the LORD:

50. Singular in Hebrew used collectively.

51. Lit., not in the near (future) the building of houses.

You have said thus, O house of Israel, and the things of your spirit I surely know. (6) You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled its streets with slain. (7) Therefore, Thus says the LORD: Your slain which you have put in your midst, they are the meat, and it is the pot; but you shall be brought forth⁵² from its midst. (8) A sword you have feared, and a sword I shall bring against you (oracle of the Lord GOD). (9) And I will bring you out from its midst, and I will place you in the hand of strangers, and I will execute judgments among you. (10) With the sword you shall fall, upon the border of Israel I shall judge you; and you shall know that I am the LORD. (11) It shall not be your pot, nor shall you be in its midst as meat; but I will judge you unto the border of Israel. (12) And you shall know that I am the LORD in whose statutes you did not walk, and whose judgments you did not execute, but have done according to the judgments of the nations which are round about you.

COMMENTS

The leading citizens of Jerusalem were convinced of the impregnability of the Holy City. In 11:1-13 Ezekiel was commissioned to smash this vain delusion. Blackwood succinctly summarizes the vision which is unraveling: Jerusalem will die, but faith will live.⁵³

In this vision the prophet feels himself swept off his feet and carried by a *spirit* to another part of the Temple. From the inner court where Ezekiel was last said to be standing (8:16), the prophet was transported to the *eastern gate* of the outer court. This was the spot where the throne-chariot had momentarily set down (10:19). This area just outside the sacred Temple precincts was traditionally a place of public assembly (cf. Jer. 26:10).

At the eastern Temple gate Ezekiel saw twenty-five men. Are

52. Another reading is, *I will bring you forth*.

53. Blackwood, *EPH*, p. 84.

these the same men Ezekiel observed worshipping the sun in 8:16? Probably not.⁵⁴ The former company was a priestly group, while these twenty-five appear to have been lay leaders. Furthermore, the two groups are seen in different localities. What significance there may be in the number twenty-five cannot be ascertained.⁵⁵ The men seem to have been members of a political pressure group.

Two of the twenty-five men were easily identified by Ezekiel. *Jaazaniah*⁵⁶ and *Pelatiah* were prominent statesmen, *princes of the people* (v. 1). This term refers to the ruling class of Judah, not necessarily the royal family.⁵⁷

The twenty-five men are said to be those who *devise iniquity and give wicked counsel in this city*, i.e., Jerusalem (v. 2). Exactly what this iniquity and counsel consisted of is not certain. Since this narrative dates from the latter half of Zedekiah's reign, Jeremiah's experiences with the princes may give some indication. In open contradiction to Jeremiah's constant proclamation of certain doom for Jerusalem, the princes optimistically advised the people of the city's invulnerability. This anti-Babylon faction constantly agitated for revolt against the authority of Nebuchadnezzar. Such policies were tantamount to rebellion against the will of God (Jer. 27:12ff.), and were therefore politically and spiritually disastrous.

The defiant boast of these evil counsellors is cited in verse 3. *It* (the judgment of which the true prophets spoke) *is not near*;⁵⁸ *let us build houses*. Jeremiah had bidden the exiles in Babylon to build houses and settle down for a long stay (Jer. 29:5). The

54. Many capable commentators do make the identification between the two groups.

55. Various conjectures: (1) two from each tribe of Israel with the king at their head; (2) two from each of the twelve divisions of the army with their commander; (3) two representatives from each of the twelve regions of the city with their president.

56. Not to be confused with the Jaazaniah of 8:11 who was the son of Shaphan. This Jaazaniah was the son of Azur. An Azur is found in Jeremiah 28:1 as the father of Hananiah the false prophet. Could this Jaazaniah have been the brother of Hananiah?

57. See Jeremiah 26:10, 12, 16, 21; 36:14, et al.

58. The Greek version turns this into a question, "Is not the time at hand to build houses?"

evil princes urged that houses be built⁵⁹ in Jerusalem, that business proceed as usual. Jeremiah had threatened the inhabitants of Jerusalem with the image of the seething pot (Jer. 1:13); but the rebel party regarded Jerusalem as the caldron which would protect the meat—the inhabitants of the city—from the fire of destruction. The schemers thus assured themselves that the walls of Jerusalem would afford them adequate protection in the event of an attack by the army of Babylon.

In his vision Ezekiel heard himself bidden to do the true work of a prophet in rebuking the defiant rebels. Concerning these Jerusalem leaders God had an urgent message. The repetition of the command to prophesy (v. 4) underscores this urgency. As in 2:2 Ezekiel felt the Spirit of God fall upon him. He knew that he would speak the word of the Lord inerrantly, and hence he prefaced his visionary oracle with the phrase *Thus says the Lord*. His message was addressed to the *house of Israel*, a term which in Ezekiel's day was restricted to the people of Judah—the remnant of Israel. God knew what the leaders of Israel had been saying, and He knew their thoughts as well (v. 5).

In verse 6 Ezekiel makes a serious accusation against the Jerusalem leadership: *You have multiplied your slain in this city*. This has been taken by some to be prophetic invective against the violence of the Jerusalem leadership.⁶⁰ The term *slain* is often used in classical Hebrew prophecy to refer to the helpless victims of social and political iniquities.⁶¹ Plenty of examples from the biographical narratives of Jeremiah can be adduced to substantiate the charge of ruthlessness against the national leaders in Jerusalem. However, context here would seem to point in the direction of another interpretation of the accusation in verse 6. It might be called a *predictive* accusation. The defiant attitude of the anti-Babylonian party would result in the streets

59. Many modern commentators prefer the translation *the time is not near to build houses*. The idea would then be that all attention should be devoted to war against Babylon, not house-building. While this translation is possible, the explanation is farfetched.

60. Wevers, *NCB*, p. 94.

61. E.g., Isaiah 1:21-23; Amos 2:6-8; Hosea 4:1-3; Micah 3:1-3.

of Jerusalem being filled with those slain by Babylonian swords. The princes or governmental leaders were ultimately responsible for this needless slaughter.

The prophet was led of the Lord to respond to their derisive and defiant caldron simile. The evil practices of Jerusalem's rulers had resulted in a situation in which the city walls would only serve to entrap and not protect. The gullible inhabitants of Jerusalem were bound together within the city for slaughter. The Jerusalem caldron was a pot of death, and the leaders were responsible for the *slain*—the corpses—which would fall in the streets of that city. But at least those slain would remain in Jerusalem, interred in their native land. For the war-mongers a worse fate was in store. They would fall into the hand of the ruthless Nebuchadnezzar and would be brought forth by him out of the midst of Jerusalem (v. 7).

Stripped of metaphor, verse 7 states simply that Jerusalem will afford no protection to the inhabitants. Many would be slain; others would be carried away into captivity on foreign soil. With all their talk about security, the leaders really feared an attack by *the sword*, i.e., Babylon. These fears, Ezekiel announced, would be justified by events (v. 8).

In verse 9 Ezekiel becomes more specific about the expulsion of the leaders from Jerusalem, and in so doing he eliminates any ambiguity in his previous statement. Their expulsion from Jerusalem spoken of in verse 7 would not result in escape to safe refuge. God would deliver them into the hands of *strangers*, i.e., the Babylonians. Through the instrumentality of these foreigners God would execute His judgments upon the rebels (v. 9). Ultimately they would fall by the sword. They would taste the judgment of the Lord *upon the border of Israel*. This prediction was fulfilled when the princes of Judah were mas-sacred at Riblah (Jer. 52:9, 10) which was on the frontier of the old Northern Kingdom (cf. I Kings 8:65; II Kings 14:25). When this prediction came to pass they would know that *I am the Lord*—that Yahweh is not indifferent to the conduct of man (v. 10).

Verses 11-12a simply serve to underscore the dramatic predictions of the previous verses. Jerusalem would not serve as

a caldron to protect the meat, i.e., these leaders, from the fire of the Babylonian army. Rather, they would experience divine judgment *upon the border of Israel*. The fulfillment of these predictions would establish that the one who spoke through the prophetic mouthpiece was really Yahweh, the God who will not leave the wicked unpunished. These leaders had disregarded the *statutes* and *ordinances* of the Lord, but on the contrary had followed heathen customs and practices (v. 12). They were therefore deserving of divine wrath.

As Ezekiel prophesied in his vision a dramatic event took place. One of the leaders, Pelatiah ben Benaiah, dropped dead.⁶² Whether the death of Pelatiah was an actual event which is incorporated into the vision,⁶³ or whether it is purely a symbolic and visionary occurrence cannot be determined. In any case Ezekiel was startled and horrified by this occurrence. He certainly interpreted it as an ominous sign. Following his natural impulse as prophetic intercessor, Ezekiel fell on this face in earnest supplication before the Lord. In a loud voice he cried out his exasperation and agony, *Ah Lord God!* A question conveys an oblique petition on behalf of his people.⁶⁴ *Will You make a full end of the remnant of Israel?* The remnant of Israel would be those who were left in Jerusalem after the Babylonian siege in 597 B.C. The prophet interpreted the death of Pelatiah, one of the chief counsellors of the city, to mean that the entire population of Jerusalem would share a similar fate.

B. The Jewish Exiles Encouraged 11:14-21

TRANSLATION

(14) And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, (15) Son of man, your brethren, your kinsmen, and all the house of

62. Compare the death of the false prophet Hananiah (Jer. 28:17).

63. Taylor (*TOTC*, p. 110) feels Pelatiah actually died in Jerusalem at the very moment that Ezekiel had his vision. Subsequent reports of the incident reaching the exiles would have confirmed the authenticity of the vision and Ezekiel's supernatural power.

64. Compare the prayer in 9:8.

Israel—all of these are they of whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Go far away from the LORD; the land has been given to us for a possession. (16) Therefore say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Although I have removed them far among the nations, and although I have scattered them among lands, yet I shall be a sanctuary for a little while for them in the lands where they have come. (17) Therefore say, Thus says the Lord GOD: I will gather you from the peoples, yes I will assemble you from the lands where you have been scattered, and I will give to you the land of Israel. (18) And they shall come there and they shall remove all her horrible things and all her abominations from her. (19) And I will give to them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them, and I will take away the heart of stone from their flesh, and I will give them a heart of flesh, (20) in order that they will walk in My statutes, and keep My ordinances, and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. (21) But as for those whose heart goes after horrible things and abominations, I will recompense their way upon their head (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

In response to the desperate prayer-question of Ezekiel concerning the future of Israel, God granted to the prophet a special revelation of comfort (v. 14). Ezekiel was first reminded that the remnant of Israel about which he was concerned embraced others besides those who still inhabited Jerusalem. The exiled Israelites were also his brethren and kinsmen. Indeed, *all the house of Israel* included the exiles of the Northern Kingdom as well as those of Judah. All the exiles were looked down on and despised by those who remained in Jerusalem. The fact that they were left in possession of the land and Temple was interpreted as being an evidence of God's blessing on them. Conversely, they regarded those who had been carried away to foreign lands as being cursed of God because they were *far from the land*, i.e., His domain and presence (v. 15).

The Lord speaking through Ezekiel rebuked the haughty attitude of the Jerusalemites. The proof that the exiles were God's people is seen in what He had done already for them, and what He promised yet to do for them. While it was true that the exiles had been scattered among the nations by the Lord, yet this in no way implied that He had cast off these people. Though they were separated by miles from Mt. Zion and God's house, yet God Himself would serve as their sanctuary during the *little while*⁶⁵ they were in captivity (v. 16). Those exiles were really nearer to the presence of God than those who worshiped in the Jerusalem Temple from which the Lord had now departed. He was their protection and source of strength. The phrase *little while* suggests that the captivity was transient and provisional. For Ezekiel, as for Jeremiah, the people in exile were the "good figs" (cf. Jer. 24:1), and those in Jerusalem the rotten figs. They were the remnant for whom there was a hope of better things.

A major theological thought emerges here. It is the presence of the Lord that makes the sanctuary, not the sanctuary that secures the presence of God. The physical Temple was not absolutely essential to the relationship between God and His people. Although the exiles had lost the Temple, they had not lost the presence of God.

For those despised exiles God had something wonderful in store. God would gather and assemble His people from among the nations where they had been driven. Furthermore, to these presently despised and disheartened exiles He would give the land of Israel (v. 17). This prophecy began to be fulfilled in the work of restoration achieved by Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. But the work of gathering God's people goes on today wherever and whenever the Gospel is preached. Men and women baptized into Christ become part of the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16) and inherit the Jerusalem which is from above (Gal. 4:26).

Those exiles brought home by God would be spiritual persons.

65. The charming translation *little sanctuary* (KJV) is not accurate. Even today Jews call their synagogues "a little sanctuary" in allusion to this verse.

Immediately upon returning they would remove all *horrible things* and *abominations*, i.e., idols, and the paraphernalia of idolatry (v. 18). Repentance must precede God's work in the heart of men. God can do nothing for the man who will not recognize his sins and turn from them.

In the new Israel God would give His people *one heart* (v. 19). Here Ezekiel is introducing the great prophetic theme of unity among the people of God, a theme which he will later amplify by a symbolic action (37:15-22). The long-standing cleavage between north and south, Israel and Judah, would disappear. Oneness of purpose and of action would characterize the new Israel of God. The unity in Christ of Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free is a grand theological fact which, unfortunately, in practice God's people do not display before the world.

The means of achieving this grand unity of God's people is the divine gift of a *new spirit* (v. 19). The prophet speaks here of the spirit of loyalty, obedience and unselfishness.⁶⁶ Thus God not only sets up His covenant, He also provides all the qualifications for living under the covenant. The new spirit is God's spirit. The New Israel of God would be infused with new divine energy. Such a prediction can only be fully understood in the light of the gift of the Holy Spirit to God's people on Pentecost.

A *new heart* as well as a new spirit would be given to the individual members of the New Israel (v. 19). The stony heart is that which is hardened (3:7) against inducements to repentance, to all spiritual aspirations.⁶⁷ The heart to the Hebrews was the center of the will and the mind, the intellectual basis for emotion and action.

The new spirit and new heart manifest themselves in a new life—a life of righteousness. In sincere obedience the members of New Israel would live by the statutes and ordinances of God (v. 20). In acts of formal worship and in their daily dealings they

66. In this prophecy of the new spirit Ezekiel echoes the thoughts and even the words of Jeremiah 31:31-33; 32:37-39 and Deuteronomy 30:11-16.

67. Zechariah 7:12 speaks of those who made their hearts "harder than an adamant stone."

would act in accordance with God's revealed will.

The new spirit, new heart and new life make possible a new—or perhaps more accurately, a *renewed*—relationship with God. They will be His people; He will be their God (v. 20). Ultimately this theme reaches its fulfillment in the blessed state of eternity (Rev. 21:3-5).

The glorious promises of this oracle come to an end with a stern warning to those Israelites who may be hardened in unbelief. Certainly the inhabitants of Jerusalem are in view in verse 21; but the warning is not limited to them. Those who continued to walk after idolatry would face the judgment of God. He would *bring their way upon their own heads*, i.e., He would give them their just deserts (v. 21). In the economy of God, every set of promises has a corresponding set of punishments which fall upon those who do not through faith and obedience appropriate those promises (cf. Deut. 11:26; Matt. 7:13f.).

C. The Conclusion of the Vision 11:22-25

TRANSLATION

(22) Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, and the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. (23) And the glory of the LORD went up from over the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which was east of the city. (24) Afterwards, a spirit lifted me up and caused me to go like a vision by the Spirit of God unto the captivity. So the vision which I had seen went up from me. (25) And I spoke unto the captivity all the things of the LORD which He had showed me.

COMMENTS

The throne-chariot of God had paused at the eastern gate of the Temple court (10:19). Now in his vision Ezekiel saw those

cherubic wings begin to whirl, and the entire throne-chariot with the glory of God over it became air-borne (v. 22). The heavenly chariot came down on the Mt. of Olives east of Jerusalem. From that same spot centuries later the Son of Man “beheld the city, and wept over it” (Luke 19:41); and from that hill He, the very embodiment of heavenly glory, ascended into heaven. It is not altogether clear why the Shechinah glory paused on the Mt. of Olives in the course of departure.⁶⁸ There is no need to trace further the journeys of the throne-chariot. Ezekiel had already seen it in Tel-Abib.

The long vision—actually a series of related visions—which commenced in 8:1 comes to an end in 11:24-25. In his vision Ezekiel felt himself transported by a spirit to Chaldea, the land of captivity. Immediately the state of prophetic ecstasy came to an end (v. 24). When Ezekiel awoke from his vision, he began to reveal to his fellow-exiles all that he had seen and experienced (v. 25). Therefore, the prophetic purpose of the visional experience was to serve, not as a message to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but rather to those in Babylonian captivity.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. At what point in his ministry did the elders begin to assemble at the house of Ezekiel? Why did they come?
2. How can you explain Ezekiel's transmigration to Jerusalem?
3. What was the image of jealousy?
4. What was the likely source of the animal worship being secretly practiced by the seventy elders?
5. Why was Jaazaniah singled out for special mention among the apostate elders?
6. What popular attitudes toward God does Ezekiel refute in these chapters?

68. Jewish tradition sees in this pause evidence that God was still looking for repentance within the city. Others suggest that the purpose of the delay was to enable the glory-cloud to direct the judgment of the city.

7. What role were women playing in the apostasy?
8. Who was Tammuz?
9. To what extent had some of the priests gone in their apostasy?
10. Who were the six executioners whom Ezekiel saw approaching Jerusalem? How were they armed?
11. What act of mercy had to precede the judgment by the six executioners?
12. What possible significance is there in the mark placed upon the brow of the faithful few in Jerusalem?
13. What evidence is there in this chapter of Ezekiel's role as intercessor?
14. What significance is there in the movements of the throne-chariot in this series of visions?
15. In what ways does the vision of the throne-chariot in chapter 10 differ from that found in chapter 1?
16. Was the death of Pelatiah an actual occurrence, or was it only part of the vision?
17. In what sense had the Jerusalem leadership *multiplied your slain in this city*?
18. What great theological truth emerges here regarding worship sanctuaries?
19. What picture does Ezekiel paint of the New Israel of God?

Chapter Seven

SYMBOLS AND SERMONS

12:1 — 14:23

This section does not begin with a chronological note, but in all likelihood the symbolic actions and oracles recorded here date from the same time frame as those in the preceding section. According to the modern calendar, that would be in the summer of 592 B.C. Ezekiel's purpose here is to defend and reinforce the announcement of Jerusalem's coming judgment. This material may be divided into four subdivisions with each subdivision itself being a logical bifid. Ezekiel has here incorporated (1) two symbolic actions which he performed (12:1-22); (2) two popular sayings which he corrected (12:17-20); (3) two scathing oracles which he delivered (13:1-23); and (4) two objections to the judgment which he answered (14:1-23).

I. TWO SYMBOLIC ACTIONS PERFORMED 12:1-22

In chapter 12 Ezekiel was commanded to demonstrate to the captives in Babylon through the medium of symbolic actions the certainty of Judah's destruction. In the parable of the fugitive he assumes the role of a refugee who tries to flee a beleaguered city (12:1-17). The second parable sets forth the hardships which will be experienced when Jerusalem comes under siege (12:18-20). Prophecies of speedy deliverance were current in both Jerusalem and Babylon, and the teaching of this section is especially aimed at countering this false optimism.

A. The Deportation of Jerusalem's Inhabitants 12:1-16

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, you are sitting in the midst of a rebellious house who have

eyes to see, and do not see, have ears to hear, but do not hear, for they are a rebellious house. (3) And as for you, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day before their eyes; and you shall go like an exile from your place unto another before their eyes. Perhaps they will see, for they are a rebellious house. (4) And you shall carry out your baggage like the baggage of an exile by day before their eyes, and you shall go out in the evening before their eyes like those who go out to exile. (5) Before their eyes dig for yourself in the wall, then carry out through it. (6) Before their eyes carry it upon a shoulder. Carry it out at twilight; cover your face that you do not see the ground because I have placed you as a sign to the house of Israel. (7) And I did as I was commanded. My baggage I brought out like an exile's baggage by day, and in the evening I dug for myself in the wall with my hand. At twilight I brought it out, upon my shoulder I carried it before their eyes. (8) And the word of the LORD came to me in the morning, saying, (9) Son of man, have not the house of Israel, the house of rebellion, said unto you, What are you doing? (10) Say unto them, Thus says the Lord GOD: This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel which are in the midst of them. (11) Say: I am your sign! As I have done, so shall it be done to them; with the captives they shall go into captivity. (12) And the prince who is in the midst of them shall bear upon his shoulder that he may go out; through the wall they shall dig to carry out through it; his face he shall cover so that he will not be able to see the ground with the eye. (13) And I shall spread out My net over him, and he shall be taken in My snare and I will bring him into Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans; yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there. (14) And all who surround him to help and all his forces I will scatter to every wind; and I will empty the sword after them, (15) that they may know that I am the LORD when I scatter them among nations, and disperse them in the countries. (16) But I will spare a few men among them from sword, famine and pestilence in order that they may declare all their abominations among the nations to which they come, that they may know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

Ezekiel's congregation in Babylon was enough to discourage the most ardent preacher. They were indeed a *rebellious house* who refused to see or hear the truth (v. 2).¹ They had refused to listen to the inspired explanation of their plight which Ezekiel had conveyed to them in sign and word. Though they themselves had fallen prey to the mighty Nebuchadnezzar, apparently they clung desperately—irrationally—to the conviction that God would ultimately deliver Jerusalem. Still the prophet must try to get through to them. The preacher's knowledge that his words will be ignored is never to be used as an excuse for not uttering those words. The truth must be forthrightly preached if only to justify the hearer's condemnation.

Ezekiel was told to prepare for himself the kind of articles that a person might be permitted to carry on a journey into exile. The barest necessities—a staff, knapsack, drinking cup—might be among the articles gathered. These preparations were to be made by day so as to call attention to them. Ezekiel's strange behavior must have been the talk of the exilic community and he would have had no lack of spectators to watch and gossip about his every action. Having gained their attention he is to make like an exile and travel from his place to an indefinite location outside his house. The object of this symbolic action was hopefully to attract the attention of the rebellious house (v. 3). Though discouraged by his lack of visible results, Ezekiel needed to be reminded that it was always possible that some would understand. *Perhaps* expresses doubt, but also hope.

Verses 4-6 set forth in more detail how Ezekiel was to carry out his fugitive parable.

1. He was to take the necessary "props" out of his house and pile them up opposite his door.

2. The baggage was to be assembled by day, but the actual trek would take place in the cool of the evening. At evening

1. Similar statements regarding spiritually blind eyes and deaf ears are found in Isa. 6:9; 42:20; Jer. 5:21; Matt. 13:13; John 12:40.

time he was to go forth like an exile seeking to evade the enemy.

3. In this action Ezekiel was to assume the dejected demeanor and undertake the desperate deeds of a man faced with the grim reality of exile (v. 4).

4. He is to dig through *the wall* in plain view of the people. The wall here is probably the wall of the courtyard around his house,² and not the wall of the city or of the house itself. Walls in Babylonia were built of sun-dried brick which could, with some exertion, be removed by hand. This phase of the parable is an allusion to the attempt of King Zedekiah to escape Jerusalem (II Kings 25:4). Through the hole in the wall Ezekiel was to *carry out* his captive's baggage (v. 5).

5. Once through the wall he was to carry his exile's baggage upon his shoulder into the early evening darkness.³

6. He was to wear a covering over his face, which would have the effect of making it impossible for him to see the ground. This may symbolize King Zedekiah's attempt to disguise himself as he attempted to flee Jerusalem. The fact that he could not see the land may be an allusion to the blinding of Zedekiah at Riblah (II Kings 25:7).

7. In all this action Ezekiel was serving as a *sign*⁴ to the house of Israel, i.e., a warning of the impending doom facing Jerusalem.

Ezekiel faithfully carried out his instructions. During the day he brought forth his "props" and that evening he dug through the walls with his hands. Digging with the hands rather than with a pick probably indicates that the fugitive would try to avoid the sound of tools.

Following the night in which Ezekiel made his symbolic escape, he received a revelation from God (v. 8). Apparently not even Ezekiel was fully aware of the significance of the actions he had performed except in the very general sense that indicated

2. The Hebrew is *qir*, not *choma*, which is used of a city wall. Tel Abib would probably not have had city walls at which Ezekiel might have demonstrated his message more accurately.

3. The Hebrew *alatah* signifies the darkness that follows sunset. The word occurs elsewhere only in Gen. 15:17.

4. Isaiah (20:2) and Jeremiah (27:2) had also been "signs" to Israel.

the prospect of further exile for the Jews of Jerusalem. By means of a negative question God alludes to the fact that many people had been interrogating Ezekiel about his strange behavior (v. 9). He was to inform them that the *burden*—his prophetic message⁵—had to do with *the prince*,⁶ i.e., King Zedekiah *and all the house of Israel* who still were in *the midst of them* i.e., the arrogant apostates in Jerusalem. This last half of verse 10 is difficult, but apparently Ezekiel is saying that some who belonged to the true Israel still remained in the condemned city.

To these people, Ezekiel was a *sign* or an illustration or an object lesson. What he had done in symbolic parody would actually befall the inhabitants of Jerusalem—they would be driven from their homeland (*exile*) and forced to settle in areas set apart for them by their conquerors (*captivity*; v. 11). To avoid that fate *the prince that is among them* (Zedekiah) would attempt to flee by night carrying what meager belongings he could in a sack thrown over his shoulder. This exodus would be made through a hole *they* (the royal servants) would be able to hastily dig through some palace wall. His face would be covered for purposes of disguise and mourning so that he would not be able to see the ground. The further significance of the covered face is found in the fact that Zedekiah was blinded at Riblah by the Chaldeans and from that time could not see the ground upon which he trod.

Zedekiah's escape efforts would not be successful. The arm of God as well as the armies of Nebuchadnezzar would be against him. His flight would be arrested by an act of God. The soldiers of the Chaldean army would act as agents of God to ensnare the apostate king⁷ (v. 13). The royal bodyguard would

5. The word *burden* in the sense of "prophecy" so common in the pre-exilic prophets, is used in Ezekiel only here. Through constant use by false prophets (Jer. 23:33-38) the term had fallen into discredit.

6. Ezekiel seems to have regarded Jehoiachin rather than Zedekiah as legitimate king of Judah. He therefore refers to Zedekiah as a prince rather than a king.

7. The picture of a net trap is used also in 17:20; and 19:8. Also see Lam. 1:13 and Hos. 7:12.

desert their commander in the moment of crisis and they would flee for their lives with the Chaldean swordsmen in hot pursuit (v. 14). The king would be hauled off to Babylon, yet he would never *see*⁸ the land (v. 13). This amazing prophecy was fulfilled when the Chaldeans blinded Zedekiah's eyes at Riblah (II Kings 25:7). When these gloomy prophecies were fulfilled the remnant of God's people scattered through the nations would realize that Yahweh is God of justice as well as salvation (v. 15). What men refuse to learn in times of prosperity they will be forced to learn in days of adversity. That is to say, when the false theological notions about the Lord had been shattered, they would realize for the first time the full significance of the name Yahweh. A few would survive the overthrow of Jerusalem—the sword, the famine, the pestilence—and they would become truly converted. They would openly admit to their guilt in worshiping pagan *abominations*, and they would make known the name and claim of Yahweh among the heathen nations where they would be scattered (v. 16). Through their account heathen nations would recognize the justice of the exile and the righteous character of Yahweh who engineered it.

B. The Suffering of Jerusalem's Inhabitants 12:17-20

TRANSLATION

(17) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (18) Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink your water with trembling and fear. (19) Say unto the people of the land, Thus says the LORD to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, unto the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with fear, and their water they shall drink with astonishment, that her land may be desolate from its fullness, because of the violence of all those who dwell in her. (20) And the inhabited cities shall become desolate, and the land shall be an astonishment, that you may know that I am the LORD.

8. Josephus (*Ant.* X.vii.2; viii.2) relates a tradition that Ezekiel sent this prophecy to Jerusalem. Finding a discrepancy in the words that he should not see Babylon, and those of Jeremiah (32:4; 34:13), Zedekiah hardened himself in unbelief.

COMMENTS

After an interval of passivity and silence, another command came to Ezekiel (v. 17). He was to set forth symbolically the conditions which would exist in Jerusalem during the Babylonian siege. Meager rations of bread and water were to be consumed in a state of fear and anxiety (v. 18). Earlier he had symbolized vividly the starvation diet of the besieged city (4:9-17). Here the focus is upon the acute terror that would grip the populace when the enemy besieged Jerusalem. The word *trembling* in verse 18 is elsewhere used only of earthquakes, and thus connotes the idea of violent shaking.

So that there would be no misunderstanding of his actions, Ezekiel adds a *thus says the Lord* directed to *the people of the land* (his fellow exiles) and concerning those who still lived in Jerusalem. While much of what he has said in the past has been directed to the national leaders, here he includes the working classes from the farms and villages. The days were coming when they would consume their meager provisions of bread and water with fear and astonishment. Cowering in a corner as one hunted down and dreading pursuit, Ezekiel portrayed the terror which would haunt the lives of the besieged in Jerusalem. *Her land*, i.e., Jerusalem's land, was to become desolate from its fulness. The land was to be stripped of its possessions. The punishment, though severe, would be just *because of the violence*—the oppression and rebellion—of the inhabitants.

II. TWO POPULAR SAYINGS CORRECTED

12:21-28

TRANSLATION

(21) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (22) Son of man, what is this proverb that your people have concerning

the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged and every vision has perished? (23) Therefore say unto them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I have made this proverb to cease, and they shall not make use of it any more in Israel; but speak unto them: The days draw near, and the word of every vision. (24) For there shall no longer be any lying vision, nor flattering divination in the midst of the house of Israel. (25) For I the LORD shall speak, and the word which I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall not be prolonged any more; for in your days O rebellious house, I will speak, and I will perform it (oracle of the Lord GOD). (26) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (27) Son of man, Behold the house of Israel is saying, The vision which he sees is for distant days and of far off times he prophesies. (28) Therefore, say unto them, Thus says the Lord GOD: All My words shall not be prolonged any longer, because I speak a word that it may be done (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

Still another revelation came to the prophet (v. 21) in order to instruct him about how to deal with a perverse attitude which was current among those who were in Israel. Doubtlessly the same attitude was current among the Jews in Babylon. This attitude had crystallized into a clever, pithy, four-word Hebrew proverb (*mashal*) which was wielding tremendous influence among the Jews. Though prophet after prophet had come in the name of God predicting national doom, yet *the days are prolonged*, i.e., time passes, and the visions of doom and destruction never yet had materialized (v. 22). Throughout history such has been the cry of those with little or no faith.⁹ In effect this proverb sneers at the prophet because his threats did not immediately and dramatically become reality. Perhaps the people had the notion that with the passage of time the power of the prophetic word became ineffective.

9. Amos 6:3; Isa. 5:19; Jeremiah 17:15; Matt. 24:48; II Pet. 3:4.

For such careless unconcern and unbelief God had an answer. The perverse proverb would not be used much longer in the land. In a four-word counter-proverb Ezekiel underscored the fact that his prophecies of doom were not for some distant age. *The days are at hand*¹⁰ when every word¹¹ of every ominous vision would come to pass (v. 23). The devastating flow of events would stop the mouths of charlatans who were specialists in *vain vision* and *smooth divination*¹² (v. 24). Optimistic promises of last-minute divine rescue for the Holy City would be discredited and false slogans, however catchy, would die. But God will speak,¹³ and whatever He speaks will assuredly come to pass. As an evidence of grace, execution of divine wrath had in the past been delayed, but no more. The grace period was over. The present rebellious generation would not only hear the prophets speak the word of God, they would witness the Lord of history perform that word in their land and city.

In verse 26-28 Ezekiel deals with yet another perverse proverb. Some had grudgingly recognized an element of truth in the predictions of Ezekiel. They did not say that his vision had failed. Rather they were content with throwing the fulfillment into the distant future (v. 26). To those who transferred the divine threats to distant times God reaffirmed that His judgment was both absolute and imminent (v. 28). The destruction of the Temple and the Holy City, the departure of the divine presence from the sanctuary there, were already within measurable time distance.

The perverse proverbs of the sixth century Jews have from time to time resurfaced in the Christian age among those who

10. Compare the language of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:21); Jesus (Matt. 4:17) and Paul (Rom. 13:11).

11. The Hebrew word *dabhar* means an effective word, word which has lasting power (Isa. 55:11). In this context it would be correct to interpret it to mean *fulfillment*.

12. Divination originally meant the use of external devices such as stars, birds, sticks or the entrails of animals to predict the future. It is impossible to be sure whether some of the false prophets in Babylon resorted to such techniques or whether Ezekiel simply used the term divination to underscore the worthlessness of their predictions.

13. The pronoun *I* is emphatic in Hebrew.

are incredulous with regard to second-coming promises. Because nineteen centuries have passed since the hope of Jesus' return was kindled, some skeptics have concluded that this doctrine can be relegated to the theological scrapheap. Others give credence to the doctrine, but in attitude and action assign the coming of the Lord to some distant age. But whether the promises of His coming have a near or distant fruition, the Christian is called upon to structure his life around the certainty and immediacy of the fulfillment. Those who tend to become weary in patient waiting should read anew II Peter 3:3-13.

III. TWO SCATHING ORACLES DELIVERED

13:1-23

In chapter 13 Ezekiel directs his attack against those who spawned the blasphemous proverbs which he has just refuted in 12:21-28. Ezekiel denounces these prophet-types for undermining the stability of the nation at a time when it needed to be built up. He speaks first of the condemnation of the prophets (vv. 1-16), and then of the prophetesses (vv. 17-23). In order to grasp the magnitude of the problem faced by the faithful proclaimer of God's word in this period, Jeremiah 29 should be read in connection with these denunciations.

A. The Condemnation of the Prophets 13:1-16

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy from their own heart, Hear the word of the LORD. (3) Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe unto the foolish prophets who walk after their spirit, and have seen nothing! (4) Like the foxes among the ruins are your prophets,

O Israel! (5) You did not go up into the gaps, nor did you put up a fence around the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD. (6) They have seen vanity and lying divination who say, Oracle of the LORD, when the LORD has not sent them, and they expect that this word will be confirmed. (7) Have you not seen a vain vision, and spoken a lying divination when you continually say, Oracle of the LORD, even though I did not speak? (8) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, Because you have spoken vanity and seen lies, therefore behold I am against you (oracle of Lord GOD). (9) And My hand shall be against the prophets who see vanity and lying divination. They shall not be in the assembly of My people nor shall they be written in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they come unto the land of Israel, that you may know that I am the Lord GOD. (10) Because, even because, they have caused My people to err, saying, Peace, when there is no peace; and one builds up a wall, and behold, others coat it with whitewash. (11) Say unto those who coat it with whitewash that it shall fall. There shall be a torrential shower, and hail stones shall fall and a stormy wind shall rend it. (12) Behold when the wall has fallen shall it not be said unto you, Where is the coating with which you coated it? (13) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: I will rend it with a stormy wind in My fury, and there shall be a torrential shower in My anger, and hailstones in fury to consume it. (14) So I will smash the wall which you have daubed with lime, and bring it to the ground, and its foundations shall be uncovered, and it shall fall, and you shall be destroyed in its midst, that you may know that I am the LORD. (15) Thus I will complete My wrath on the wall, and on those who daubed it with whitewash, and I will say to you, The wall is no more, and those who coated it are no more, (16) the prophets of Israel who prophesy unto Jerusalem and who see visions of peace for her when there is no peace (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

Basically two charges are leveled against the national prophets: (1) they had undermined the nation (vv. 1-7); and (2) they had encouraged false security (vv. 8-16).

Surely it must have been with sarcasm that Ezekiel referred to his opponents as the *prophets of Israel*. These were the spiritual leaders preferred by the rebellious nation. Their messages had no higher authority than their own heart. For those deceivers Ezekiel had a genuine word from the Lord (v. 2). Plumptre captures the revulsion which Ezekiel must have felt when he denounced the false prophets when he writes:

To one who was conscious that he had a message which he had not devised himself, and which he had not been taught by men; that he had no selfish by-ends in what he said and did; that he was risking peace, reputation, life itself, for the truth revealed to him—nothing could be more repulsive than this claim to have seen a vision of Jehovah, by men who had in reality seen nothing.¹⁴

Ezekiel pronounced a *woe* upon those foolish prophets (lit., *the prophets, the fools*). The Hebrew for *foolish* (*nebal*)¹⁵ denotes more than stupidity. The fool was a person arrogant, blasphemous, and devoid of ethical and religious scruples.¹⁶ Such were the prophets who followed *their own spirit* rather than the leading of God's Spirit. Their message was grounded in self-deception—*things which they have not seen* (v. 3). The spiritual progeny of those prophetic pretenders are those today who present human wisdom as though it were from above.

Israel's prophets—they are not *God's* prophets—are compared to *foxes among the ruins* (v. 4). Like foxes they were cunning and destructive. Foxes find a natural habitation among the ruins of cities and their presence only increased the devastation. So the false prophets had infiltrated the nation that was

14. Plumptre, *PC*, p. 228.

15. A deliberate word play between the word for prophet (*nabi*) and fool (*nabhal*) is probably intended.

16. The fool (*nabhal*) was inclined to blasphemy (Ps. 74:18) and atheism (Ps. 14:1), and immorality (II Sam. 13:13).

crumbling to destruction. They had no real concern for the people among whom they lived. They burrowed about among the foundations without any concern for the welfare of the place, intent only at making dens for themselves. In an atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity charlatans could easily gain a hearing for dogmatic optimism. But their pious platitudes and perverted theology served to further undermine the already precarious position of the nation.

The evidence of the falsity of the popular prophets was the fact that they did not grasp the serious situation which confronted the nation. In the hour of peril those characters had made no contribution to the national defenses. The great need of the hour was for spiritual leaders to go up into the breaches¹⁷ in the moral walls that protected Israel from defeat and destruction. The figure here is that of warfare; when a wall is breached the defenders must go up into the gap, i.e., quickly repair the break. The work of the true prophets was to preach on the great moral themes—to point out transgression—and call for repentance so that a protective hedge could be erected about the nation. As long as Israel followed the law of God the nation was untouchable. But because of unfaithfulness Israel faced the judgment of the *day of the LORD*¹⁸ when the nation would have to defend itself against invasion. The popular prophets had done nothing to prepare the nation for this ordeal (v. 5). When the storm of judgment broke forth in 587 B.C. most of the nation was spiritually (as well as militarily) unprepared.

The false prophets had seen only *vanity*. Their visions were the fancy of their deluded minds and their predictions about the future were *lying divination*. Divination was the pseudo-science of foretelling the future by human devices rather than by divinely inspired oracles. True prophets never made use of divination. However, false prophets blatantly used the standard prophetic formula *oracle of the Lord*;¹⁹ but God had nothing

17. Cf. Isa. 58:12; Ps. 106:23.

18. The *day of the Lord* in Scripture is always future and consists of the next great judgmental act of God.

19. Cf. Jeremiah 14:14; 23:21.

to do with their mission. So self-deluded were those prophets that they actually believed that their words would be fulfilled (v. 6). In attempting to deceive others they had actually deceived themselves. In an abrupt change of person not uncommon in Biblical style, Ezekiel directed a rhetorical question to the pretenders (v. 7). Perhaps he could shame them into confessing the falsity of their claims and methods.

The punishment of those prophetic pretenders is spelled out in verses 8-9.

1. Those who perverted the divine word are declared to be the enemies of God. In a formula which possibly originated in the days of hand-to-hand combat, God declared His implacable hostility toward these prophets: *Behold I am against you* (v. 8). The hand of God which had meant such strength and encouragement to Ezekiel, would be raised against those prophets in anger.

2. The presently influential prophets would be discredited as counsellors and leaders. But in the future they would have no place *in the council of the people*.

3. Presently their names were high on the national register;²⁰ but in the future they would not *be written in the register of the house of Israel*. Such an act would be tantamount to losing full citizenship in the nation. There is no specific mention of a name being struck from the register in Old Testament times. It is probable, therefore, that Ezekiel contemplates a new register in which their names would never appear.

4. These prophetic pretenders would not even have a place in the land of Israel. The fulfillment of these threats would serve as another convincing proof of the justice and power of Yahweh (v. 9).

The indictment of the false prophets continues in verses 10-12. This indictment is introduced by an unusual repetition of the conjunction *because*. Even as impending calamity closed in on the inhabitants of Judah the prophets at home and abroad

20. Cf. Isaiah 4:3. Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 are examples of such a register which had civil and religious significance.

were assuring their constituents that all was well. The Hebrew noun translated *peace* (*shalom*) in this context refers to national prosperity and security. Such optimistic assessments is likened to the building of a wall. The word for wall—*chayits*—signifies a wall of stones heaped one upon another with no mortar to hold them together. A coat of whitewash (*taphel*) in no way added to the strength of such a wall; it only served to conceal the dangerous character of the wall (v. 10). The wall represents the false hopes which the people are erecting for themselves and which the false prophets are indorsing by their “lying lullabies” (Taylor). How tragic that some spiritual leaders cater to the desires of their auditors and yield to the temptation to speak pleasant and appeasing words to their people. Disaster is inevitable when religious leaders encourage people in unbiblical ways. By indorsing revolt against Babylon and promising divine deliverance from the inevitable confrontation with that power the false prophets had created a spirit of complacency and unwarranted security. But the wall of theological and political promises which they had built would collapse at a touch and thus leave the population exposed and vulnerable.

God had a word for the prophetic whitewash crew. Torrential rains, hailstones²¹ and wind would put their deceitful wall to the test (v. 11). When that wall fell—and fall it surely would—angry citizens who had been deceived and misled would hold those prophets up to derision: *where is the coating . . . ?*—the lies with which they sought to establish national security (v. 12). The stormy wind, hailstones and torrential rain of military assault would demonstrate the *fury* and *anger* of God against His people (v. 13). The fall of the whitewashed wall of imaginary security would be God’s doing. In that day even the very foundations of those walls—the false theological notions about God’s relationship to Judah—would be exposed to plain view. The use of whitewash instead of mortar is what made the false

21. The hailstones are addressed as God’s agents for the destruction of the wall. Some reprint the Hebrew to get the meaning, “and I will cause great hailstones to fall.” The meaning is the same in either case.

prophet a criminal. The prophets would be destroyed by the collapse of their wall of words. They would be overwhelmed in the disaster which would befall the people they had deceived. In that day the prophets would know that Yahweh was faithful to His word of judgment as well as to His word of promise (v. 14). When that fury had been completely poured out, God would announce that both the metaphorical wall and those who built it no longer exist (v. 15). The nation did not enjoy peace with God, nor with the superpower of that day. Those who claimed to have received revelations to the contrary were clearly worthy of the heavenly judgment just announced (v. 16).

B. The Condemnation of the Prophetesses 13:17-23

TRANSLATION

(17) And as for you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who are prophesying from their heart, and prophesy against them. (18) And you shall say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to those who sew bands for every joint of the arm, and make veils for the head of every height to lie in wait for souls. Will you lie in wait for My people, while you save your own lives? (19) And will you profane Me among My people in exchange for handfuls of barley and pieces of bread to slay souls who should not die, and to save souls who should not live by your lying to My people who hear (your) lies? (20) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold I am against your pillows by which you lie in wait for souls there to make them like birds,²² and I will rend them from upon your arms and I will send forth the souls, the souls for whom you have been lying in wait to make them fly. (21) And I will rend your coverings, and I will deliver My people from your hands, and they shall not again be in your hand to be hunted down, that you may know that I am the LORD. (22) Because you have made sad the heart of the

22. The text is difficult to translate. KJV and ASV render, *to make them fly*.

righteous with lies, when I did not make him sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not turn from his evil way to cause him to live. (23) Therefore you shall see no more vanity, nor engage in divination again; for I shall deliver My people from your hand, that you may know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

When it came to condemnation, the Old Testament prophets were not respecters of persons. They condemned wayward women as well as wayward men.²³ The women here are not called prophetesses,²⁴ but women who play the role of prophet. The description of their activities suggests that they were more like witches. Times of national decay and crisis produce an abundance of female psychics, astrologers, palm readers and the like who prey on credulous and anxious minds. It is not surprising that in the turbulent first decade of the sixth century such leeches would appear. The ways of Babylon, where necromancy and divination abounded, had been adopted by the Jews. For good as for evil, the influence of women in religious life was stronger than in most other nations of antiquity.

The prophetesses as well as their male counterparts were aggravating the spiritual and political problems of Judah. In verses 17-19 Ezekiel lists a number of accusations against these women.

1. Like the prophets, these women prophesied *out of their own heart*. Their message was of human rather than of divine origin (v. 17).

2. These women employed magical arts by which they pretended to foretell the future. *Magic bands*²⁵—perhaps cases

23. Besides the present section, the following passages are critical of women: Amos 4:1-3; Isaiah 3:16—4:1; 32:9-13.

24. The title *prophetess* is also bestowed on Deborah (Jud. 4:4ff.) Huldah (II K 22:14); Miriam (Ex. 15:20); and Noadiah (Neh. 6:14) and Isaiah's wife (Isa. 8:1). In the New Testament compare Luke 2:36ff.; Acts 21:9; Rev. 2:20; I Cor. 11:5.

25. In post-biblical Hebrew *kesathoth* had the meaning of *cushions*; but here that meaning is unlikely.

containing incantations and charms—were sewn on their *wrists*.²⁶ This seems to be similar to a Babylonian custom in which a sorcerer would bind the wrist of a client to symbolize the binding power of the spell or incantation which was pronounced.²⁷ The sorceresses would also drape their clients with full-length veils or shawls.²⁸ They possessed a whole wardrobe of such veils adapted to persons of various heights, so that in all cases it shrouded their whole form (v. 18). Just what the purpose of these veils was cannot now be determined. Some spoken spell must have accompanied the use of these objects (cf. v. 17).

3. The sorceresses were not harmless cranks. Their object was to *lie in wait for the souls* (i.e., the lives) of God's people. They were determined to capture the attention and control the minds of those who were still trying to be faithful to the Lord.²⁹ Ezekiel seems to think of those magical veils as nets cast over victims, a snare from which they could not escape.

4. While they could care less about the fate of God's people, they were determined to save their own lives³⁰ (v. 18). This probably means that they were driven by the profit motive. Their sole concern was to receive their fees by which they could sustain their lives. By means of a variety of spells and incantations the prophetesses claimed the power to keep clients alive on payment of certain fees.

5. They had *profaned* the Lord among His people (v. 19). Their actions caused people to deny their faith in Yahweh and trust in deceitful divinations. Thus the name of God was profaned by those who turned their backs on Him.

26. Lit., *joints of my hands*. This expression has been taken to refer to the knuckles, arm-holes and elbows as well as the wrists. The first person possessive suffix on the word is most difficult to explain. Perhaps the meaning is that the sorceresses were trying to bind or restrict the power of God by means of these magical paraphernalia. That the wrists of the sorceress rather than the client were bound is suggested by verse 20.

27. Taylor, *TOTC*, p. 124.

28. *Mispachoth* is rendered *kerchiefs* in KJV and ASV. The RSV prefers *veils*.

29. Wevers, (*NCB*, p. 109) thinks that hunting souls is a technical term for harming opponents by magical means.

30. The Hebrew literally reads: *and save souls alive for yourselves*.

6. Their deceitful oracles would be cranked out with the aid of *handfuls of barley and crumbs of bread* (v. 19). Modern scholars feel that these materials were used as auguries to be examined to see whether a sick man would live or die.³¹

7. They would slay *the soul that should not die*, i.e., foretell the death for the righteous.³² At the same time, they would *save the souls alive that should not live*, i.e., they promised life to the wicked (v. 19).

8. They were *lying* to God's people who were inclined to listen to untruth more than truth (v. 19).

9. They had caused the righteous to be disheartened, and at the same time they had given encouragement to the wicked. The result of this was that the wicked had no inclination toward repentance (v. 22).

Following the indictment against the prophetesses, Ezekiel pronounced the divine sentence in verses 20-23. Compared to the condemnation of the prophets in the preceding section, these women were treated quite lightly. They would not suffer more than the loss of their influence and livelihood. Specifically, five elements are included in their condemnation.

1. God declared His absolute opposition to the pagan paraphernalia employed by these women (v. 20).

2. The bands (or cushions) would be ripped from the arms of these women (v. 20), and their veils would be torn away (v. 21).³³ Implied in the judgment is that the magic bands and veils in some way imprisoned the lives of the people.

3. The souls held captive by the magic spells would be liberated, set free like birds from a cage (v. 20). God's people would no longer be in the *hand*, i.e., under the power of these prophetesses (vv. 21, 23).

31. Taylor, *TOTC*, p. 125. Older scholars took the sense to be that the sorceresses would put forth their spells for a mere pittance of reward.

32. Others take the expression to mean that they led on to destruction the souls that were meant for life while they saved their own souls which were worthy of death.

33. The suffix *your* on the words *bands* and *veils* is masculine. The use of the masculine form when speaking of women is not uncommon in the Old Testament. The feminine is resumed in *your hand* in verse 21.

4. The profession of which these women were a part would be abolished. No more would they make claims to see visions or employ divination to ascertain the future (v. 23).

5. In the day of judgment when all the magical schemes of these women fail, they would comprehend that the God who had spoken these things is Yahweh, who is faithful to perform His word of judgment as well as His word of promise (vv. 21; 23)

IV. TWO OBJECTIONS ANSWERED 14:1-23

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

A. Deception by the False Prophets 14:1-11

TRANSLATION

(1) And certain men of the elders of Israel came unto me, and sat before me. (2) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (3) Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and the stumblingblock of their iniquity they have placed before their face. Should I ever permit them to make inquiry of Me? (4) Therefore, speak unto them, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Every man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and places the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and comes unto the prophet—I the LORD will respond to him that comes according to the multitude of his idols; (5) in order that I may take the house of Israel in their heart because all of them have been turned aside from Me

through their idols. (6) Therefore, say unto the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Return and turn yourselves³⁴ from your idols and from all your abominations turn away your face; (7) because every man of the house of Israel and of the stranger who dwells in Israel who has turned aside from Me, and erected his idols in his heart, and has set the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and comes unto the prophet to inquire by him of Me—I the LORD will respond to him by Myself. (8) And I will set My face against that man, and I will make him a sign and proverb; and I will cut him off from the midst of My people, that you may know that I am the LORD. (9) And as for the prophet, when he is enticed and speaks a word, I the LORD have enticed that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him, and I will destroy him from the midst of My people Israel. (10) And they shall bear their iniquity, the iniquity of the prophet shall be like that of the one who inquires; (11) that the house of Israel might not again go astray from Me, nor defile themselves with all their transgressions; but they shall be My people, and I shall be their God (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

False prophets could not and would not exist without people willing to patronize them. Ezekiel now turns his attention to the masses who had ears itching to hear pious platitudes and flattery. In an alien land and far from the Jerusalem Temple the exiles faced the temptation to engage in idolatry while at the same time not abandoning Yahwism. To this situation Ezekiel addresses himself in chapter 14.

During the period of the exile the elders were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of the nation. The elders of Israel³⁵ now

34. Lit., *turn them*, i.e., *your faces* referred to in the next clause.

35. Blackwood (*EPH*, p. 99) thinks these elders of Israel are the same as the elders of Judah mentioned in 8:1. Plumptre (*PC*, p. 247) thinks there may have been two groups of elders. These elders would then be a deputation from the earlier group of exiles taken captive by the Assyrians.

came to Ezekiel to seek a message from the Lord. They were probably anxious to be enlightened about the future of their homeland. In *sitting* before the prophet the elders were acknowledging him as a genuine teacher from God (v. 1).

How shocked those elders must have been when the prophet through revelation from God disclosed the spiritual condition of their hearts. They were guilty of setting up their idols in their hearts. This does not necessarily mean that these elders were actually worshiping idols, but that they were longing after the old pagan practices which they had observed prior to the exile. Their thoughts were influenced by magic spells, divination and the like. This internalized idolatry was a *stumblingblock* which these elders had willfully set before themselves.³⁶ No special divine direction would be forthcoming for men who do not exclusively devote their heart to the Lord. To express this fact, God used a rhetorical question couched in the most emphatic terms. Should God allow Himself to be inquired of by hypocrites? A strong negation is implied (v. 3).

Because idolatry was so firmly rooted in their hearts, these elders need not expect an oral answer from the Lord through His prophet. Rather, the Lord Himself will bring Himself to answer,³⁷ i.e., He will answer personally, not through an intermediary. He will answer them by deeds—by acts of judgment. Furthermore, the judgment which He metes out to each individual will be *according to the multitude of his idols* (v. 4).

God's great priority was to *take the house of Israel in their heart*, i.e., to win complete allegiance from His people. All of them, like the hypocritical elders, had divided hearts—hearts still estranged from God because of idolatry (v. 5). By exposing the paganistic inclinations of the elders, and by bringing judgment upon them for their lack of full commitment to Him, the Lord would force all members of the house of Israel to

36. The phrase, the *stumblingblock of their iniquity*, is peculiar to Ezekiel (7:19; 14:3, 4, 7; 18:30; 44:12) and usually refers to idols. For God's people at this stage of history idols were the chief occasion of sin.

37. The verb is Niphal or reflexive.

acknowledge Him alone as God.³⁸

As always in the economy of God, a call for repentance precedes the execution of judgment. They must completely abandon their *idols* which are *abominations* in the sight of God (v. 6). God now says to the visitors what He previously said to Ezekiel. Those who play the role of the hypocrite, who harbor idolatrous inclinations in their heart, will receive a message from God when they appear before a prophet; but it will not be the kind of message they expect. Instead of a spoken answer by the mouth of the prophet, there will be an answer in the discipline of life. This applies to the *stranger that sojourns in Israel*—Gentile converts carried away by Nebuchadnezzar—as well as to native born Israelites (v. 7). Foreigners who lived in the Israelite theocracy were as much bound by the laws against idolatry as native born citizens.³⁹

Verse 8 sets forth four things which God will do to show His rejection of those whose heart is divided regarding Him:

1. He would set His face against that man, i.e., He would assume a posture of hostility toward that hypocrite.

2. God would make that man a *sign and proverb*, i.e., He would inflict upon that man an exemplary punishment which would become proverbial and act as a deterrent to others inclined toward idolatry (cf. Deut. 28:37).

3. God would *cut off* that man from the midst of His people, i.e., excommunicate him from the people of God.⁴⁰

4. When men witnessed this righteous judgment they would recognize that Yahweh had intervened in the affairs of men.

Some so-called prophets did give responsive oracles to hypocritical inquirers. But such men were false prophets. It must have been hard for people in the closing decades of Old Testament

38. Others interpret the verb *take* in verse 5 to be equivalent to *expose* or *hold responsible*. Still others see verse 5 simply as a threat that the hypocrites of the nation would be caught up in a snare of their own making.

39. Cf. Lev. 17:10; 20:1-2.

40. The Law of Moses also set forth the first and third penalties which are threatened here. See Lev. 17:10; 20:3, 5, 6.

kingdom history to distinguish between true and false prophets. Several tests are suggested here and there in the Scriptures, and here is yet another such test. These hypocrites sitting before Ezekiel knew their own hearts. They knew that inwardly they had not surrendered their idols. Since God would not give guiding counsel to such people, the "prophet" who pretended to do so was not inspired of God.

The prophets who were causing such confusion in Jerusalem and Babylon had been *enticed*. God declares here that He had enticed that prophet, i.e., He had permitted the enticement to take place. This does not mean that the prophet who spoke falsely was not a free moral agent. He bore complete responsibility for his actions. The idea here is that men who reject the truth of God have opened their mind for such judicial enticement to false thinking.⁴¹ One must distinguish here between the permissive and active will of God. Pharaoh hardened his own heart, and yet the Scripture declares that God hardened his heart as well. Part of the punishment which God metes out to sinners is that He *permits* them to be led into ever greater sin. When men obstinately refuse the truth, God gives them over to falsehood. These prophets had been enticed to falsehood, and shortly they would experience divine judgment. God would stretch out His hand against them, and they would be destroyed from the midst of Israel (v. 9).⁴²

God is no respecter of persons when it comes to judgment. Both the prophet and the citizen who came to seek the counsel of these charlatans would have to *bear their iniquity*, i.e., suffer the same punishment (v. 10). The deceivers and those who cried out to be deceived would alike experience the judgment of God. The purpose of this divine judgment was not so much revenge as

41. For Yahweh as a deceiver of prophets see I Kings 22:19-23 and Deuteronomy 13:1-5. Cf. II Thess. 2:11. Secondary causation has here been eliminated as in Isaiah 45:7 and Amos 3:6.

42. Some think that *destroyed from the midst of My people* (v. 9) is synonymous with *cut off from the midst of My people* (v. 8). It seems, however, that the former refers to death and the latter to excommunication.

it was correction. The punishment was to serve as a deterrent so that God's people would no longer *go astray* from Him to serve idols and thus defile themselves by such transgressions.⁴³ By thus discouraging defilement by idolatry, God is doing what is necessary to promote His relationship with His people. Free from the taint of idolatry they could be His people and He could be their God (v. 11). At this point hope clear and radiant shines through the otherwise gloomy discourse of Ezekiel. The prophet is a realistic optimist. He cannot deny the divine forecast of stormy judgment. But he sees a silver lining in those dark clouds. Some ultimate good would come of it. God's eternal purpose would not be frustrated by the collapse of earthly Jerusalem.

B. Presence of Righteous Men 14:12-23

TRANSLATION

(12) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (13) Son of man, when a land sins against Me by trespassing grievously, and I stretch out My hand against it, and break its staff of bread, and send against it a famine, and cut off from it man and beast; (14) though these three men—Noah, Daniel, and Job—were in its midst, they would deliver only their own life through their righteousness (oracles of the Lord GOD). (15) If I cause a wild beast to pass through the land, and they bereave it, and it becomes so desolate that no man passes through her because of the beasts; (16) though these three men were in its midst, as I live (oracle of the Lord GOD), they would not deliver sons nor daughters; they alone would be delivered, but the land would become a desolation. (17) Or if I bring a sword against that land, and I say, Let a sword pass through the land, so that I cut off from it man and beast; (18) though these three men were

43. The priestly interest of Ezekiel is evident from the statement that transgressions (conscious rebellion against divine law) render one unclean, i.e., defile one.

in its midst, as I live (oracle of the Lord GOD), they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, for they alone would be delivered. (19) Or if I sent a plague against that land, and I poured out My wrath upon it in blood to cut off from it man and beast; (20) though Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, as I live (oracle of the Lord GOD) they would not be able to deliver son nor daughter; they would deliver only their own life by their righteousness. (21) Because thus says the Lord GOD: How much more when I send My four calamitous judgments against Jerusalem—sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence—to cut off from it man and beast. (22) And if a remnant is left in it who are brought forth, sons and daughters, behold they shall come forth unto you, and you shall see their way and their deeds, and you shall be comforted concerning the calamity which I have brought against Jerusalem, all that I have brought against her. (23) And they shall comfort you, when you see their way and their deeds, that you may know that I have not done all that I did against her without cause (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

Here Ezekiel addresses himself to a question that surely must have been on his mind as well as the mind of his auditors. Would not the presence of righteous men in Jerusalem spare that city from the threatened destruction? Abraham in his mighty intercessory prayer (Gen. 18:23ff.) had used this as a ground to plead for the deliverance of Sodom and Gomorrah. But Israel was beyond the help of any human mediation. The presence of a righteous soul here or there cannot be a lucky religious charm, a community insurance policy which guarantees, if not immunity from judgment, at least a softened blow. So grievously had the land of Judah transgressed against God that not even the presence of super-saints like Noah, Daniel, and Job⁴⁴ would be able to deliver the land. The doctrine

44. Feinberg (*PE*, p. 81) suggests that the order of the names is climactic rather than chronological: Noah delivered his family with himself; Daniel his friends; but Job, not even his own children.

of personal responsibility here is carried to its logical conclusion. Judgment for unrepentant sinners is inevitable.

Because Noah was a righteous man he and his family escaped the universal destruction by the Great Flood. Because of his steadfast loyalty to God, Daniel⁴⁵ survived deportation to Babylon and saved his friends from a royal edict to slay the royal magicians. Eventually he was elevated to high office in the Babylonian government. Though but a lad at that time, Daniel had already established himself as a pious man of God and a folk hero. Yet he had not been able to use his influence with Nebuchadnezzar to spare the people of Judah. Job was spared while his wayward children met with fatal accidents. In none of these cases did the righteousness of these great men of God induce God to spare the wicked.⁴⁶ And so it is that Noah, Daniel and Job would only be able to save their own lives through their righteousness (vv. 14, 16, 18). Sons and daughters of the sinful inhabitants would die (vv. 16, 18, 20). The combined goodness of all three men could not save Israel from divine destruction. As if the mere declaration of this fact in verse 14 were not sufficient, God three times in this passage underscores the solemnity of this declaration by repeating it in the context of an oath. *As I live* (vv. 16, 18, 20) is a familiar oath formula in the Old Testament. God swears that under no condition can the righteousness of the most righteous men avert the destruction of a sinful nation.

Resorting to emphasis by repetition Ezekiel pounded home his point that Noah, Daniel and Job would not be able to deliver the land. In verses 13-20 he enumerates four types of judgment which God might on occasion send against His people:

1. Famine is frequently mentioned in Scripture as a means by which God punished His people. When God would *break the staff of bread*⁴⁷ (i.e., bring about a famine), innocent beasts

45. The notion that Ezekiel refers to a fifteenth century Phoenician hero named Daniel rather than the famous Biblical personage of the same name is common among those who do not accept the authenticity of the Book of Daniel.

46. A similar argument is used by Jeremiah (15:1).

47. Man's life is sustained by bread even as his weight is sustained by a staff.

who inhabited the land as well as sinful men would thereby be *cut off*, i.e., die (v. 13). Yet there was no deliverance for the sinful land merely because innocent animals suffered.

2. Evil beasts⁴⁸ might be brought against the land, attacking and destroying the inhabitants, bereaving them by robbing them of their children. Out of fear, the land would be deserted and become *desolate*. Men of other countries would loathe to pass through the land (v. 15). Still there would be no deliverance for the sinful land.

3. The *sword* (i.e., military invasion) might be used against the land. Such action would involve the indiscriminate slaughter of man and beast (v. 17). From such slaughter there would be no deliverance.

4. *Pestilence* might be the means of punishment. God's *fury* poured out upon the land would manifest itself *in blood*, i.e., a high death rate. Still there would be no deliverance.

Ezekiel has set forth in verses 12-20 the general principle that the presence of even the most godly men cannot save a land from divine judgment. In verse 20 the prophet makes the application to Jerusalem. If when only one of the above mentioned punishments is inflicted upon a land the righteous are unable to save the wicked, how much more true will this be in the case of Jerusalem which must suffer all four (v. 21). The number four conveys the idea of completeness and universality because it reflects the notion of the four points of the compass.

Verse 22 asserts that a remnant would survive the fourfold catastrophe which was to befall Jerusalem. They would be *brought forth*, i.e., carried into exile. Their survival should not be interpreted as indicating their righteousness. Far from it! These escapees would serve as an object lesson. When the earlier exiles observed the character and conduct of those who later would join them, they would be *comforted concerning the calamity* which Jerusalem experienced. They would acquiesce in the righteousness of the judgment of God. They would realize

48. Some have interpreted the evil beasts to be Gentile invaders. But there is no reason these cannot be literal beasts.

that God had no alternative but to destroy that city. His punishments had not been arbitrary or excessive (v. 22). Indirectly the future captives would *comfort*⁴⁹ those who were already in Babylon (v. 23). The kind of comfort referred to here is that which comes about when a person learns new facts which throw new light on what was perceived to be a disastrous situation.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Chronologically, where should the sermons and symbols of chapters 12-14 be placed?
2. By what symbolic act did Ezekiel portray the deportation of Jerusalem's inhabitants? How did this action relate to King Zedekiah in particular?
3. Ezekiel prophesied that King Zedekiah would never see the land of Babylon. How was this prophecy fulfilled?
4. What positive benefits would result from the shattering of the theological notion that Jerusalem could never be destroyed?
5. How did Ezekiel portray the fear and astonishment which would befall the inhabitants of Jerusalem when the city came under siege?
6. What did the people mean by the proverb *the days are prolonged and every vision has perished*? How did Ezekiel respond to this proverb?
7. What second proverb was common among the Jews? How did Ezekiel respond to this proverb?
8. How were Jerusalem's prophets *like foxes among the ruins*?
9. What was the "wall" which surrounded God's people? What should a prophet have done when that "wall" began to collapse?
10. Were the false prophets sincere in their predictions, or were they playing the role of hypocrites?

49. The Hebrew *nacham* does not mean comfort *in* sorrow, but comfort *out of* sorrow.

11. What punishment would befall the false prophets for presuming to speak in the name of God?
12. In what sense do God's modern-day spokesmen whitewash the "wall" about God's people?
13. What objects were used by the prophetesses in their magic rituals? What is thought to have been the purpose of these objects?
14. What punishment would befall the prophetesses?
15. What two objections to divine judgment were raised by Ezekiel's auditors? How did Ezekiel answer these objections?
16. What threat is made against those who were half-hearted in their commitment to the Lord?
17. In what sense had God enticed the prophets into their delusions?
18. What three men are named as being righteous men and great intercessors? Is there any significance in the order in which they are named?
19. What four types of judgment were about to fall upon Jerusalem?

Chapter Eight

PARABLES AND PICTURES

15:1 — 17:24

The justification of God's judgment against Judah continues in chapters 15-17, but the nature of the defense changes. Here Ezekiel employs parables or allegories to paint a rather gruesome word picture of the ingratitude, sin and rebellion of God's people. He describes (1) the useless vine (15:1-8); (2) the faithless wife (16:1-43); (3) the fallen sister (16:44-63); and (4) the lowly vine (17:1-21). The section closes with a brief and optimistic parable of the stately cedar (17:22-24).

I. ISRAEL: A USELESS VINE 15:1-8

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, what is the vine tree more than any other tree, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? (3) Is wood taken from it to make any work? or will men take a peg from it to hang any vessel thereon? (4) Behold, it is cast to the fire for fuel; the fire has devoured both ends of it while the middle is singed. Is it profitable for any work? (5) Behold, when it is whole it is not suitable for work; how much less when the fire consumes it, and it is singed, shall it yet be suitable for work? (6) Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Like the vine tree among the trees of the forest which I have appointed for fuel for the fire, thus I have appointed the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (7) And I will set My face against them; from the fire they have come forth and the fire shall consume them; and you shall know that I am the LORD when I set My face against them. (8) And I will make the land a desolation because they have grievously transgressed (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

The earlier prophets frequently had spoken of Israel as the vine of God.¹ That figure, while beautiful to contemplate, can lend itself to gross distortion in the minds of hypocrites. Jews might begin to think that because of the accident of birth they were branches of the true vine which could never be destroyed. In chapter 15 Ezekiel sets forth a parable, as later the Greater Son of Man would do (John 15), to expose the groundlessness of this hope.

The Lord here directed Ezekiel's thinking to the *vine tree*—the wild vine of the woods that was virtually valueless (v. 2). It was a fruitless vine and its wood was useless as timber. No one would think of using that wood as material for making furniture. The wood of the vine was even too thin and pliable to be fashioned into a wall peg (v. 3). The wild vine was fit only for kindling for the fire. Should it be snatched from the fire before being completely consumed it would still be good for nothing (v. 4). Before it was cast into the fire it was good for nothing; how much less after it had been charred and burned (v. 5).

The application of the vine-tree parable comes in verse 6. The purpose of the vine is fruit bearing. If a vine bears no fruit, or wild and sour fruit, it is, in comparison to other trees, of no value. So it was with Israel. If Israel bore no fruit—did not fulfill its mission—then it was poorer and weaker than the heathen nations round it. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were like that vine tree—good for nothing except destruction by fire (v. 6). Israel was God's vine which He hoped would bear precious fruit. But that vine had degenerated into a wild vine and thus had become valueless. The whole nation consisting of the twelve tribes failed in its purpose. Into the fire of affliction that vine had already been put. Israel already had been weakened by the loss of the ten northern tribes, and the Judean exile of 597 B.C. All that remained was Jerusalem, and that

1. Genesis 49:22; Psalms 80:9; Hosea 10:1; Isaiah 5; Deuteronomy 32:32; Jeremiah 2:21.

city is like a charred piece of wood which was good for nothing save further burning.

God had set His face against the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The city had passed through the fire of earlier Babylonian invasions—in 597 and 605 B.C.—and had been charred but not consumed. But that was no guarantee that the city was inviolable. In the next fire the city would be consumed, and when that happened the inhabitants would know that the destruction had not happened by chance, but that it was the decree of God (v. 7). Their land would become a desolation because of the grievous transgression of the people (v. 8).

II. JERUSALEM: A FAITHLESS WIFE 16:1-43

Perhaps nowhere in the Bible is the faithlessness of God's people and the faithfulness of the Lord set in more stark contrast than in the present passage. In four paragraphs Ezekiel reviews the past and future dealings between God and His people. In unfolding this allegory Ezekiel discusses (1) the circumstances of Jerusalem's birth (vv. 1-7); (2) the marriage and adornment of Jerusalem (vv. 8-14); (3) the infidelity of the bride (vv. 15-34); and (4) the punishment of the harlot (vv. 35-43).

Chapter 16 is a survey of Israel's history from the birth of that nation up to Ezekiel's day. The prophet is almost indelicately realistic in his description here. He meant it that way. Sin is ugly, and if the prophet is going to "tell it like it is" he must resort from time to time to ugly words. Hardened hearts sometimes respond to shock therapy, and so the prophet is commissioned by God to cause Jerusalem to know her abominations (v. 2).

A. The Unwanted Foundling 16:1-7

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations. (3) And say unto them, Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: Your origin and birth are of the land of the Canaanite; your father was the Amorite, and your mother the Hittite. (4) And as for your birth, on your birthday your navel was not cut, nor were you washed in water for cleansing; you were not salted at all, nor were you wrapped at all. (5) No eye had pity upon you to do any of these things to you to have compassion upon you; but you were cast out upon the surface of the ground when you were regarded as loathsome in the day of your birth. (6) And when I passed by you, and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you: In your blood live; yea, I said to you, In your blood live; (7) An increase like the sprout of the field I appointed you. And you increased, and grew up, and came to excellent beauty: your breasts were formed, and your hair was grown; yet you were naked and bare.

COMMENTS

Although *Jerusalem* is specifically addressed, the parable applies to the whole nation and its history. The *origin* and *nativity* of Israel took place on the soil of Canaan. The parents of the infant Israel are said to have been the Amorite² and the Hittite³ (v. 3). Since it is known from the earliest Biblical records that historically the Hebrews sprang from pure Aramean stock (cf. Deut. 26:5), Ezekiel's statement must be taken as satire.

2. Amorites were a west-Semitic people who began filtering into the Fertile Crescent from the desert about 2000 B.C. At the time of Moses they were firmly entrenched in the mountains of Palestine and in the Transjordan region as well.

3. The Hittites were an Indo-European people whose center was in Asia Minor and, during some periods, Syria.

The point he is trying to make is that from the very beginning Israel had been strongly influenced by its Canaanite environment.

Like many female infants, Israel was abandoned after birth, left exposed in a field to die. She had not received the customary treatment afforded newborn babes (v. 4). Normally after the navel was cut the baby would be rubbed all over with salt which served to harden and strengthen its body. The baby was then wrapped tightly in bands of cloth. Every seven days through day forty the dirty clothes were removed, the baby washed, anointed with oil, and rewrapped.⁴ But none of these customary treatments was applied to this child Israel. No one pitied the child who had been regarded as loathsome and had been exposed to death by neglect (v. 5).

Unlike all others, God did not pass by the ugly and unwanted child. Although the child was repulsive to look upon squirming about in her blood, i.e., unwashed, still God decreed that it should live (v. 6). Under God's care the nation increased numerically (cf. Ex. 1:7, 12). The female infant grew to maturity. She possessed the physical attributes of a beautifully formed woman, viz., a full bust and long hair. Yet she was still *naked and bare*. The Hebrew terms usually mean, insufficiently clad. Israel was like a poor desert shepherd girl inadequately clothed when she entered into Egypt (v. 7).

B. The Marriage and Adornment 16:8-14

TRANSLATION

(8) Now when I passed by you, and saw you, behold, your time was the time of love; and I spread My skirt over you, and covered your nakedness; and I swore to you, and entered into a covenant with you (oracle of the Lord GOD), and you became

4. The obstetrics of the verse are best explained by the present-day customs of Arabs described by Mastermann in Cooke, *ICC*, p. 162.

Mine. (9) And I washed you with water, and cleansed your blood from upon you, and I anointed you with oil. (10) And I clothed you with woven work, and I shod you with sealskin, and I bound you with fine linen, and I covered you with silk. (11) And I adorned you with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon your hands, and a chain upon your neck. (12) And I put a ring upon your nose, and earrings upon your ears, and a beautiful turban upon your head. (13) And you were decked with gold and silver, and your garments were of fine linen, silk, and woven work; and you ate fine flour, honey and oil; and you became more and more beautiful until you achieved royal rank. (14) And your reputation went forth among the nations for your beauty for it was perfect through My splendor which I put upon you (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

The relationship between God and Israel is frequently depicted under the metaphor of marriage. So it is here that the divine Rescuer noticed that the young nation had reached *the time of love*, i.e., marriageable age. He therefore spread His skirt over her, a gesture which was, apparently, part of the ancient marriage ceremony (cf. Ruth 3:9). God thereby covered the nakedness of his bride, i.e., He provided for Israel's needs. He entered into a marriage covenant with the maiden nation (cf. Ex. 24:8) and thereby Israel became the bride of God (v. 8).

God treated His young bride most tenderly. He first washed her with water. This no doubt is an allusion to ritual purification of a bride before marriage (cf. Ruth 3:3).⁵ He then anointed her with oil (v. 9). He clothed her with the finest garments from head to toe (v. 10) and placed jewelry upon her wrists, neck (v. 11), nose and ears. As befitting her queenly position, a beautiful crown was placed on her head (v. 12). She

5. The reference may be to the purification of the Israelites before the revelation from Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:10).

ate the finest foods and became ever more beautiful until she finally attained to royal rank during the days of David (v. 13). The beauty—the power and prosperity—of the nation was spoken of among other nations. But whatever greatness was achieved by Israel was not self-earned, it was bestowed by her divine husband. She reflected the splendor of God (v. 14).

C. The Infidelity of the Bride 16:15-34

TRANSLATION

(15) But you trusted in your beauty, and committed harlotry because of your reputation, and poured out your harlotries upon all who passed by; it belonged to him. (16) And you took from your garments, and made for yourself high places decked with different colors; and you committed harlotry upon them; they are not coming, and it will not lie. (17) And you took your fair jewels of My gold and My silver which I had given to you, and you made for yourself images of men, and committed harlotry with them. (18) And you took your woven garments, and you covered them; and My oil and My incense you placed before them. (19) And My bread which I gave to you, fine flour and oil and honey which I fed you, you set before them for a sweet savor, and thus it was (oracle of the Lord GOD). (20) And you took your sons and your daughters whom you bore unto Me, and you sacrificed them to them to be devoured. Were your harlotries a small matter, (21) that you slaughtered My children, and gave them up, in causing them to pass (through the fire) to them? (22) And in all of your abominations and harlotries you did not remember the days of your youth when you were naked and bare, and you were wallowing in your blood. (23) And it came to pass after all your evil—woe, woe to you (oracle of the Lord GOD)—(24) that you built for yourself a platform, and you made for yourself a high place in every street. (25) At every head of the way you have built your lofty place, and you have made your beauty an abomination, and have opened your feet

to every one that passed by, and multiplied your harlotries. (26) And you committed harlotry with the Egyptians, your neighbors, great of flesh, and you multiplied your harlotry to provoke Me. (27) And behold I have stretched out My hand against you, and I have diminished your allowance, and I have delivered you into the will of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines who are ashamed of your lewd way. (28) And you committed harlotry with the Assyrians without having enough; you committed harlotry with them, and yet you were not satisfied. (29) And you multiplied your harlotries with the land of merchants, Chaldea, but yet you were not satisfied. (30) How weak is your heart (oracle of the Lord GOD) when you do all these things, the work of a wanton harlot. (31) When you built your platforms at the head of every way, and have made your lofty place in every street, and you were not like the harlot who seeks more pay. (32) O woman that commits adultery, who takes strangers instead of her husband! (33) To all harlots gifts are given; but you have given your gifts to all your lovers, and you have bribed them to come unto you from round about in your harlotries. (34) And you are different from other women, in that you solicited to harlotry, and you were not solicited, and in that you paid the wages of prostitution rather than the wages of prostitution being given to you, and so you were different.

COMMENTS

The beautiful bride proved unfaithful to the marriage covenant with God. Instead of trusting Him she began to trust in her beauty, i.e., her material prosperity. She began to *commit harlotry* with foreign nations and their gods thus hoping to endear herself to her neighbors. She readily responded to every proffer of love (v. 15), i.e., she took up with every form of idolatry. The garments given to her by her divine Husband (i.e., material blessings) were used to make and decorate high places where Israel pursued her idolatrous lust. The last expression in verse 16 is difficult: *they* (feminine) *are not coming and it*

(masculine) *will not be*. Perhaps these words express disgust at the lewdness of Israel.

The jewelry of gold and silver had been melted down and fashioned into idols (cf. Hos. 2:10)—*images of men* with whom the adulterous wife might commit her harlotry (v. 17). The images were dressed with the rich garb with which God had bedecked His bride. Oil and incense, gifts which God had given to His people were given as offerings to the lifeless idols (v. 18). The rich foods God had given His bride were set before these idols in various pagan rituals to serve as a *sweet savor*, i.e., something to satisfy the appetite of the gods. *Thus it was*, God says; it cannot be denied (v. 19).

As God's wife, Israel had a responsibility to rear her children in the fear of the Lord. But some of these precious little ones had been slaughtered and burned by their parents in the worship of the god Molech.⁶ Not satisfied with the lewd rites of Canaanite worship, Israel went the whole way even to this horrible extreme⁷ (vv. 20-21). The bride of God had sunk to this extreme because she failed to remember the days of her youth. If from time to time she had called to mind those humble origins she surely would not have been guilty of these abominations (v. 22).

As the prophet contemplates the fate in store for Israel as a result of her wickedness he bursts forth in a lament—*Woe, Woe unto you!* (v. 23). He then expands upon the theme of the wickedness of Israel. In every street platforms or pedestals for various images could be found (v. 24). *At every head of the way*, i.e., crossroad, their idols were conspicuous. The bride of God had put her beauty to an abominable use. She had spread her feet, i.e., committed prostitution, with *every one who passed by*, i.e., she had taken up with every pagan cult with which she had come in contact (v. 25). Israel did not even confine her

6. Warnings against this practice are found in Lev. 18:21, 24 and Deut. 18:9f. Ahaz of Judah seems to have introduced the practice (II K 16:3) and during the reign of Manasseh the practice was widespread (II K 21:6).

7. Verse 21 suggests that the children were first slain and then burnt. *Pass through the fire* appears to be a euphemism for child immolation.

spiritual harlotries to Canaanite worship ways. Through foreign alliances she became involved with the gods of more distant powers. Spiritual harlotry with the sensuous (*great of flesh*) Egyptians whose worship was characterized by obscene idolatries was perhaps the climax of Israel's degeneration. The tendency to worship so many foreign gods was motivated not so much by their lust for forbidden forms of worship as by a sub-conscious desire to provoke and defy the Lord (v. 26).

Because of these acts of infidelity, God stretched out His hand over Israel for the purpose of inflicting punishment. As a betrayed husband might withdraw or reduce an unfaithful wife's maintenance (cf. Hos. 2:11), so God reduced the portion He had originally assigned to Israel. The reference here is probably to the territorial incursions by foreign nations against Israel from the days of Solomon to the time of Ezekiel. At the time the prophet spoke these words tiny Judah occupied only a fraction of the territory which God had given to Israel of old. So weak were the people of God that their ancient arch-enemies the Philistines⁸ were now able to satisfy their desire for revenge. Sarcastically Ezekiel adds that even the ruthless Philistines were ashamed of the disgraceful conduct of Israel (v. 27). Assyria and Chaldea, the two great commercial centers, number among Israel's lovers; but still the harlotrous wife could not find spiritual satisfaction (vv. 28-29).

How morally weak and degenerate was the heart of God's once lovely wife! She had become a *wanton* (lit., *domineering*) *harlot* (v. 30). Unlike the ordinary harlot, the profit motive did not figure in Israel's spiritual liaison. Israel prostituted herself not for gain but to satisfy her unbridled lust (v. 31). The picture is pathetic. A woman unwilling to be a wife to her husband, but anxious for intimate association with strange gods and foreign lands (v. 32). Rather than receiving gifts as is common with women of the street, Israel actually bribed lovers, i.e., she solicited alliances with foreign nations (vv. 33-34).

8. It is generally understood that *daughters* of the Philistines refers to Philistine cities.

God had a word for His harlotrous wife (v. 35). Because of all her spiritual adultery with foreign nations, her abominable idols and her revolting sacrifice of little children to those idols, (v. 36) God would bring judgment upon the land. Israel's *lovers*—nations with whom she had a treaty—and those other nations with whom treaties had been broken would be gathered against Judah. Those nations would be used of God to bring national humiliation upon the people of God. The land will be stripped bare by these forces and her nakedness thus will be exposed to public view (v. 37).

Adulteresses and child murderers were judged most harshly under the Law of Moses. That same severe judgment was now about to be brought against Judah. Only the blood of the guilty could assuage the divine fury and jealousy (v. 38). To accomplish that judgment, God would use foreign nations, those who once were Israel's lovers. This ruthless force would destroy the *eminent places* used in idolatrous rites. Enemy soldiers would strip the adulterous wife of clothing and jewels and leave her naked, i.e., Judah would see her buildings destroyed and her wealth carried away (v. 39).

D. The Punishment of the Harlot 16:35-43

TRANSLATION

(35) Therefore, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD! (36) Thus says the Lord GOD: Because your filthiness was poured out, and your nakedness revealed through your harlotry with your lovers; and because of all the idols of your abominations, and for the blood of your sons which you gave to them, (37) therefore, behold I am about to gather your lovers unto whom you have been pleasant, and all whom you have loved, along with all whom you hate; I will gather them against you round about, and I will reveal your nakedness unto them, that they may see all your nakedness. (38) And I will judge you with the judgments accorded adulteresses and those who shed blood;

and I will bring upon you the blood of fury and jealousy. (39) And I will give you into their hand; and they shall throw down your eminent places, and break down your lofty places; and they shall strip you of your garments, and take your fair jewels; and they shall leave you naked and bare. (40) And they shall bring up an assembly against you, and they will pelt you with stones, and shall thrust you through with swords. (41) And they shall burn your daughters with fire, and they shall execute judgments against you in the sight of many women; and I will cause you to cease from being a harlot, and also the wages of prostitution you shall not give anymore. (42) So I will cause My wrath against you to rest, and My jealousy will turn from you, and I will be quiet and will no more be vexed. (43) Because you have not remembered the days of your youth, and you have made Me angry with all of these things; therefore also behold I will bring your way on your head (oracle of the Lord GOD); or have you not done this lewdness above all your abominations?

COMMENTS

The allegory continues as the punishment of Judah is described in terms of the punishment of an adulteress. An adulteress was executed publicly. Accusers would start the bloody work and others would then join in (cf. Deut. 13:10). So Judah's lovers would summon other nations to join in the attack upon her. Stoning was the penalty for adultery (Lev. 20:10), and so Judah would be bombarded by the missiles of the enemies as well as thrust through by their swords (v. 40). Houses and public buildings would be burned. *Many women*, i.e., neighboring nations, would witness the execution and hopefully learn a lesson from it.⁹ With the destruction of political Israel God would bring the harlotry of the nation to an abrupt end. No longer would Judah be in a position to bribe neighbors for

9. There seems to have been a practice of making other women witness the execution of an adulteress as a warning.

their friendship (v. 41). Divine justice must punish such unfaithfulness as Israel manifested. Only after the *wrath* and *jealousy* (zeal) of God had been satisfied could there be hope of reconciliation (v. 42). But these calamities would befall them because they had forgotten their past; they were ungrateful for what God had done for them (v. 43).

III. JUDAH: THE FALLEN SISTER 16:44-63

TRANSLATION

(44) Behold every one who employs proverbs shall use this proverb against you, saying, As the mother, so the daughter. **(45)** You are the daughter of your mother who loathes her husband and her sons; and you are the sister of your sisters who loathe their husbands and their children; your mother was a Hittite, and your father was an Amorite. **(46)** And your older sister is Samaria—she and her daughters—who dwell on your left hand; and your younger sister on your right side is Sodom and her daughters. **(47)** Yet you have not walked in their ways, and you have not done after their abominations, but in a very little while you acted more corruptly than they in all your ways. **(48)** As I live (oracle of the Lord GOD) Sodom your sister—she and her daughters—has not done as you have done, you and your daughters. **(49)** Behold this was the iniquity of Sodom your sister; pride, fullness of bread and careless ease was in her and in her daughters; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and the needy. **(50)** And they became haughty, and committed abomination before Me; therefore I removed them when I saw it. **(51)** And as for Samaria, she did not sin half as much as you; but you increased your abominations more than they while you vindicated your sisters in all the abominations which you did. **(52)** You also, bear your own shame in which you have judged your sister; through your sins in which you have been more abominable than they, they have been more righteous than you; yes, you—be ashamed and bear your guilt in your vindication of your sisters. **(53)** And I will turn their captivity, the

captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and the captivity of your captives in the midst of them; (54) in order that you may bear your own shame, and may be ashamed because of all which you have done in comforting them. (55) And your sisters—Sodom and her daughters—shall return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former state, and you and your daughters shall return to your former state. (56) For Sodom your sister was not mentioned by your mouth in the day of your pride; (57) before your wickedness was uncovered, as at the time of the reproach of the daughters of Aram and all that are round about her, the daughters of the Philistines who despise you round about. (58) You have borne your lewdness and your abominations (oracles of the LORD). (59) For thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, who has despised the oath to break the covenant. (60) Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. (61) And you will remember your ways and you will be ashamed when you receive your sisters, the older and the younger; and I will give them to you for daughters, but not because of your covenant. (62) And I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD; (63) in order that you might remember, and be ashamed, and never again open your mouth because of your shame when I have forgiven you of all which you have done (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

When the judgment has fallen no one will be able to say that it was unjust. In years to come those who specialized in proverbs would say concerning sinful Israel, *As the mother, so the daughter* (v. 44). Like her mother, the Hittite, (and her sisters Samaria and Sodom) she was unfaithful in marriage and as a mother. The point here is that Judah was as sinful as the original inhabitants of Canaan (v. 44). Samaria is Judah's *elder*

sister because she was larger in size and more numerous in population. She is on the *left*, i.e., north of Judah. The *younger sister* on the right side (south) of Judah is *Sodom*. The *daughters* of Samaria and Sodom are subordinate towns (v. 46). For only *a very little while* after the fall of Samaria—during the reign of Hezekiah—Judah did not walk in the abominations of Samaria and Sodom. But after that short pause in her ugly history Judah acted more corruptly than either of her sinful sisters (v. 47).

In verses 48-51 the comparison between the sins of the three sisters—Sodom, Samaria and Judah—continues. Even sinful Sodom had not surpassed the sin of Judah (v. 48). The root of Sodom's sin was pride which grew out of her security and prosperity. The pride manifested itself in heartless neglect of the poor and needy (v. 49) as well as other abominations. Therefore God *removed them* after their sins came under His judicial inspection (v. 50). *Samaria* had not committed even half the sins committed by Judah. In fact, in comparison to Judah's guilt, Sodom and Samaria appeared almost righteous (v. 51). How ashamed Judah ought to be of her gross sin which would cause men to render a favorable judgment with regard to Samaria and Sodom (v. 52).

Sodom and Samaria have a future. God would *turn their captivity* (i.e., restore their fortunes) and that of Judah as well (v. 53). Judah would actually be a *comfort* to Sodom and Samaria because of her greater guilt (v. 54). If God restores Judah, He must also restore the two sisters for they had sinned less (v. 55). In hypocritical self-righteousness Judah in former days would not so much as mention the name of Sodom (v. 56). But that was before Judah's own wickedness was made public through divine judgment. Humbled Judah became the object of disdain by the singers in Aram and Philistia. The particular occasion here mentioned is probably the humiliating and devastating Syro-Ephraimitic invasion of Judah in the days of Ahaz¹⁰ (v. 57). Judah already had suffered and would yet suffer for her infidelity (v. 58).

10. See II Chron. 28:5, 18.

Words of comfort follow the condemnation and threat of the preceding verses. God could not ignore the adulterous behavior of His national wife. She had broken the marriage covenant and must suffer the consequences (v. 59). But God would remember that covenant which He had made with Israel so many years before in the youth of the nation—the period of the Exodus and wanderings (cf. Jer. 2:2). After judgment, God would enter into a new covenant—an *everlasting covenant* with His people.¹¹

How ashamed Israel would be of her sordid and checkered past in that new day. God's grace in overlooking past sin, making a new covenant with His people, and even bestowing upon them Sodom and Samaria, would arouse in them a deep sense of remorse. This reinstatement of Judah (Jews) as God's people would have nothing to do with the old Sinai covenant. *That* covenant had been broken and disannulled. But the new covenant would be with converted sinners whether they were Jew, Samaritan or Gentile (Sodom).

The establishment of a new covenant is a sovereign act of God. This is emphasized by the pronoun *I* in verse 62 which is emphatic in the Hebrew. Through this gracious reinstatement of His people, as well as in the punishment previously threatened, men would learn about the nature of the God of the Bible (v. 62). The unfathomable grace of God in forgiving past sin would forever silence any self-justification (v. 63).

IV. THE KING: A LOWLY VINE 17:1-21

In chapter 17 Ezekiel turns his attention to King Zedekiah back in Jerusalem. This vassal king had committed an act of treachery against Nebuchadnezzar by breaking his solemn oath of allegiance to Babylon in seeking military aid from Egypt. In this oracle delivered shortly before 587 B.C. Ezekiel predicts the extinction of Zedekiah's dynasty and the fall of Jerusalem. He first presents his parable (vv. 1-10) and then makes an application of what he has said (vv. 11-21).

¹¹. Cf. Ezekiel 37:26; Jeremiah 31:30ff.

A. The Parable of the Two Eagles Presented 17:1-10

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, Put forth a riddle and speak a parable unto the house of Israel, (3) and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: A great eagle with great wings and long pinions, full of feathers of various colors, came unto Lebanon, and took the top of the cedar. (4) He broke off the topmost of its twigs, and carried it unto a land of commerce; he set it in a city of merchants. (5) Moreover he took from the seed of the land and set it in a fruitful field; he set it as a stalk¹² alongside many waters, as a willow. (6) And it sprouted and became a spreading vine of low stature whose tendrils turned toward him, and whose roots were under him; so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and put forth sprigs. (7) And there was another great eagle, with great wings and many feathers; and behold this vine bent its roots unto him, and put forth its tendrils toward him to water it from the beds of its plantation. (8) In a good field, by many waters it was planted that it might produce branches and bear fruit, that it might be a glorious vine. (9) Say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Shall it prosper? Shall he not pull up its roots, and cut off its fruit that it wither, that it wither in all its sprouting leaves? Neither shall great power nor many people be at hand when it is plucked up by its roots. (10) And behold, being planted, shall it prosper? When the east wind touches it, shall it not utterly wither? In the beds where it sprouted it shall wither.

COMMENTS

Ten prominent features of this parable need discussion:

1. The *great eagle* is the mighty King Nebuchadnezzar who is king of kings, even as the eagle is the king of birds. Like the

12. The Hebrew is difficult. The Rabbinic understanding of the verse has been followed here.

eagle Nebuchadnezzar swooped down upon his prey to plunder and destroy.¹³ His *great wings* enabled him to fly long distances and extend his influence over vast territories. The various colors (v. 3) of this great bird may represent the many different nations who were subject to Nebuchadnezzar and who contributed to his military might.

2. *Lebanon* (v. 3) represents the land of Israel and especially the kingdom of Judah.

3. The *cedar* (v. 3) represents Jerusalem.

4. The *top of the cedar* (v. 3) stands for the nobility of the city, especially the princes of the house of David.

5. The *topmost of its twigs* (v. 4) would be the youthful King Jehoiachin who was carried off by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. to a *land of commerce* (Chaldea) and a *city of merchants* (Babylon).

6. The *seed of the land* (v. 5) is a member of the royal family, Zedekiah, who was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar as king of Judah in the place of Jehoiachin.

7. The *fruitful field* (v. 5) in which the *seed* was planted must be Judah.

8. Beside *many waters* (v. 5) is probably a reference to Babylon (cf. Jer. 51:13). Although Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah on the throne, he was dependent on Babylon like a stalk is dependent on the moisture of a near-by stream.

9. The *spreading vine of low stature* (v. 6) must depict the Judaeans vassal state administered by Zedekiah. The *tendrils* of this vine turned toward, and the *roots* were under, the eagle (Nebuchadnezzar). Zedekiah was given only limited and local authority. But as long as the vine maintained this posture it prospered, at least in a measure.

10. The second *great eagle* (v. 7) is Pharaoh Hophra to whom the vine (Zedekiah) turned for military aid in an attempt to free itself from the influence of the first eagle (Nebuchadnezzar). This spreading toward the direction of the second eagle (Egypt) was unnatural and unnecessary. The vine should have prospered

13. Cf. Isaiah 46:11; Jeremiah 48:40; Hosea 8:1.

and even could have produced *fruit* — children of Zedekiah — to carry on the royal succession (v. 8).

How could the vine (Zedekiah) prosper when it had tried to spread beyond its prescribed domain? The first great eagle would uproot the vine, cut off its fruit so that it would completely wither and die. Zedekiah's reign would be terminated, all the heirs to the throne would be killed and the nobles of Judah would perish. No great power or army of soldiers would be at hand to thwart the great eagle in his vengeful attack (v. 9). That Judaeen vine would utterly wither right in the spot where it was planted when the scorching *east wind* (Babylonian empire) began to blow against it (v. 10).

B. The Explanation of the Eagle Parable 17:11-21

TRANSLATION

(11) Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me saying, (12) Say now to the rebellious house, Do you not know what these things mean? Say: The king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, and took its king and its princes and brought them to him in Babylon. (13) And he took of the royal seed and made a covenant with him, and brought him under an oath; and the mighty of the land he took away; (14) that it might be a lowly kingdom, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping his covenant it might stand. (15) But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors to Egypt that he might give to him horses and much people. Shall he prosper? shall the one who does these things escape? shall he break the covenant and escape? (16) As I live (oracle of the Lord GOD), surely in the place where the king caused him to reign, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke, with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. (17) Neither shall Pharaoh with mighty army and great company assist him in the war, when they cast up mounds and build siege forts, to cut off many lives; (18) seeing that he despised an oath by breaking a covenant, and,

behold, he gave his hand, and has done all these things, he shall not escape. (19) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: As I live, surely My oath which he despised, and My covenant which he broke, I will even bring it upon his head. (20) And I will spread My net over him, and he shall be taken in My snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and I will plead with him there because of his treachery which he committed against Me. (21) And all his mighty men¹⁴ in all his bands shall fall by the sword, and the rest shall be scattered toward every wind; and you shall know that I the LORD have spoken it.

COMMENTS

So that the meaning of his parable would be absolutely clear, Ezekiel was commanded to offer an interpretation of it to that *rebellious house* (the kingdom of Judah). He begins with a rhetorical question which is designed to rebuke the spiritual obtuseness of his hearers: *Do you not know what these things mean?* Nebuchadnezzar had carried away the princes of Judah (*top of the cedar*) and King Jehoiachin (the topmost of the twigs) to Babylon (v. 12). After deposing the youthful Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar took the *seed royal*, i.e., Zedekiah the son of Josiah and uncle of Jehoiachin, and placed him upon the throne in Jerusalem. Zedekiah was placed under a solemn oath taken in the name of God to be loyal to Nebuchadnezzar. The *mighty of the land*, i.e., influential leaders, were carried to Babylon (v. 13) as hostages so as to guarantee Zedekiah's compliance to the terms of his oath. Nebuchadnezzar's purpose was to keep Judah weak and subservient (v. 14).

Disregarding his sacred oath, Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar by making overtures to Egypt (the second eagle) and seeking military aid from Pharaoh. Three rhetorical questions underscore the futility of such a course (v. 15). One

14. This reading is supported by many Hebrew manuscripts. The standard (Masoretic) text reads *hid fugitives*.

could not break a sacred oath taken in the name of God and then expect any divine aid. The king against whom Zedekiah had committed treachery would haul him off to die in the midst of Babylon (v. 16). Aid from Pharaoh would not be forthcoming when the Babylonians built their siege mounds and forts at Jerusalem (v. 17).

Zedekiah had been required to take an oath by a heathen king, and therefore he *despised* that oath and regarded it as non-binding. Nevertheless, he had *given his hand* as a pledge of faithful compliance with the terms of that oath (v. 18). He had taken that oath in the name of God, and it was, therefore, God's oath which he despised and broke. So God takes an oath (*as I live* is an oath formula) that He would bring down on the head of Zedekiah the punishment for this treachery (v. 19). The rebellious king would be caught in the net of divine retribution and would be carried off to Babylon. There God would *plead with him*, i.e., make him conscious of the serious crime he had committed against God (v. 20). The royal bodyguard which might try to protect Zedekiah from this fate would be slain or scattered by the Babylonians. When all these specific predictions came to pass all the Jews would realize that it was truly God who had spoken through the mouth of the prophet to oppose the rebellion against Babylon (v. 21).

V. MESSIAH: THE STATELY CEDAR 17:22-24

TRANSLATION

(22) Thus says the Lord GOD: Moreover I, even I, will take of the top of the lofty cedar, and I will set it; and I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs, a tender one, and I will plant it upon a high and eminent mountain; (23) in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it; and it shall bring forth boughs and produce fruit, and it shall be a glorious cedar; and under it shall dwell every bird of every wing in the shadow of its branches shall they dwell. (24) And all the trees of the field

shall know that I the LORD have brought low the high tree, have exalted the low tree, and have dried up the green tree, and I have caused the withered tree to flourish; I the LORD have spoken and done it.

COMMENTS

The message of doom in the preceding parable and application is tempered by a word of hope in verses 22-24. God in His sovereign grace is about to act. Nebuchadnezzar had cut a twig from the cedar and had removed it to far off Babylon (cf. vv. 3f.). But God would now cut a twig from that same royal cedar tree and plant it upon a high mountain (v. 22). The basic idea is that the Davidic dynasty would be reinstated and would achieve a prominence which it had not heretofore enjoyed. The Messiah King of the house of David is in view here.¹⁵ Jesus of Nazareth now occupies the throne of God and rules over the New Israel of God.

The Messianic twig would be prominent, planted in the high mountain of Israel. The cedar—Messianic Jerusalem, the church of Christ—would be stately, i.e., dignified. It would bear fruit. The Messiah heads a royal family of kings and priests (1 Pet. 2:9). Many birds (different nations) would place themselves under the protection of this Messianic Monarch (v. 23). The *high trees*—proud kingdoms—of Ezekiel's day would be cut down or dry up. The *low tree*—God's people—would be exalted under the leadership of the Messiah. All peoples would then realize that it is by the will of God that the haughty are humbled and the debased exalted (v. 29).

15. Some interpret this as a reference to the restoration under Zerubbabel, a descendant of Jehoiachin. But Zerubbabel was never a king.

Special Study

THE RESTORATION OF SODOM

Ezekiel's allusion to *turning the captivity* of Samaria and Sodom (16:53, 55) has occasioned commentators great difficulty. The prophet seems to be saying that Sodom, which was destroyed in the days of Abraham, and Samaria, which had been carried away into captivity in 722 B.C., would be restored as well as Jerusalem. Whereas there is no parallel in Scripture to the restoration of Sodom, the Bible does point to the restoration of other evil nations surrounding Israel (cf. Jer. 12:14-17). But how could Sodom which had been totally obliterated without survivor be restored? Six different answers to this question have been given:

1. Currey and Ellicott deny that the passage contains any promise of restoration for Sodom. These commentators understand 16:53 to be underscoring the hopelessness of Judah's punishment. Only when Sodom was restored—something manifestly impossible—would Jerusalem be restored. Yet it does appear in this passage that some kind of restoration is promised or at least implied for Sodom. Besides, if the prophet is saying that Jerusalem would never be restored he would be contradicting not only other prophets but his own predictions as well.

2. Feinberg sees here a prediction of a literal rebuilding of Sodom and the cities of the plain. During the Millennium these cities will be restored. But how can Sodom and her daughters be restored when all the inhabitants of that area have been swept off the face of the earth? Feinberg limply replies: ". . . the restoration of Sodom will pose no difficulty for the omnipotence of God."¹⁶

3. The renowned German commentator Keil insists that the passage must refer to literal Sodom. But Keil does not see here an earthly restoration. He contends that ". . . the realization of

16. Feinberg, *PE*, p. 91.

the prophecy must be sought for beyond the present order of things, in one that extends into life everlasting."¹⁷ Keil is thus ambiguous about the fulfillment. Surely this passage does not refer to those Sodomite sinners who endure eternal fire (Jude 7). Keil's proposed fulfillment of the passage almost borders on universalism.

4. Payne has suggested that the post-exilic occupation of the Dead Sea area by the Jews constitutes a reasonable fulfillment to the prediction.¹⁸ However, it is difficult to see how this could constitute a reversal of the fortunes of *Sodom*.

5. Still others regard *Sodom* as symbolic of the descendants of Sodom. Ammon and Moab were born to Lot's daughters who had escaped from the destruction of Sodom (Gen. 19:29-30). The restoration of Sodom would in reality be the restoration of Moab and Ammon. Jeremiah 20:16 refers to the cities of the plain as "the cities which the Lord overthrew and repented not." This statement seems to preclude a literal, physical restoration of Sodom. However, Jeremiah does predict the restoration of Ammon and Moab (48:47; 49:6). A. R. Fausset develops this view as follows:

Probably . . . Ammon and Moab, were in part restored under Cyrus; but the full realization of the restoration is yet future; *the heathen nations* to be brought to Christ being typified by "Sodom," whose sins they now reproduce.¹⁹

6. Perhaps Sodom here comes to represent the heathen in general—all that survived of the Canaanites and their culture. The thrust of the passage is not the restoration of cities, but of rightful inhabitants. Ellison²⁰ points out that Samaria never actually ceased to be a city. Sargon, the conqueror of Samaria, immediately rebuilt and repopulated the place. Thus, the prophecy must be talking about changing the fortunes of the *inhabitants* of Jerusalem, Samaria, and Sodom. God must

17. Keil, *BCOT*, I, 228.

18. Payne, *EBP*, p. 359.

19. Fausset, *JFB*, IV, 257.

20. Ellison, *ENN*, p. 66.

punish wicked men; but His mercy is such that He must provide for the deliverance of even the greatest sinners. Ezekiel here is filled with the thought of the *spiritual conversion* of wicked people like Sodom. He expresses this thought concretely in terms of a reversal of the fortunes for Sodom (i.e., gross sinners). Sodom and Samaria would be given to Jerusalem as daughters (v. 61). Citizens of the former Northern Kingdom and heathen in general would become part of that new covenant Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22). This could not and would not take place under the Old Testament covenant of works; but Jew, Samaritan and Gentile would find salvation under God's everlasting covenant of grace.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What comparisons did Ezekiel see between Judah and a vine tree?
2. In what sense had Jerusalem already passed through the fire of judgment prior to the 587 B.C. destruction?
3. How does Ezekiel illustrate the grace of God in the original selection of Israel?
4. Who were the Amorites and Hittites? In what sense was Israel the daughter of the Amorite and Hittite?
5. What treatment was normally accorded new-born babies in the ancient world?
6. Where and when did Israel become the bride of God?
7. By what figures does Ezekiel indicate God's gracious concern for his "wife"?
8. How did God's bride commit adultery against Him?
9. How is the total degeneracy of Israel indicated in the parable of chapter 16?
10. How would God punish His harlotrous wife?
11. In what sense could Samaria be called Judah's *elder* sister, and Sodom her *younger* sister?

12. In what sense had the sin of Judah exceeded that of Samaria and Sodom?
13. How was the prophecy of the restoration of Sodom and Samaria fulfilled?
14. What is the everlasting covenant to which Ezekiel alludes in 16:60?
15. Identify the major symbols in the parable of the two eagles.
16. What had King Zedekiah done which particularly antagonized the Lord?
17. What is represented by the tender twig which God Himself would plant on a high mountain?

Chapter Nine

DOCTRINES AND DIRGES

18:1 — 19:14

In chapters 18 and 19 Ezekiel brings to a close the long section of his book which began in chapter 12. The prophet's purpose in these eight chapters has been to reinforce the announcement of Jerusalem's judgment by refuting the erroneous bases of the exile's confidence which led them to believe that Jerusalem could never be destroyed. In these chapters Ezekiel deals with seven false attitudes which are in some cases explicitly stated and in other cases implied in the text. The chart below will serve as a review of the argumentation found in chapters 12-19.

REVIEW OF CHAPTERS 12-19	
Popular Rationalization	Prophetic Response
<p>Prophecies of doom have failed to materialize. God loves us too much to destroy us (12:22).</p> <p>Judgments against Judah belong to some distant future age. No cause for alarm now (12:27).</p> <p>Prophets and prophetesses have assured us this is a time of peace.</p> <p>Righteous people still live in Jerusalem. God will spare the place on their account.</p> <p>Israel is God's choice vine. God should care for her.</p> <p>This generation is being judged for crimes committed by previous generations.</p> <p>If God punishes men for the sins of their fathers, of what value is repentance.</p>	<p>This proverb will soon cease. The day is at hand (12:23).</p> <p>No more delay. The word will be fulfilled in your lifetime (12:25-28).</p> <p>The prophets are unreliable. They have received no message from the Lord (13:1-23).</p> <p>Even if Noah, Job or Daniel lived there they would only be able to save themselves (14:12-23).</p> <p>God had indeed continually cared for Israel; but throughout her history she continually had rebelled against Him (chap. 16).</p> <p>The present generation has rebelled by seeking aid and security from Egypt and breaking a solemn oath to Nebuchadnezzar (chap. 17).</p> <p>Each man is responsible for his own deeds (chap. 18).</p>

In chapters 18-19 Ezekiel (1) discusses some basic doctrines (chap. 18); and (2) breaks forth into some bitter dirges over the fate of his native land (chap. 19).

I. BASIC DOCTRINES 18:1-29

Two important doctrines are discussed in chapter 18. In verses 1-20 Ezekiel develops at length the doctrine of individual responsibility and in verses 21-29 he implicitly affirms the doctrine of freedom of the will or self-determination.

A. The Principle of Personal Responsibility 18:1-20

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) What do you mean by making this parable concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, but the teeth of the children have been set on edge. (3) As I live (oracle of the Lord GOD) you shall not make use of this parable any more in Israel. (4) Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine; the soul that sins, it shall die. (5) But if a man is righteous, and practices justice and righteousness, (6) and has not eaten upon the mountains, and has not lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, nor has defiled the wife of his neighbor, nor has come near unto a menstruous woman; (7) and has not wronged any man, but has restored his pledge for a debt, has seized nothing by robbery, has given his bread to the hungry, and has covered the naked with a garment; (8) who has not given on interest, nor has taken increase, who has withdrawn his hand from iniquity, has executed true justice between man and man, (9) has walked in My statutes and kept My judgments to deal truly; he is righteous, he shall surely live (oracle of the Lord GOD). (10) If he begets a son that is a man of violence who sheds blood, and

who does to a brother any of these things, (11) whereas he himself had not done any of these things, for he has even eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbor's wife, (12) has wronged the poor and needy, has seized things by robbery, has failed to return objects taken in pledge, and has lifted up his eyes to idols, has committed abomination, (13) has made loans on interest, and has taken increase; shall he live? he shall not live—he has done all these abominations; he shall surely die, his blood shall be on him. (14) Then, behold, he begats a son, and he sees all the sins his father has done, and considers, and does not do any such thing, (15) he does not eat upon the mountains, nor does he lift up his eyes unto the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife, (16) neither does he wrong a man, nor does he take a pledge, nor seize by robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment; (17) who has withdrawn his hand from the poor, who has not taken interest or increase, who has executed My judgments, and has walked in My statutes; he shall not die in the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live. (18) As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, committed robbery against a brother, and did that which is not good in the midst of his people, behold, he shall die in his iniquity. (19) But you say, Why does not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son has done that which is just and righteous, has kept all My statutes, and has done them, he shall surely live. (20) The soul that sins it shall die; the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, nor shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

COMMENTS

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

wicked live under His curse.

Sinful men always tend to underestimate their own wickedness and to blame their tribulations on others. So it was with the men of Israel. They attributed their suffering to the sins of their fathers. The proverb which was once current in Jerusalem (Jer. 31:28) was now being heard in Babylon: *The fathers have eaten sour grapes* (i.e., have sinned), but the *teeth of the children are set on edge* (i.e., they were being punished). Where did such an idea arise? Possibly from a misunderstanding of passages in the Law of Moses such as Exodus 20:5 where God is said to visit the sins of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. Or possibly the proverb arose out of the prophetic teaching that because of the sins of Manasseh the nation would be destroyed (II Kings 21:10-12). The former passage actually teaches that sin, even though forgiven, often has unavoidable repercussions in the lives of one's children. The latter passage indicates that the *origin* of Judah's sin was Manasseh. The following generation would be destroyed because it still practiced the grotesque idolatry introduced during Manasseh's reign.

The perverse proverb which in effect challenged the justice of God would no longer be employed in the future. Experiences would prove it to be untrue (v. 3). God is the creator of all individuals. Though physically related, the father and son are separate entities in His sight. Each must give account of himself to his Creator. The individual who sins, *he* shall die (v. 4). More than premature death is intended here. The sinner is dead in sin during his physical life. Eventually he experiences the second death.

The man who practices justice and righteousness lives under the blessing of God. This person is described in some detail in verses 5-9. Fourteen characteristics of the righteous man are enumerated in these verses.

1. *He has not eaten upon the mountains.* He has not participated in the pagan rituals at the "high places" which normally involved eating of sacrificial meals.

2. *He has not lifted up his eyes to idols,* i.e., offered prayer

to them in expectation of aid. Baal is particularly in mind.

3. *He has not defiled his neighbor's wife*, i.e., he has not committed adultery.

4. *He has not approached a menstruous woman*, i.e., he has observed the sexual taboos of the Law of Moses (cf. Lev. 18:19; 20:18).

5. He has not engaged in any fraudulent dealings with his fellowman (v. 7).

6. He has complied with the law of Exodus 22:25f. which compelled creditors to return to borrowers any item of collateral which might be necessary to his well-being (v. 7).

7. He has never resorted to violent robbery in order to enhance his wealth (v. 7, cf. Lev. 19:13).

8. He has fed the hungry and clothed the naked (v. 7, cf. Deut. 15:7-11).

9. He has not lent money on the express condition of receiving interest, nor has he accepted interest offered to him voluntarily by the debtor (v. 8). The laws on money lending are found in Exodus 22:24; Lev. 25:35ff.; Deut. 23:20.

10. He has *withdrawn his hand from iniquity* (v. 8). The sin probably intended here is giving false weight or measure (cf. Lev. 19:35).

11. As an arbiter of disputes he has been scrupulously fair (v. 8).

12. To the best of his ability he has observed the divine laws (v. 9).

13. He deals *truly*, i.e., his observance of God's law is motivated by love for the truth and not by any personal motive (v. 9).

14. Because of all the above considerations this man can be said to be *just* (v. 9).

In verses 10-13 the prophet describes a son who is the exact opposite of the just man described above. He is a *man of violence* who even commits murder. He is not beneath practicing any of the sins which his father so carefully avoided (vv. 10-13a). Should such a wicked man escape divine retribution? Certainly not! The law required the death penalty for

such crimes as murder, idolatry, and adultery.¹ The righteousness of his father could not save him. *His blood shall be on him*, i.e., he and he alone would bear responsibility for his life of sin. Those who executed the sentence against such a man would not be held guilty (v. 13b).

The third specific case cited by Ezekiel is that of a son who reflects upon the consequences of his father's sin and resolves to abandon that sort of behavior (v. 14).² He does not, therefore, participate in any of the activities which brought his father under civil and divine judgment (vv. 15-17a). This man should not be executed because of his father's sin (v. 17b). The father should die for his blatant iniquity (v. 18), but the son should be spared. This teaching absolutely refutes the notion current in Ezekiel's day that innocent children were punished for the sins of their fathers (v. 19).

The lengthy treatise on personal responsibility reaches its climax in the crystal clear assertion of verse 20. Wicked men bear the responsibility and suffer the consequences of their wickedness. Neither iniquity nor righteousness is inherited. The individual's righteousness or wickedness *shall be upon himself*, i.e., he will bear the responsibility of his own conduct.

B. The Potential of Personal Repentance 18:21-32

TRANSLATION

(21) But if the wicked one turns from all his sins which he has done, and keeps all My statutes, and deals justly and righteously, he shall surely live, he shall not die. (22) All of his transgressions which he has done shall not be remembered against him; in his righteousness which he has done he shall live. (23) Do I have delight in the death of the wicked? (oracle of the Lord GOD); is it not when he turns from his way and lives?

1. Cf. Num. 35:16; Deut. 17:5; Lev. 20:10.

2. Some notable examples among the Biblical kings illustrate how sons sometimes choose to walk the path of righteousness in spite of the example of their fathers: Hezekiah and Josiah.

(24) But when a righteous man turns from his righteousness, and does iniquity according to all the abominations which the wicked has done, shall he live? All his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered for his trespass which he committed, and for his sin which he has sinned, in them he shall die. (25) And you say, The way of the Lord is not even. Hear now, O house of Israel: Is it My way that is not even? Is it not your ways which are not even? (26) When a righteous man turns from his righteousness, and does iniquity, he shall die because of them; for his iniquity which he has done he shall die. (27) And when the wicked man turns from his wickedness which he has done, and executes justice and righteousness, he shall cause his soul to live. (28) Because he considers, and turns from all his transgressions which he has done, he shall surely live, he shall not die. (29) Yet the house of Israel have said, The way of the Lord is not even. Is it My ways which are not even, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways which are not even? (30) Therefore, I will judge you, O house of Israel (oracle of the Lord GOD), each according to his ways. Return, and cause others to turn, from your transgressions, that iniquity might not be a stumblingblock to you. (31) Cast away from all your transgressions which you have committed; and make for yourself a new heart and a new spirit; for why will you die, O house of Israel. (32) For I do not delight in the death of the one who dies (oracle of the Lord GOD); wherefore, turn yourselves and live.

COMMENTS

In verses 21-29 Ezekiel carries his subject one step further. Men are not locked in either genetically or environmentally to a life of sin. By the grace of God and the assertion of their own free will men can change their character, conduct and destiny. In these verses the basic thesis is that men are not punished for sins after they repent of them.

In genuine repentance there are two clearly defined steps—turning from sin, and keeping the law of God. The Jewish

Rabbis speak of the essential elements of repentance being remorse and amendment. If a wicked man genuinely repents he shall escape the divine death sentence (v. 21). None of his former transgressions shall be remembered against him. Because of his present righteousness he shall live (v. 22).

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

The fairness and justice of God are frequently called into question by perverse and ignorant men. The Jews in Jerusalem and Babylon were saying (or at least thinking) that God's manner of ruling the universe was inconsistent. God is unchanging in His nature. He is absolutely righteous and must therefore punish sin. At the same time He is merciful and gracious and therefore is inclined to recognize the feeble efforts of His children to execute His way. God does not change; but men constantly change in relationship to God (v. 25). The rays of the sun are constant; but in the course of the earth's rotation darkness falls upon a portion of the planet. So the righteous man who turns away from the warmth of God's love faces inevitably the darkness of death (v. 26). By the same token the wicked man by an act of his own free will may decide to walk in the light of God's word. He will do those things which are lawful in the eyes of men and right in the sight of God. Thus he will save his life (v. 27). His consideration of the fate of the wicked causes him to make this about face (v. 28). This being the case, how can the house of Israel continue to perversely charge God with inconsistency. If they have experienced the wrath of God it is because *they* have changed in relationship to Him (v. 29).

The former wicked deeds of the penitent sinner are not held against him. Neither are the former righteous acts of the backslider credited to his account. Such a backslider has committed a *trespass* and a *sin*. He has rebelled against God in casting aside his former way of life, and he has willfully adopted a sinful life.

For this twofold transgression he must die the death of a sinner (v. 24).

God judges each individual separately. This being the case, Ezekiel pleads with his hearers to repent and to seek to get others to repent. Otherwise iniquity would be a stumblingblock to them which would ultimately mean their doom (v. 30). Like an unclean and loathsome thing all transgression must be *cast away*. They must make for themselves a *new heart and a new spirit*, i.e., they must have a firm resolve to be faithful and obedient. Otherwise they would die a tragic and unnecessary death¹ (v. 31). God does not desire to so punish sinners. Therefore, repentance is urgent (v. 32).

II. BITTER DIRGES 19:1-14

There is a time for a preacher to rebuke his audience; there is also a time for him to weep with them and for them. In chapter 19 Ezekiel becomes a sympathetic mourner. God is grieved over the impending fate of Jerusalem, and Ezekiel is told to give vent to his emotions as a means of illustrating the divine agony. The dirge falls into two sections. Verses 1-9 lament the fate of Judah's last kings; verses 10-14 bewail the fall of Jerusalem.

A. Dirge Over Judah's Kings 19:1-9

TRANSLATION

(1) And as for you, take up a lamentation concerning the princes of Israel, (2) and say, How your mother was a lioness; among the lions she crouched, in the midst of the young lions she reared her whelps! (3) And she brought up one of her whelps, he became a young lion; and he learned to tear the prey,

3. In 11:19 *God* gives the new heart and spirit. Here they must make it for themselves.

he devoured men. (4) Then nations assembled against him, he was taken in their pit; and they brought him by hooks into the land of Egypt. (5) Now when she saw that, she was disappointed, her hope was lost. Then she took one of her whelps, and made him a young lion. (6) And he went to and fro in the midst of the lions, he became a young lion; and he learned to tear prey, he devoured men. (7) And he knew their widows, and he laid waste their cities; and the land and its fullness was desolate because of the noise of his roaring. (8) Then the nations cried out against him, round about from provinces, and they spread their net over him, he was taken in their pit. (9) And they put him in a cage with hooks, and they brought him unto the king of Babylon; they brought him into strongholds so that his voice might not be heard again upon the mountains of Israel.

COMMENTS

Ezekiel is told to take up a lament (*qinah*) for the *princes* (i.e., kings) of Israel (v. 1). The fates of the three sons of godly King Josiah—Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah—are mentioned. The house of David is the *mother* of these princes. She is compared to a *lioness* in verse 2 because the tribe of Judah in general (cf. Gen. 49:9) and the family of David in particular were symbolized by a lion. As long as Judah remained faithful to the Lord she dwelt securely and fearlessly among the *young lions*, i.e., surrounding nations. The period of King Josiah is in view. Tiny Judah was independent and prosperous during the reign of this godly king (v. 2).

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

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

When the lioness (Davidic dynasty) saw that Jehoahaz had been deported, she was disappointed.⁴ She took another of her whelps and trained him to be a *young lion* (v. 5). He took his place among the other lions (kings), and quickly learned the ruthless conduct which oriental kings manifested (v. 6). Because of his misrule he *knew their widows*,⁵ i.e., he caused many women to lose their husbands and sons. Because of his boisterousness (*noise of his roaring*) he brought destruction and desolation upon his land (v. 7).

Some difference of opinion exists as to whether Ezekiel has in view Jehoiakim who ruled Judah from 605-598 B.C. or his son Jehoiachin who ruled but for three months early in 597 B.C. Jewish commentators generally prefer the former; modern commentators the latter. Some details of the allegory seem to fit best the one, and some seem to point to the other. On the whole, however, the Jehoiachin interpretation is superior.

The *nations* led by Nebuchadnezzar attacked the kingdom of Jehoiachin in 597 B.C. The young king was taken captive (v. 8) and brought before the king of Babylon. Thus did his rule over Judah come to an end. The growl of this young lion was no longer heard in the land (v. 9).

4. The Hebrew verb *yachal* in the Niphal stem means "to wait expectantly." In certain contexts Hebrew verbs take on the opposite of their usual meaning, and this appears to be the case here.

5. Some think the Hebrew word is an unusual form of the word meaning *castles* or *citadels*.

B. Dirge over Judah's Collapse 19:10-14

TRANSLATION

(10) Your mother was like a vine in your blood, planted by waters; she was fruitful and full of branches because of much water. (11) And she had strong rods to be scepters for rulers; and her height was exalted among the branches, and she was in her height, in the multitude of her tendrils. (12) But she was plucked up in fury, she was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up her fruit; her strong rod was broken and withered, the fire consumed her. (13) And now she is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. (14) And fire has gone out from the rod of her branches, it has consumed her fruit, so that she does not have a strong rod as a scepter to rule. This is a lamentation and it became a lamentation.

COMMENTS

The figure changes in verse 10. The *mother* is now the state of Judah, and she is compared to a *vine* rather than a lioness. The vine had its blood, i.e., sap, and was full of vigor. Because this vine was planted near abundant water the vine was fruitful (v. 10). The allusion is to former days when the nation prospered under the rule of righteous kings. The vine put forth strong rods—strong and resolute kings who ruled over the nation. Among the other thick branches (prosperous nations) Judah had a position of honor (v. 11).

Judah the exalted vine was *plucked up* and *cast down to the ground*. The present lowly position of the nation could only be due to divine determination. The *east wind* (Nebuchadnezzar and his armies) *dried up the fruit* of that ignoble vine. Enormous tribute to Babylon over several years had drained the royal coffers of Judah. The *strong rod* of that branch—the last king of Judah—had been broken off and withered by that mighty king from the east. The fire of war and divine judgment

had consumed Zedekiah. He lost his crown and his eyesight before being carried away in humiliation to Babylon (v. 12).

That once luxuriant vine planted by many waters is now forcibly transplanted to the *wilderness* of exile in Babylon (v. 13). The fire which would ultimately destroy the nation had *gone out of the rod*. Zedekiah's rebellion against Babylon was the cause of the ruin which engulfed the nation of Judah. With the deportation of Zedekiah the royal house of David was reduced to insignificance *so that there is in her no strong rod* to assume the rule (v. 14).

Chapter 19 is a prophetic lamentation spoken *before* the final calamity took place. What is here recorded as prophecy became the general theme of the national lamentation after the disaster had transpired (v. 14).

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. With what seven false attitudes does Ezekiel deal in chapters 12-19? How does he respond to each attitude?
2. How would Ezekiel respond to modern sociologists who would blame anti-social behavior on environmental factors?
3. Explain the proverb *the fathers have eaten sour grapes, but the teeth of the children have been set on edge*.
4. How did Ezekiel describe a righteous man?
5. What did Ezekiel have to say about the results of true repentance?
6. How would Ezekiel respond to the Calvinistic doctrine of "once saved, always saved"?
7. How did Ezekiel expect his hearers to acquire a new heart and a new spirit?
8. To what animal does Ezekiel liken the house of David in chapter 19?
9. What king of Judah is represented by the first *young lion* mentioned in chapter 19? What was his fate?

10. Identify the second young lion raised by the Davidic lioness. What punishment came upon the land because of his actions?
11. To what plant does Ezekiel liken Judah in chapter 19? What had been the fate of that plant?
12. Who was the *strong rod* which was to be broken off the vine tree?

Chapter Ten

ISRAEL: PAST AND FUTURE

20:1—21:32

Eleven months intervene between Ezekiel's last series of oracles and the present utterances. He has effectively shattered Judah's insane hope that judgment would never fall on Jerusalem. Every argument put forth in objection to his dogmatic assertion of imminent judgment has been rebutted. Ezekiel may have passed the past eleven months in silence.

Late in the summer of 591 B.C. news of Egyptian military victories in Africa spawned new delusions of deliverance among the Jews in Judah and in Babylon. King Zedekiah was now looking to Egypt for assistance against Babylon. Sometime between the end of 591 B.C. and the summer of 589 B.C. Zedekiah formally severed his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. The question uppermost in the minds of the captives was, What bearing would this political realignment have on the fortunes of Judah? In response to this unasked question Ezekiel speaks of (1) the past corruption of the nation (20:1-29); (2) the future restoration of Israel (20:30-44); and (3) the imminent judgment of Jerusalem (20:45—21:32).

I. ISRAEL'S PAST CORRUPTION 20:1-29

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

A. Introduction 20:1-4

TRANSLATION

(1) And it came to pass in the seventh year, the fifth month, the tenth day of the month that certain men of the elders of Israel

came to inquire of the LORD; and they sat before me. (2) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (3) Son of man, Speak unto the elders of Israel, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Are you coming to inquire of Me? As I live, I will not be inquired of by you (oracle of the LORD). (4) Will you judge them, will you judge them, O son of man? Cause them to know the abominations of their fathers.

COMMENTS

This section begins with a new date which apparently includes all the material in chapters 20-23. The last note of time was in 8:1, and eleven months and five days have passed. Ezekiel has now functioned in his prophetic office for two years, one month and five days. Converted into terms of the modern calendar the date of this section would be August 14, 591 B.C. On this date certain elders of Israel¹ approached Ezekiel in order to inquire of the Lord through him (v. 1). They obviously hoped to receive from him some optimistic assurance that the time of deliverance was at hand.

In the presence of his guests Ezekiel received a new revelation (v. 2). He has an answer for the inquirers, but it was not what they expected. Instead of indulging their curiosity regarding the "times and the seasons" of future divine activity, Ezekiel launched into a stern sermon, the theme of which is the persistent rebellion of Israel against leadership of the Lord. Whatever their specific query was, God regarded it as impertinent and irrelevant. God through Ezekiel had already made it abundantly clear that Jerusalem was doomed for destruction. God was not interested in hearing their requests, He wanted to see their repentance! That which sinful men want to hear from the Lord is not always what they need to hear (v. 3).

By means of a double question (*Will you judge them, will*

1. The elders in 8:1 were said to have been "of Judah." Ezekiel seems to use the terms *Israel* and *Judah* interchangeably.

you judge them?) God commissions Ezekiel to sit as a judge in the trial of His people Israel. He is to recount to the elders all *the abominations of their fathers* (v. 4), and that not in parables as in chapter 16, but in a very factual way. The plight of the nation and the necessity of the impending doom would become clear to his auditors through this sad survey of Israel's history.

B. Israel in Egypt 20:5-9

TRANSLATION

(5) Say unto them, Thus says the Lord GOD: In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up My hand to the seed of the house of Jacob, and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up My hand to them, saying, I am the LORD your God. (6) In that day I lifted up My hand to them to bring them from the land of Egypt unto the land which I sought out for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the beauty of all lands; (7) and I said unto them, Let each man cast away the detestable things of his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the LORD your God. (8) But they rebelled against Me, and they did not want to listen to Me; every man did not cast away the detestable things of his eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I thought to pour out My wrath upon them, to exhaust My anger on them in the midst of the land of Egypt. (9) But I took action for the sake of My name, that it might not be profaned before the nations among whom they were, to whom I made Myself known so as to bring them out from the land of Egypt.

COMMENTS

Ironically, Israel's case history began in Egypt, the same country to which she was now appealing for aid. There God *chose* Israel to be His very own people. It was there that God

bound Himself by an oath to the *seed of Jacob*, i.e., he confirmed the covenant made with Jacob, and with Isaac and Abraham before him. The process of selection began with His self-revelation to Moses at the burning bush (cf. Ex. 6:2, 7). Then God swore with an oath (*lifted up My hand*) that He would be Israel's God (v. 5). He further swore that He would bring Israel out of Egyptian bondage and into a very special land—a land *flowing with milk and honey*. The comparative fertility of Canaan, its geographical features and climate, made this land *the beauty of all lands* (v. 6).

The Lord made one single requirement of those He chose as His people, viz., that they cast aside the *detestable things* (idols) and that they not defile themselves with idolatrous practices. They must recognize Yahweh alone as God (v. 7). However, even this basic commandment was totally ignored (v. 8a). The Pentateuch says nothing about the religious life of the Hebrews during the Egyptian period. Their later history would lead one to conclude that they were far from successful in maintaining their distinctive religious heritage in Egypt.²

On the strict principle of justice Israel should have perished in Egypt (v. 8). But had the Israelites perished in Egypt, the heathen would not have attributed it to divine retribution, but to His lack of power to redeem His people. God would not allow His great name to be thus *profaned in the sight of the nations*. God had revealed Himself to Israel and publicly through Moses had announced His intention to bring them out of Egypt. The Egyptians knew all this. Had no redemption taken place, Israel's God would forever have been held in contempt in the land of Egypt. Therefore, in bringing Israel out of Egypt God was acting in His own self-interest. He acted *for His name's sake* (v. 9). To misunderstand God's nature, to regard Him less highly than He ought to be regarded, is to profane His name. "It is the duty of the new Israel, as

2. See Joshua 24:14. The episode of the golden calf at the foot of Sinai (Ex. 32:4) shows to what extent heathenism had influenced the thinking of Israel.

it was of the old Israel, to see that God's name is not profaned through inadequate witness to His nature and His truth."³

C. Israel in the Wilderness 20:10-26

TRANSLATION

(10) And I brought them out from the land of Egypt, and brought them unto the wilderness. (11) And I gave to them My statutes, and My ordinances I made known to them, which if a man do them, he shall live by them. (12) And also My sabbaths I gave to them to become a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctified them. (13) But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes, and they spurned My ordinances, which if a man do them, he shall live by them. My sabbaths they profaned exceedingly, and I intended to pour out My wrath upon them in the wilderness to consume them. (14) But I took action for the sake of My name, that it might not be defiled before the nations before whom I brought them out. (15) And also I lifted up My hand to them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them unto the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, the beauty of all the lands; (16) because they rejected My judgments, and in My statutes they did not walk, and they defiled My sabbaths, for after their idols their heart did go. (17) But My eye had pity upon them from destroying them, and I did not make a complete end of them in the wilderness. (18) And I said unto their sons in the wilderness: Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their ordinances, and with their idols do not defile yourselves. (19) I am the LORD your God; walk in My statutes, and keep My ordinances, and do them; (20) and sanctify My sabbaths that they may be signs between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your god. (21) But the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor did they keep My ordinances to do them, which if a man will do them, he shall live by them; they profaned My sabbaths; and I intended to pour

3. Taylor, *TOTC*, p. 158.

out My wrath on them to finish My fury on them in the wilderness. (22) And I withdrew My hand, and took action for the sake of My name, that it would not be defiled in the sight of the nations before whom I brought them out. (23) Also I lifted up My hand to them in the wilderness to scatter them among the nations and to disperse them in the lands; (24) because My ordinances they did not perform, and My statutes they rejected, and My sabbaths they profaned, and their eyes were after the gods of their fathers. (25) And also I gave to them statutes which were not good, and ordinances whereby they could not live. (26) And I defiled them with their gifts, in that they consecrate all who open the womb, that I might destroy them, that they might know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

God's concern for His name prevailed over His desire to rid Himself of that rebellious people. He brought them out of Egypt and into the wilderness (v. 10). At Mt. Sinai He graciously gave to that people His Law. In keeping this law one could find the key to life, i.e., he would prosper materially and spiritually. National faithfulness to that Law would result in social happiness and political stability (v. 11). As further evidence of His gracious concern, God ordained the sabbath⁴ as an outward sign of His covenant with Israel. Every observance of the sabbath was an affirmation of their relationship to Him (v. 12; cf. Ex. 31:17).

Within days of the gracious giving of the Law, Israel rebelled against the Lord in the incident of the golden calf. The Book of Numbers contains numerous examples of the times when Israel murmured against the Lord. Direct violation of the sabbath is recorded on two occasions (Ex. 16:27; Num. 15:32), but that sacred day was defiled by attitude again and again. Because

4. The text reads *sabbaths* and may include the various festivals as well as the weekly sabbath.

Israel had spurned God's gracious wilderness gifts to His people, He was fully prepared to destroy them there and then (v. 13). However, again for the sake of His name—His reputation among the heathen nations—he refrained from executing His wrath (v. 14).

While God did not completely destroy the nation in the wilderness, He did swear that the guilty generation which showed such lack of faith at Kadesh-barnea (Num. 13-14) could not enter the land of promise (v. 15). Because they had defiled the law of God and secretly had craved for their idols in their heart, God sentenced that generation to wander in the wilderness for forty years (v. 16). Yet God did not make a *full end* of Israel at that time (v. 17). Those under the age of twenty survived that disciplinary death march.

God warned that new generation not to follow in the sinful paths of their fathers (v. 18), but rather to recognize His absolute divinity. He earnestly pled with them through Moses to obey the divine law (v. 19) and to faithfully observe the sabbaths as an outward sign and reminder that they were indeed God's people (v. 20). Unfortunately that new generation was every bit as bad as the former one. At Baal-peor in their very first exposure to Canaanite Baal worship, the men of that new generation rushed headlong into the vilest form of degrading worship (Num. 25:1-9; Hos. 9:10). God was of a mind to destroy the nation entirely (v. 21). However, for the sake of His own self-interest—for the sake of his reputation among surrounding nations—God relented (*withdrew My hand*; v. 22).

Though Israel survived her wilderness wandering, divine discipline was again necessary. The sentence of destruction was commuted. Instead, at some point in the future this nation would be scattered among other lands and countries (v. 23). The time and manner of that dispersion is not specified. The long periods of oppression during the period of the Judges probably were the first step in the fulfillment of this threat. Attacks by neighboring nations during the monarchy period resulted in God's people being deported far and wide (cf. Amos 1:6, 9; Joel 3:1-8). The culmination of this threatened dispersion was the

deportation of the northern tribes by the Assyrian kings,⁵ and the removal of captives from Judah by Nebuchadnezzar.⁶

The generation which was brought into Canaan also rejected God's holy law and went after idols (v. 24). God gave them over to the consequences of their own sinful desire. He punished their sin by means of their sin. As they went ever deeper into the baser forms of idolatry, they brought themselves under statutes and judgments of a different sort. The pagan religious code which they adopted as their own did not contribute to health, happiness and well-being (*life*), but rather became a vicious and demanding taskmaster (v. 25). Stephen describes this situation when he says, "God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven" (Acts 7:42). He punished them by permitting them to do what they really wanted to do.

All the material gifts which God bestowed upon His people were permitted by Him to be defiled in the debasing worship of Baal. They rejected God's law of dedicating their first born to the Lord (Ex. 13:2) and replaced it with the horrible practice of child sacrifice (cf. Ezk. 16:21). The ultimate end of such perverse pagan practices would be national destruction. Only then would Israel realize that Yahweh was the only God (v. 26).

D. Israel in Canaan 20:27-29

TRANSLATION

(27) Therefore speak unto the house of Israel, son of man, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed Me, in that they have dealt treacherously with Me. (28) For when I brought them to the land which I lifted up My hand to give unto them, then they saw every high hill, and every leafy tree, and they made sacrifices there, and gave there the provocation of their offering, and placed there their sweet

5. The two main Assyrian deportations occurred in 745 B.C. by Tiglath-pileser III, and in 722 B.C. by Sargon.

6. Four deportations by Nebuchadnezzar are recorded in Scripture: The first was in 605/604 B.C. and the last in 582 B.C. See Jeremiah 52:30.

savor, and they poured out their drink offerings. (29) Then I said unto them: **What is the high place to which you are going? So its name is called Bamah (high place) unto this day.**

COMMENTS

In addition to their wickedness in Egypt and in the wilderness, the fathers had continued their sinning when they were in their own land. In fact *they blasphemed*, i.e., committed a cardinal sin against the Lord; they *dealt treacherously* with him, i.e., broke the most solemn kind of commitment to Him (v. 27). No sooner had they, by God's mercy, entered the land of Canaan, they promptly appropriated to themselves the heathen hill-top shrines and adopted the Canaanite ways of worship. The *leafy trees* were desirable for the sinful orgies which accompanied sacrifices to Baal. Their offerings which should have been a sweet savor to the Lord were in reality an irritation or provocation which only engendered the divine anger (v. 28).

Some day the Jews would have to give an account of their worship conduct. *What is the high place to which you are going?* Ezekiel asks in verse 29. Who authorized you to go there? What business do you have there? In spite of the repeated condemnation of high place worship still those shrines existed throughout the land. The *bamah* or high place was still very much a part of the worship scene in Judah. These prostitution chapels had not yet been abolished in the land.

II. ISRAEL'S FUTURE RESTORATION 20:30-44

TRANSLATION

(30) Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: In the way of your fathers you have defiled yourselves, and you are whoring after their abominations, (31) and when you offer your gifts, in making your sons to pass through the

fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols, unto this day; and shall I allow you to inquire of Me, O house of Israel? As I live (oracle of the Lord GOD) I shall not allow you to inquire of Me; (32) and that which goes up on your spirit shall not be; because you are saying, We shall be like the nations, as the families of the lands, to serve wood and stone. (33) As I live (oracle of the Lord GOD) surely with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out I will reign over you; (34) and I will bring you out from the peoples, and I will gather you from the lands where you were scattered, with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out; (35) and I will bring you unto the wilderness of the peoples; and I will plead with you there face to face. (36) As I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, thus will I plead with you (oracle of the Lord GOD). (37) And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. (38) And I will purge out from you the rebels, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out from the land of their sojourn, and unto the land of Israel they shall not come; and you shall know that I am the LORD. (39) As for you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord GOD: Go, serve each his idols, even because you have not hearkened unto Me; but My holy name you will not profane again with your gifts and with your idols. (40) For in My holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel (oracle of the Lord GOD) there all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve Me in the land; there I will accept them, and there I will require your heave offerings and the first of your gifts, with all your holy things. (41) With your sweet savor I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you from the lands where you were scattered; and I will be sanctified in the sight of the nations. (42) And you shall know that I am the LORD when I bring you unto the land of Israel, unto the land which I lifted up My hand to give to your fathers. (43) And there you shall remember your ways, and all your deeds by which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourself in your eyes for all your evils which you have done. (44) And you shall know that I am the LORD when

I deal with you for the sake of My name, not according to your evil deeds, nor according to your corrupt ways, O house of Israel (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

Ezekiel replied to the request of the visiting elders by reviewing the past corruption of Israel; now he applies this teaching to the present and future of the nation. How can these representatives of the nation expect to receive encouraging divine responses to their inquiries when the abominable practices of idolatry continued to that very day? The present generation had defiled itself after the manner of their fathers by offering gifts to Baal and even causing their children to *pass through the fire*, i.e., offering them as burnt offerings to Molech.⁷ How could God suspend or cancel the threat of judgment when they continued to defile themselves by such degrading religious practices? Their defilement drove a wedge between them and their God, and under present circumstances He refused to *be inquired of* by them, i.e., He would grant them no special insight into what the immediate future held in store beyond the threats which He had already announced through His prophet (vv. 30-31).

The attitude among the exiles was reprehensible. In verse 32 the prophet reads the hearts of the inquirers. Being humiliated, subject to foreign domination, and driven from their homeland, they now felt free to join in the worship of their neighbors. How was it possible for them to continue to render homage to Yahweh when His Temple was so far away, and when all public acts of worship to Him were restricted to that Temple? If the Temple were destroyed, they thought, then the one restraint on the idolatries which they loved would be removed, and that by

7. That immolation of the children is intended, and not just ritual purification, is made clear by Jeremiah 19:5.

God Himself. According to their perverse logic, if God wanted their continued allegiance He would have to preserve the Temple and quickly restore them to Canaan. However, God would not allow this perverse purpose to stand. Those who thought the distinctive character of Israel would be and should be lost in exile were doomed to disappointment.

God was about to intervene in Israel's history with the same *mighty hand* and *outstretched arm* as saved them at the Exodus. He would show Himself again to be *king* over this people (v. 33) by leading them in judgment into another wilderness experience (cf. Hos. 2:14f.; 12:9). The Babylonian exile was Israel's second wilderness period. When the discipline was over, God would gather His people (v. 34). Israel would by no means lose her identity among the nations!

The exact prophetic import of verses 35-38 is in dispute. Some commentators understand these verses to be predicting that after the Babylonian exile Israel would be brought into another dispersion. It is better, however, to regard the *wilderness of peoples* as yet another reference to the Babylonian captivity. In verse 34 God states the general principle that He will in His own good time gather His people. Verses 35-38 tell how that would come about. As in the wilderness of Egypt God constituted Israel as a nation, so in the Babylonian wilderness He would re-constitute them as a nation. There they would come *face to face* with God. He would *plead* with them, i.e., remonstrate and reason with them, through those harsh circumstances, through the voice of conscience, and through the stern preaching of men like Ezekiel (vv. 35-36).

Not all those who were carried off to the wilderness of exile would be coming home. The captives would be scrutinized by the Good Shepherd and caused to pass *under the rod*. The allusion is to Leviticus 27:32 where every tenth sheep which passed under the rod of the shepherd was to be consecrated to the Lord. The select sheep of Israel would be brought into *the bond of the covenant* (v. 37). The apostasy had cancelled the blessings set forth in the Sinai covenant. The chastisement of exile, for those who would accept it, would serve the purpose of

restoring that broken relationship with God.

The land of restored Israel would be a land of righteousness. Those who had rebelled against God's authority and who had transgressed against Him would be purged from the nation. They would not be allowed to re-enter the land of Canaan. God might bring them out of the land where they were presently sojourning, but He would by no means allow them to re-enter Canaan. When he brought them back the chastened remnant would know that He truly was Yahweh, the God of covenant faithfulness (v. 38).

In prophetic irony Ezekiel now called upon the house of Israel to go ahead with their idolatry. They cannot thereby frustrate God's ultimate purpose for a holy people. The day would come when God's holy name would no longer be profaned by idolatrous practices (v. 39).

In verse 40 Ezekiel passes on from the earlier stages of the restoration to speak of its consummation. He sees Israel as a mighty mountain (*mountain of the height of Israel*) or nation of the world (cf. Micah 4:1-2; Isa. 2:2, 3). He sees a united nation (*all of them*)—Israel and Judah—worshiping on Mt. Zion (*My holy mountain*). He sees a holy people rendering acceptable service and sacrifice to their God. Gone forever are the heathen influences which marred the worship of his own day. *Heave offerings*,⁸ offerings of firstlings,⁹ and other gifts would be required by God and willingly offered by His redeemed people (v. 40).

Ezekiel foresees seven consequences of the new relationship between God and His people:

1. The sacrifices which Israel offers to God would be considered a *sweet savor* by the Lord, i.e., would be pleasant in His sight.

2. God *accepts* Israel, i.e., acknowledges them as His own.

8. *Heave offerings* (*terumah*) are mentioned in Exodus 24:27; Leviticus 7:14 and many other places.

9. *The first of your gifts* would include the first-ripe grain (Deut. 26:2ff.), the firstborn of the cattle and the redemption fee for firstborn male children (Exodus 13:2, 12ff.), and the first portion of the dough (Num. 15:20f.).

3. In and through that restored remnant God's name would be *sanctified*, i.e., respected and revered, by surrounding nations (v. 41). God's name is sanctified when He is manifested and recognized as holy (Lev. 10:3; Num. 20:13). Even the heathen would recognize that God's dealings with Israel had been holy and just.

4. Israel would realize without doubt that they had been restored to Canaan through the might of God. They would willingly acknowledge that He, and none other, is God (v. 42).

5. It would be obvious to the remnant that God keeps His word. He had sworn to give to their father the land of Canaan. Through sin Israel forfeited the right to live in that Holy Land. Now God would give them a second chance in Canaan (v. 43).

6. Remnant Israel would remember their past failings and *loathe* themselves for the abominations which they had committed prior to the captivity (v. 43). In spite of repentance and forgiveness, the redeemed man can never forget that he is a sinner saved by grace.

7. Remnant Israel would realize that their change in fortunes was not due to their own merits. They deserved to perish. However, for the sake of His name, the gracious God had ransomed the house of Israel (v. 44).

III. ISRAEL'S IMMINENT JUDGMENT

20:45—21:32

In the Hebrew Bible verse 45 becomes the first verse of chapter 21. Clearly this is a better arrangement than that adopted by the Authorized Version and subsequent English translations. What is said in 20:45-49 has no connection with what has immediately preceded, but rather sets the stage for what follows in chapter 21. Ezekiel starts out with another parable (20:45—21:7) which may be entitled *The Parable of the Forest Fire*. To his parable he adds a song about a sword (21:8-17). This song becomes the springboard for two oracles dealing with the words of the king of Babylon (21:18-27), and the sword which would one day fall upon Ammon (21:28-32).

A. The Parable of the Forest Fire 20:45—21:7

TRANSLATION

(45) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (46) Son of man, set your face toward the South, and preach unto the South, and prophesy unto the forest of the field of the South. (47) And say to the forest of the South, Hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am about to kindle against you a fire, and it shall consume every green tree in you, and every dry tree, and it shall not be quenched, a flaming flame; and all faces from the south to the north shall be seared by it. (48) And all flesh shall see that I am the LORD when I burn it, and it shall not be quenched. (49) And I said, Ah Lord GOD! They are saying to me, Is he not a maker of parables? (1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, Set your face toward Jerusalem, and preach toward the sanctuaries, and prophesy unto the land of Israel; (3) and say to the land of Israel, Thus says the LORD: Behold, I am against you, and I will bring out My sword from its sheath, and I will cut off from you both righteous and wicked. (4) Because I will cut off from you righteous and wicked, therefore My sword shall go out from its sheath against all flesh from the south to the north. (5) And all flesh shall know that I the LORD have brought out My sword from its sheath; it shall not return any more. (6) And as for you, son of man, sigh; with the breaking of loins, and with bitterness you shall sigh before their eyes. (7) And it shall come to pass when they say unto you: Why are you sighing? Then you shall say: Because of the tidings, for it comes; and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall droop and every spirit shall be faint, and all knees shall drip water; behold it comes, and it shall be done (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

In another revelation from the Lord (v. 45), Ezekiel was told to direct his attention, verbally and perhaps physically as well,

toward the south. He was to *preach*¹⁰ the word of the Lord in that direction. The whole of Judah is the *forest of the south* which Ezekiel was to address in this utterance (v. 46). That entire forest would be consumed by an unquenchable fire kindled by God Himself. *Fire* here is symbolic of the devastation wrought by the Chaldean armies. What few righteous there might have been (*every green tree*) as well as the hardened sinners (*every dry tree*) would be affected by that conflagration. From one end of the land to the other every face would be seared by the hot flames of judgment (v. 47). That destruction would be of such proportions that the entire world would recognize it as an act of divine judgment (v. 48).

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

After an interval of undetermined duration, God granted the unspoken request of his prophet (v. 1). He was to preach toward Jerusalem, the holy places and the land of Israel¹¹ (v. 2). Ezekiel was to announce that God had assumed a posture of hostility toward the land of Israel (*Behold I am against you*). The divine sword of judgment (the fire in the parable) was about to come out of its sheath. Both *wicked* and *righteous* were to be *cut off* (v. 3). Ezekiel had already taught that as regards to final judgment the righteous would not be destroyed with the wicked (chap. 18). But of necessity in temporal judgments the entire

10. *Preach* here in the Hebrew is literally, *drop your word*. This was a technical expression used to designate prophetic utterances. The same word is used in Amos 7:6 and Micah 2:6, 11.

11. In 20:46 three different Hebrew words are translated *south*. Here in 21:2 the symbolic significance of those three words is explained.

population of an area would be affected. Other peoples besides Israel would feel the effect of the sword of the Lord which at this point in time was wielded by the Chaldeans (v. 4). Even the foreign nations would realize that they had experienced a divine judgment. The sword of the Lord would not return unto its sheath until the destructive work assigned to it was complete (v. 5).

Ezekiel was deeply moved by this revelation, and he was told not to hide his emotion. As in other instances (4:4; 5:1-4) he was to dramatize in his own person the coming calamity. He was to assume the role of a mourner whose sighs were so deep that they seem to *break his loins*, i.e., he is to bend double as though smitten with great pain in the abdomen. This agonizing sigh was to be done *before their eyes* so as to provoke questions. When asked about his bitter sighing, he was to explain that this was but an example of what all the exiles would do when they got the message from Jerusalem that the Temple had been destroyed. The prophet, because of his special relationship to God, had already heard those tidings through revelation. Five years later all the exiles would hear that same message from some one who had barely escaped the fallen city. With the loss of the Temple all hopes of return to Jerusalem would be smashed. Four expressions set forth the physical and psychological reaction to the news of Jerusalem's destruction: (1) every heart shall melt; (2) all hands shall be slack; (3) every spirit shall be faint; and (4) all knees shall drip with water, i.e., kidney functions would not be able to be controlled. Nonetheless, that bad news was coming, and when it came it would prove to be a true account of what had actually happened in Jerusalem (v. 7).

B. The Song of the Sword 21:8-17

TRANSLATION

(8) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (9) Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the LORD: Say: A sword,

a sword is sharpened and also polished; (10) in order to make a great slaughter it is sharpened, in order that it might flash it is polished—or shall we rejoice—the rod of My son, who rejects everything of wood. (11) And He gave to be polished, to be seized by the hand; the sword, it is sharpened, and it is polished, to give it into the hand of the slayer. (12) Cry out and wail, son of man; for it is against My people, it is against all the princes of Israel, those who are thrust down to the sword with My people; therefore smite upon the thigh. (13) For there is a trial, and what if the despising scepter shall be no more? (oracle of the Lord GOD). (14) And as for you, son of man, prophesy, and smite your hands together; and let the sword be doubled the third time, the sword of those to be slain, the sword of the great one who is to be slain which surrounds them. (15) In order that their heart may melt, and their stumbling be multiplied, I have set the point of the sword. Ah! it is made to flash, it is sharpened for slaughter. (16) Unite yourself, go right, set yourself, go left! Where is your face set? (17) I also will smite My hands together, and cause My wrath to rest; I the LORD have spoken it.

COMMENTS

The thought of the unsheathed sword in verse 3 gives rise to this present section. In the Hebrew text this section is in poetic form and may have been a common lament song sung in times of coming judgment. It is even possible that Ezekiel accomplished these words with some kind of sword-brandishing. The sword of the Lord is ready for action. Its dazzling brightness is added to its sharpness as a fresh element of terror (vv. 8-10a).

Ezekiel quickly broke off his sword song as he noticed the smiles on the faces of his auditors. Or do we make mirth?, he asked. Do you think I am joking about this whole matter? This sharpened and glittering sword is *the rod of My son*, i.e., the rod with which God's son Israel must now be disciplined. The nation had despised *everything of wood*, i.e., every former instrument of punishment (cf. Isa. 10:5). God had given that

sword to be polished and then handed over to the executioner (vv. 10-11).

God called upon the prophet to take up a lament over the impending doom, and to slap his thigh as a gesture of grief and despair. Even the princes of Judah would be thrust down along with the common people by the divine sword (v. 12). The *trial* of Judah had now come, and during that trial the scepter that despised the word and warning of God would not be, i.e., exist. Judah would be left without a ruler (v. 13).

God directed Ezekiel to perform yet another gesture. He was to slap his hands together either to indicate lamentation, or, what is more likely, to summon the agent of destruction. He was to brandish the sword with a double motion, backward and forward, three times.¹² That sword of divine justice would slay many, even *the great one*, i.e., the king. From that sword there would be no escape, for it would surround them like a besieging army (v. 14). The point of the sword of the Lord would be set at every gate of the city causing consternation within and *stumbling* as the citizens attempted to escape that sword which glittered because of sharpening and furbishing (v. 15).

God addresses the sword¹³ (king of Babylon) in verse 16. This agent of divine judgment is urged to make a decision as to which direction he will move, but to get on with the judgment (v. 16). It is, after all, Yahweh who had given that command with a gesture of supreme authority (*clap My hands together*). Only when the divine sentence had been executed against Judah would God's anger be appeased. God had spoken, and what He had said must come to pass. With these words the song of the sword ended, and there followed another interval of silence (v. 17).

12. Perhaps the brandishing of the sword three times points to three times Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land of Judah—in 605/604, in 597 and finally in 587 B.C.

13. The verbs have the feminine form indicating that the "sword" (a feminine noun in Hebrew) is being addressed rather than the prophet as proposed by some.

C. The Sword of the King of Babylon 21:18-27

TRANSLATION

(18) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (19) Now as for you, son of man, make for yourself two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come; the two of them shall come forth out of one land; and fashion it. (20) You shall make a way that the sword may come to Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and to Judah in the fortress of Jerusalem. (21) For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to employ divination; he shakes the arrows, he inquires of the teraphim, he observes the liver. (22) In his right hand is the divination of Jerusalem to set battering rams to open the mouth for the slaughter, to lift the voice in a battle cry, to set battering rams against the gates, to construct mounds, to build siege forts. (23) And it shall be unto them as false divination in their sight, who have sworn oaths unto them. But he brings iniquity to remembrance, that they may be taken. (24) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have caused your iniquity to be remembered in that your transgressions have been uncovered, so that your sins appear in all your deeds; because you are remembered, you shall be seized with the hand. (25) And you, O profane and wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, in the iniquity of the end; (26) thus says the Lord GOD: The turban shall be removed, and the crown shall be taken off; things will be thrown into confusion; the lowly shall be exalted, and the high shall be brought low. (27) A ruin, a ruin, a ruin I have made it; this also shall not be until he come whose right it is, and I will give it to him.

COMMENTS

Ezekiel received a new revelation (v. 18) in which he was commanded to sketch a road which, at a certain point, branched in two directions. The road *came forth out of one land*, i.e., out

of the land of Babylon. That was the road which God's divinely appointed sword, the king of Babylon, would travel. At the crossroads the prophet was to draw, or perhaps cut out and place, a signpost (literally, *a hand*) pointing *the way to the city*, i.e., Jerusalem (v. 19). The other branch in that road led to Rabbah Ammon (v. 20).

His props in place, Ezekiel was to depict the king of Babylon standing at that crossroads attempting to discover by means of pagan divination which of those two routes to travel. Three forms of divination are mentioned. Shaking the arrows involved writing the names of the two objectives on arrows, shaking them up in the quiver, and drawing forth one of them. The precise manner by which the small household gods called *teraphim* were used to receive oracular direction is unknown. Examining the color and markings of a liver from a sacrificial animal, however, is a well-known form of divination among the Babylonians, although this is the only place the custom is mentioned in the Scriptures (v. 21).

Ezekiel pictures Nebuchadnezzar drawing two arrows from the quiver. The one in the right hand had the name *Jerusalem* written on it. His pagan divination informed him that he was to employ every siege weapon to assault the city—battering rams to assault the walls and gates; mounds of earth and mobile forts from which to hurl missiles over the walls. As he attacked Jerusalem his men would *open the mouth for the slaughter*, i.e., lift up their voices in blood-curdling battle cries designed to terrify the inhabitants of the city (v. 22).

To the men of Jerusalem what Nebuchadnezzar had done was but vain divination. Still they lulled themselves into a false sense of security. They had escaped the king's wrath in the past by swearing oaths of allegiance to him,¹⁴ and they were fully prepared to take such oaths again. But this time, says the prophet, Nebuchadnezzar would come to settle the account with

14. The Hebrew reads literally, *oaths of oaths are theirs*. Keil thinks the reference is to the oaths of the Lord which He had sworn unto His people. They were trusting in divine promises of protection and deliverance. However, God would bring to remembrance their iniquity.

the rebels—*he will bring iniquity to remembrance*. This time they *will be taken*, i.e., seized by the invader and either slain or made prisoners (v. 23).

The iniquity of Judah had forced, not only the king of Babylon, but the Lord Himself to remember their iniquity. Their more recent transgressions had caused their former iniquities to be remembered before God. Because of their consistent record of willful disobedience they would fall into the hand of the God of judgment (v. 24).

Zedekiah is prophetically addressed in verse 25 as a *profane and wicked prince*. This weak-kneed monarch had shown himself to be unfaithful both to his overlord Nebuchadnezzar and to the God in whose name he had taken his vassal oath. Now his day had come. He had committed his final iniquity which brought down on him the final punishment (v. 25). He would lose the insignia of his rank. Things would be thrown into confusion.¹⁵ The rulers of Judah would be brought down and abased; the humble citizens who heeded God's word would be exalted (v. 26). The honors offered Jeremiah after the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem might be an example of the exaltation of the humble (cf. Jer. 40:5f.). The monarchy would be in utter ruin (emphasized by the threefold repetition of the noun) as a result of the calamity which would befall Zedekiah. The monarchy would exist no more *until he come whose right it is*. There can be little doubt that this is a Messianic prediction. The kingly line would be overthrown and God's people would remain without a king until that one arose who had been anticipated throughout Old Testament history. When Messiah finally came, the crown and diadem would be given to him, for he would be "the culmination of everything to which the Davidic house and the Messianic kingship in Israel have always pointed."¹⁶

15. Literally the Hebrew reads, *this not this*. The paraphrase of Lofthouse has been followed here.

16. Taylor, *TOTC*, p. 165.

D. The Sword Against Ammon 21:28-32

TRANSLATION

(28) And as for you, son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the children of Ammon and their taunt, and say: O sword, keen-edged, furbished to the uttermost for slaughter that it may flash. (29) While they see falsehood about you, while they divine lies regarding you, to lay you upon the necks of the wicked who shall be slain, whose day has come, in the time of the iniquity of the end. (30) Cause it to return to its sheath! In the place where you were created, in the land of your origin, I will judge you. (31) And I will pour out My wrath upon you, I will blow you with the fire of My wrath; and I will give you into the hand of ruthless men, skillfull destroyers. (32) You shall become fuel for the fire; your blood shall be in the midst of the land. You shall not be remembered; for I the LORD have spoken it.

COMMENTS

Apparently Ezekiel again takes up his sword and turns it against the Ammonites. They might have thought that they would escape the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar when Judah was invaded. However, these who had mocked when Judah had experienced earlier invasions by Nebuchadnezzar should not imagine that they would escape a similar fate. The sword of divine judgment was sharpened and polished *to the uttermost*, i.e., as much as it could receive, so as to be a terrifying and effective instrument of punishment (v. 28).

Ammonite soothsayers were envisioning peace and security for that kingdom. Such divination was false and unreliable. Ultimately Ammon would share the same fate as Jerusalem, and her slain would fall in heaps *upon the necks of the wicked that are to be slain*, i.e., upon the bodies of the Jews previously slain by Nebuchadnezzar. For them divine punishment has been

decreed, and that punishment must certainly come (v. 29). At this point Ezekiel is commanded to return his symbolic sword to its sheath.

The symbolic action performed by Ezekiel came to an end, but the execution of the judgment thereby predicted would shortly follow. God would judge Ammon on their own soil—the *place where you were created* (v. 30). God's anger against Ammon would grow ever more intense as does a flame blown by bellows. They could expect no mercy at the hands of the ruthless Babylonians into whose hands they were about to fall (v. 31). Judah would be carried into exile, but Ammon would be destroyed in the midst of their own land. For Ammon there was no hope of restoration like that which Ezekiel portrays as Israel's future. Ammon would pass into oblivion. Such was the final decree of the sovereign ruler of all nations (v. 32).

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. When are the prophecies of chapters 20-21 to be dated?
2. What historical events probably triggered the utterances in these two chapters?
3. In what sense did Ezekiel become a judge of Israel?
4. What new information about the Egyptian sojourn of Israel is brought out by Ezekiel?
5. Why did God spare His people time and again when they so manifestly deserved destruction?
6. What does it mean to profane the name of God?
7. What gracious provisions did God bestow on Israel in the Wilderness? How did Israel respond to those provisions?
8. What happened at Baal-peor?
9. How did God punish Israel in Canaan for rejecting His Law?
10. In what sense did the ancestors of Israel blaspheme God once they were brought into Canaan?

11. What is a *bamah*?
12. Why did God refuse to allow the elders of Israel to inquire of Him?
13. Why does God promise the restoration of Israel in this section?
14. How does Ezekiel describe the worship of the restored remnant?
15. What was the new wilderness into which God was about to take His people?
16. Explain the parable of the forest fire.
17. How did Ezekiel's audience react to his use of parables? What did Ezekiel do about this?
18. How did Ezekiel dramatize the agony which the news of Jerusalem's fall would cause?
19. What action likely accompanied Ezekiel's song of the sword?
20. What was the significance of the prophet slapping his hands together?
21. What did God have to say to the king of Babylon in chapter 21.
22. What objects did Ezekiel use to dramatize how the king of Babylon would be guided to attack Jerusalem?
23. What prophecy did Ezekiel make about the future of the house of and throne of David?
24. Why does Ezekiel include a brief note about the destruction of Ammon at this point in the book?

Chapter Eleven

THE DEFILEMENT OF ISRAEL

22:1 — 24:27

Chapters 22-24 form the conclusion of a lengthy section of the Book of Ezekiel which began back in chapter 12. In these chapters Ezekiel has been answering all objections articulated and unarticulated which could be raised against his thesis that God must destroy Jerusalem. By means of three oracles, two parables and a symbolic action the prophet here underscores the defilement of the land of Israel in the past and in the present. Each chapter in this section forms a distinct unit which may be titled as follows: (1) A Sinful Nation (22:1-31); (2) A Sad History (23:1-49); (3) A Significant Date (24:1-27).

I. A SINFUL NATION 22:1-31

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

A. The Bloody City 22:1-16

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) And as for you, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Then make known to her all her abominations. (3) And say: Thus says the Lord GOD: O city that sheds blood in her midst, that her time may come, and that makes idols unto her to

defile herself; (4) you are guilty in the blood that you have shed, and you are defiled by the idols which you have made; and you have caused your days to draw near, and you have come unto your years; therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all lands! (5) Those that are near and those that are far from you shall mock you, you defiled of name and great of tumult. (6) Behold, the princes of Israel, each according to his strength, they have been in you in order to shed blood. (7) In you they have made light of father and mother; in the midst of you they have dealt with the stranger by oppression; in you they have wronged the orphan and widow. (8) You have despised My holy things, and you have profaned My sabbaths. (9) Talebearers have been in you to shed blood; and in you they have eaten upon the mountains; in the midst of you they have committed lewdness. (10) In you a father's nakedness has been uncovered; in you they have humbled the woman who was unclean in her impurity. (11) And one has committed an abomination with the wife of his neighbor, while another has defiled his daughter-in-law with lewdness; and still another in you has humbled his sister, his father's daughter. (12) In you they have taken gifts in order to shed blood; interest and increase you have taken and you have gotten illicit gain from your neighbor by oppression, and you have forgotten Me (oracle of the Lord GOD). (13) Behold I have smitten My hand at your illicit gain which you have made, and against your blood which exists in your midst. (14) Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong for the days when I will deal with you? I the LORD have spoken, and will do it. (15) And I will scatter you among the nations, and spread you in the lands; and I will consume your uncleanness from you. (16) And you shall be profaned in yourself in the sight of the nations; and you shall know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

Again Ezekiel is asked if he would judge Jerusalem (cf. 20:4). Before he can pronounce such judgment, Ezekiel must inform

the inhabitants of the charges against them (v. 2). He therefore lists for them their crimes:

1. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were guilty of bloodshed openly practiced in the midst of the city. This brazen disregard for life indicates the terrible moral debasement of the place.

2. The Jerusalemites had made idols for themselves which had resulted in ritual and moral defilement (v. 3).

The bloodshed and idolatry had caused Jerusalem's *time* (v. 3) and *days to draw near*, i.e., had hastened the retribution. The *years* of dispersion and exile were just around the corner. In the eternal counsels of God Jerusalem had already been made a reproach and an object of mockery to all neighboring lands (v. 4). The people of God would be known far and near. They would be *defiled of name*, i.e., have a bad reputation derived from the fact that their land was full of *tumult*, i.e., turmoil and confusion caused by war and natural calamity (v. 5). After this brief aside on the nearness of judgment, Ezekiel continues the catalog of crimes committed by his countrymen.

3. The princes or leaders of Judah had abused their power even to the point of bloodshed (v. 6).

4. In open defiance of the fifth commandment the people of Judah had ridiculed and mocked their elderly fathers and mothers (v. 7a).

5. Oppression of the helpless—the strangers or sojourners, the orphans and widows—was common throughout the land (v. 7b).

6. They had despised the *holy things* of God by the disrespectful way in which they conducted themselves in the Temple (v. 8a).

7. The weekly sabbath and the special festival days designated as sabbaths had been profaned by the hypocritical conduct of the worshipers (v. 8b).

8. Talebearers or slanderers had sent many innocent persons to face the death penalty (v. 9a).

9. Participation in the idolatrous worship exercises upon the hills was common (v. 9b).

10. *Lewdness* or unchastity was an integral part of those pagan rituals (v. 9c). Unlike his contemporary Jeremiah who says virtually nothing about sexual sins, Ezekiel expands the general charge of lewdness in sickening detail in verses 10-11. He accuses the Jews of uncovering the nakedness of their fathers, an expression which refers to incestuous relationships especially with a stepmother (cf. Lev. 18:7f.).¹ They had also committed rape, and that of a menstruous woman whose condition rendered intercourse forbidden (cf. Lev. 18:19; 20:18). Adultery which is an *abomination* in the sight of God, had been committed. Their lust even drove them to defiling their daughters-in-law and raping their half-sisters (cf. Lev. 18:9, 15).

11. Bribery of judicial officials leading to the execution of innocent men was common (v. 12a).

12. In violation of the laws against usury (cf. Lev. 25:36f.), the wealthy had taken undue interest and thus had enhanced their personal wealth through greed and oppression (v. 12b).

13. All of the above sins grew out of one fundamental transgression: Judah forgot God.

Such crimes must be punished! In a gesture of anger God is said to smite His hands, i.e., to clap His hands, to summon the agents of judgment (v. 13). By means of a rhetorical question Ezekiel drives home the point that the Jews would not have the fortitude nor the physical strength to stand against the enemies by which God would bring judgment upon them. With God the very pronouncement of judgment is tantamount to the act of judgment, for what He decrees He will surely bring to pass (v. 14).

As far as Judah was concerned, that judgment involved ultimately exile to foreign lands. However, this exile would have a positive benefit. The people of God would be purged of their *uncleanness*, i.e., their sin and iniquity (v. 15), and they would realize that Yahweh who knows the end from the beginning had

1. According to a Rabbinic tradition this verse refers to King Amon who is said to have had intercourse with his mother.

brought this calamity to pass. But however beneficial the ultimate result, the exile would not be a pleasant experience. In the sight of the nations Judah would be *profaned*, i.e., humiliated and debased, and this would generate feelings of shame and remorse (v. 16).

B. The Smelting Furnace 22:17-22

TRANSLATION

(17) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (18) Son of man, the house of Israel has become to Me dross; all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the midst of a furnace; they are the dross of silver. (19) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Because all of you have become dross, therefore, behold, I am about to gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. (20) As they gather silver, and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the midst of a furnace to blow the fire upon it to melt it, thus I will gather you in My wrath and fury, and I will cast you in, and melt you. (21) And I will gather you, and I will breathe upon you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in the midst of it. (22) As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, thus you shall be melted in the midst of it; and you shall know that I the LORD have poured out My wrath upon you.

COMMENTS

The thought in verse 15 that the exile would purge the filthiness from Judah is amplified in the present paragraph. The *house of Israel*, i.e., Judah, has become like a metallic ore, a mixture of various minerals and impurities which must undergo a smelting process. They once were silver; now they are *dross*, i.e., worthless (v. 18). *Jerusalem* where the inhabitants would gather to make their last stand would serve as the symbolic furnace in which the refining process would begin (v. 19). The

wrath and *fury* of the Lord would be the fire which would heat that furnace (vv. 20-21). But through the holocaust the precious *silver*—the spiritual remnant—would become evident. All the inhabitants of that place would know that they had experienced the judgmental fury of the one true and living God (v. 22).

C. The Corrupt Land 22:23-31

TRANSLATION

(23) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (24) Son of man, say to her: You are a land not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation. (25) There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst, like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured souls, they have taken treasure and precious things, they have multiplied her widows in the midst of her. (26) Her priests have done violence to My law, and have profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and the common, nor have they taught the difference between the unclean and clean, and they have hidden their eyes from My sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. (27) Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey: to shed blood, and to destroy souls, in order to acquire illicit gain. (28) And her prophets have daubed for them with white plaster, seeing falsehood and divining lies to them, saying, Thus says the Lord GOD, when the LORD has not spoken. (29) The people of this land have engaged in oppression, and they have been involved in theft, and they have wronged the poor and needy, and have oppressed the stranger unlawfully. (30) And I sought for a man among them to build up the wall, and one to stand in the breach before Me for the land that I should not destroy it, but I found none. (31) Therefore have I poured out upon them My wrath, in the fire of My anger I have consumed them; their way I have placed upon their head (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

The land of Judah was defiled (*a land not cleansed*) and spiritually desolate (*nor rained upon*) at the time divine judgment was about to fall (v. 23). This condition existed primarily because of the actions of her national leaders.

The *prophets* had entered into a *conspiracy*, a solemn pact that they would predict only peace and security for the nation. Their loud oratory, like the roar of a lion, was only the prelude to national disaster. The character of these men was indicated by their greed. For *treasure and precious things* they would paint the future in the most optimistic hues. But the results of this kind of prognostication were disastrous. Lives would be lost and widows made numerous by the ruinous national policy which they encouraged (v. 25). Prophets were supposed to rebuke wicked men, expose national corruption and warn of impending disaster. But Judah's prophets had whitewashed the leadership and supported their dangerous international policy by proclaiming falsehood. They used pagan divination to conjure up some of their lies and boldly announced them with *Thus says the Lord* (v. 28; cf. 13:10).

The *priests* were not one whit better than the prophets. Instead of teaching the Law of God and exemplifying its contents, they had *done violence* to God's Law. They failed to teach it and violated its teaching. They *profaned the holy things* of God by not adhering to the regulations which served to underscore the sanctity of the Temple. They failed both in their private lives and in their public teaching to differentiate between *holy* and *common*, i.e., they allowed holy things to be used in profane ways (cf. Lev. 10:10f.). Likewise the Mosaic distinction between *clean* and *unclean* was ignored both as regards meat fit for food, and as regards the ritual purity of worshipers. They *hid their eyes* from the sabbaths of God, i.e., they looked on indifferently as God's people desecrated those sacred days. By means of all the above named transgressions the priests had *profaned*, i.e., treated disrespectfully the Lord God (v. 26).

The *princes*, like fierce wolves, shed blood and destroyed

lives so as to enrich themselves. Probably these men used legal machinery to achieve their ends (v. 27).

The *people of the land*, i.e., the wealthy landholders, had unlawfully resorted to robbery and oppression against the helpless element of society and the *strangers* who sojourned in the land (v. 29).

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

II. A SAD HISTORY 23:1-49

In chapter 23 Ezekiel vividly portrays the history of the sister kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Israel is represented here by Samaria, and Judah by Jerusalem. They are allegorically compared to two wicked sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, who were unfaithful to their lawful husband. Both sisters sought liaisons with strange men. So also Israel and Judah had committed spiritual adultery against God. Samaria had already been punished for her unfaithfulness. Judah had failed to learn from the experiences of her sister kingdom, and was headed for the same fate. Such is the overall import of Ezekiel 23.

A. Introduction of the Two Sisters 23:1-4

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of the same mother;

(3) and they committed harlotry in Egypt; they committed harlotry in their youth; there were their breasts pressed, and there their virgin breasts were fondled. (4) And their names were Oholah the elder, and Oholibah her sister; and they became Mine, and bore sons and daughters. And as for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem is Oholibah.

COMMENTS

The allegory begins with the introduction of the two women, *daughters of one mother*. The two women are identified in verse 4 as Samaria and Jerusalem. Both cities had their origins in the nation Israel (v. 2). The tribes of Judah (represented by Jerusalem) and Ephraim (represented by Samaria) had both experienced the Egyptian bondage. But even in that formative period of Israel's history they had shown inclinations toward idolatry. Using the figure of sexual license—the fondling of the breasts—Ezekiel describes how God's people lost their virgin chastity even before leaving Egypt (v. 3). Nonetheless, the Lord married the sisters and produced children by them. The covenant relationship between God and Israel is frequently depicted in terms of a marriage in the Old Testament. The names of the sisters are given in verse 4. Samaria is Oholah (*she who has a tent*) and Jerusalem is Oholibah (*a tent is in her*). Both cities were noted for their religious shrines (tents).

B. Samaria's Prostitution 23:5-10

TRANSLATION

(5) And Oholah committed harlotry under Me, and she threw herself on her lovers, on the Assyrians, warriors, (6) clothed with blue, governors and rulers, all of them handsome young men, horsemen riding on horses. (7) And she bestowed her harlotries upon them, the choicest men of Assyria all of them;

and on whomsoever she threw herself, with all their idols she defiled herself. (8) And she did not forsake her Egyptian harlotries; for they lay with her in her youth, and they bruised her virgin breasts; and they poured out their lust upon her. (9) Therefore, I will give her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians upon whom she threw herself. (10) They uncovered her nakedness; they took her sons and daughters, and slew her with the sword, and she became a byword to women, for judgments were made against her.

COMMENTS

For the purposes of this allegory Samaria is called the elder sister because that city had experienced the judgment of God prior to Jerusalem. Oholah (Samaria) committed harlotry from under God, i.e., from under His control and authority as her lawful husband. She threw herself at various lovers among whom the Assyrians were most notable. The Assyrian warriors dressed in handsome uniforms and led by men of note attracted the inhabitants of Samaria² (v. 6). Israel plunged headlong into political alliance with Assyria, and willingly paid the price demanded of all allies, viz., homage to the Assyrian deities. Thus did Samaria defile herself with *all their idols* (v. 7).

The corrupt Oholah (Samaria) did not forsake her earlier harlotries when she took up with the Assyrians. She had committed spiritual adultery in Egypt. She had prostituted herself before Egyptian idols, and throughout her history she had continued to engage in those pagan cultic practices (v. 8).

Because of her harlotries Oholah (Samaria) was delivered by God into the hands of her lovers, the Assyrians. What irony, to be destroyed by the nation which she counted on as ally—a lover (v. 9). The Assyrians stripped Oholah—ravished her land, removed her wealth. The sons and daughters of Samaria were

2. The first king of Israel to render tribute to Assyria was Jehu in 841 B.C. The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser depicts and describes the scene.

carried away into captivity. Oholah herself was slain with the sword, i.e., Samaria was destroyed by military action. Oholah became *a name*—a byword or warning—to all other women (nations) who might contemplate unfaithfulness to the Lord. What happened to Samaria should have been a warning to Jerusalem (v. 10).

C. Jerusalem's Prostitution 23:11-21

TRANSLATION

(11) And her sister Oholibah saw this, and she became corrupt in her doting more than she, and in harlotries more than the harlotries of her sister. (12) She threw herself upon the Assyrians, governors and rulers, warriors, clothed handsomely, horsemen riding horses, all of them handsome young men. (13) And I saw that she was defiled; they both went the same way. (14) And she added to her harlotries; for she saw men depicted upon the wall, the images of Chaldeans depicted in red color, (15) girded with girdles upon their loins, with flowing turbans upon their heads, all of them with the appearance of captains, the likeness of the sons of Babylon, the Chaldeans, the land of their captivity. (16) And when she saw them she threw herself upon them, and sent messengers to them to Chaldea. (17) And the Babylonians came to her to the bed of love, and they defiled her with their harlotries; and she was defiled by them, and her soul was alienated from them. (18) So she uncovered her harlotries, and she uncovered her nakedness; then My soul was alienated from her as My soul was alienated from her sister. (19) Yet she multiplied her harlotries, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the harlot in the land of Egypt. (20) And she threw herself upon the idea of being their concubine, whose flesh is as the flesh of asses, and whose sexual potency is like that of horses. (21) And so you relived the lewdness of your youth when they from Egypt bruised your breasts for the breasts of your youth.

COMMENTS

Oholibah (Jerusalem) learned nothing from the experience of her elder sister. She became yet more corrupt, adopting the same policy of political and religious flirtation with foreign powers, but intensifying it (v. 11). She too fell for the Assyrians with their handsomely clad officers and warriors (v. 12; cf. vv. 5-6). Whereas Judah derived much advantage from the alliance with Assyria,³ from the religious point of view the association was disastrous. God saw immediately that Judah had defiled herself with the Mesopotamian practices. Both sisters—Samaria and Jerusalem—had pursued the same corrupt way (v. 13).

The harlotries—pagan practices—of Jerusalem were more extensive than those of Samaria. Oholibah saw paintings depicting the glories of a people who lived beyond Assyria. Her lust for political liaison was kindled by the sight of the martial Chaldeans (v. 14) girded in native dress. The waist-belt and turban with dangling fillets was the garb which set the sons of Babylon apart as a distinct people in the ancient world (v. 15).

Oholibah (Jerusalem) was unable to resist the lure to associate with this strange and exotic people. She threw herself upon them by sending messengers there to negotiate the alliance (v. 16). The Babylonians were quick to take advantage of this thoughtless infatuation. They *came to her into the bed of love*, i.e., they entered eagerly into the alliance with Judah. The result was inevitable. Judah was further defiled by the Babylonian cults which were transplanted there. Eventually Judah felt revulsion at this alliance and tried several times unsuccessfully to disengage herself from this entanglement.⁴

Yet one step remained before Oholibah (Jerusalem) reached the depth of corruption. In the process of trying to pry herself loose from the clutches of Babylon, Oholibah had *uncovered*

3. The reference may be to King Ahaz's appeal to Tiglathpileser for help (II Kings 16:7).

4. The reference is to efforts of Jehoiaikim and later Zedekiah to free themselves from Babylonian domination.

her nakedness in an effort to attract other lovers who might rescue her. Such degrading national conduct was revolting to God. He now felt toward Judah the same antagonism which He had felt towards Samaria over a century earlier. He was alienated from His people (v. 18).

Oholibah seemed undismayed at the knowledge revealed to her constantly by the prophets that she was alienating herself from God. She *multiplied her harlotries*. Recalling her ancient association with Egypt, she made overtures in that direction (v. 19). To break her ties to Babylon she *threw herself upon their concubinage*, i.e., Judah was willing to become one of the numerous vassal states of Egypt. The harlot Oholibah was attracted by the sexual potency of Egypt which is likened to that of an ass or horse. Sexual potency here is a symbol for military power (v. 20). Egyptian customs and cults long forgotten were called to remembrance as Judah plunged headlong into spiritual harlotry and political alliance with their ancient enemy to the south (v. 21).

D. The Punishment of Jerusalem 23:22-35

TRANSLATION

(22) Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold I am about to stir up your lovers against you, those from whom your soul is alienated, and I will bring them against you round about; (23) the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them, handsome young men, governors and rulers all of them, captains and counsellors, all of them riding upon horses. (24) And they shall come against you with hosts,⁵ chariots, wheels, and with an assembly of peoples; with shield, buckler, and helmet they shall set themselves against you round about; and I will commit

5. The word is of uncertain meaning.

judgment to them, and they will judge you with their judgments. (25) And I will set My jealousy against you, and they shall deal with you in wrath; they shall remove your nose and your ears, and the rest of you shall fall with the sword; they shall take your sons and daughters, and the rest of you shall be consumed with fire. (26) And they shall strip off your garments, and take away your fair jewels. (27) And I will cause your lewdness to cease from you, and your Egyptian harlotry, so that you will not lift up your eyes unto them, nor remember Egypt any more. (28) For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold I am about to give you into the hand of the one you hate, into the hand of the one from whom your soul is alienated; (29) and they shall deal with you in hatred, and they will take away all your labor, and they will leave you naked and bare; the nakedness of your harlotries shall be uncovered, both your lewdness and your harlotries. (30) These things shall be done to you because you have whored after nations, and because you were defiled by their idols. (31) You walked in the way of your sister; therefore, I will place her cup in your hand. (32) Thus says the Lord GOD: You will drink the cup of your sister which is deep and large; it shall be for scorn and derision; it is full to the uttermost. (33) You shall be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of astonishment and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria. (34) And you shall drink it, and drain it, and you shall gnaw its sherds, and you shall tear your breasts, for I have spoken (oracle of the Lord GOD). (35) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have forgotten Me, and cast Me behind your back; therefore, bear also your lewdness and your harlotries.

COMMENTS

Gross infidelity must be punished. As time went on, Judah became *alienated* from her lovers and wished to be free of all foreign entanglements. But morally and spiritually the damage already had been done. Ironically, God would use Judah's *lovers* as the instrument by which to punish His people (v. 22).

The various racial and linguistic groups which made up the empire of Nebuchadnezzar⁶ are named in verse 23. What a handsome sight that would be when those troops from far-off Mesopotamia armed to the teeth with the finest military equipment came against Jerusalem! God had commissioned those troops to execute His judgment upon Jerusalem, and they would fulfill that commission *according to their judgment*, i.e., in their own ruthless fashion (v. 24).

Yahweh is a jealous God. He would not tolerate His people engaging in flirtations with other gods. God would set His jealousy against Judah, i.e., He would bring divine retribution upon them. The attacking forces would deal ruthlessly with Jerusalem. The *nose* and *ears* of the adulterous Oholibah would be removed. The reference is probably to be taken figuratively of the execution or deportation of the leading citizens of the nation.⁷ Other citizens would *fall by the sword* or be taken as slaves. The houses and property of the city would be put to the torch (v. 25) after being plundered (v. 26). The fall of that nation and subsequent exile would cure the Jews of their *lewdness*, i.e., lust for idolatry. Pagan practices learned in Egypt would be abandoned and forgotten (v. 27). History records that God's judgment of Jerusalem did have this purging and purifying effect.

The prophet further describes Jerusalem's attackers and their destructive works in verses 28-30. The Jews would be delivered into the hand of their hated enemy, the Babylonians (v. 28). They would deal with the Jews in hatred. They would take away all the *labor*, i.e., fruit of the labors, of the Jerusalemites. The land would be stripped of all its wealth and left *naked and bare*. By the drastic extremes of the punishment the magnitude of the *harlotries* of Jerusalem, i.e., idolatrous sins, would be revealed (v. 29). Again the prophet pounds home his point that the judgment would fall upon Jerusalem because they had entered into

6. Pekod, Shoa, and Koa are now known to be races inhabiting the land east of the Tigris and bordering on Elam or Persia. See Fisch, *SBB*, p. 154.

7. In ancient times disfigurement was inflicted on women caught in adultery.

alliances with foreign nations instead of trusting in the Lord; and they consequently had been corrupted by the practices of these nations (v. 30).

Oholibah (Jerusalem) had followed the example of her sister Oholah (Samaria). The bitter cup of divine judgment had been drunk by the Northern Kingdom in the days of the great Assyrian kings. Now that cup would pass into the hands of Judah (v. 31). That cup of judgment was deep and large and full to the brim with bitter brew. That cup would bring scorn and derision to Judah (v. 32) because the nation would manifest the characteristics of a drunken man (v. 33). The cup would be drained to the last drop, and the vessel itself chewed up so that the beverage which had soaked into the pottery could be consumed. In drunken madness the inebriated Oholibah would tear at her breasts in anguish. This figure conveys the thought that the complete measure of divine judgment must be endured. God had decreed the judgment (v. 34), because they had forgotten Him and cast Him behind their backs as they would a worthless object. They must suffer the consequences of their spiritual indiscretion (v. 35).

E. Further Indictment of the Two Sisters 23:36-49

TRANSLATION

(36) And the LORD said unto me, Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations. (37) For they have committed adultery and blood is on their hands, and with their idols they have committed adultery; and also their sons whom they bore to Me they offered up to them to be devoured. (38) This also they have done unto Me: they have defiled My sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned My sabbaths. (39) For when they had slain their sons to their idols, then they came unto My sanctuary the same day to profane it; and, behold, thus they did in the midst of My house. (40) And furthermore you have sent for men that come

from afar; to whom a messenger was sent, and behold they came; for whom you washed, painted your eyes, and you decked yourself with ornaments; (41) and you sat upon a stately bed, with a table arranged before it, upon which you set My incense and My oil. (42) And the voice of a multitude at ease was in it; and with men of the common sort were brought drunkards from the wilderness, and they put bracelets upon their hands and beautiful crowns upon their heads. (43) Then I said to her worn out by adultries: Still they commit harlotries with her, even her. (44) For one went in unto her as one goes unto a harlot; so they went in unto Oholah and unto Oholibah, the lewd women. (45) But righteous men, they shall judge them with the judgment of women who commit adultery, and with the judgment of those who shed blood; for they are adulteresses, and blood is on their hands. (46) For thus says the Lord GOD: An assembly shall be brought up against them, and they shall be made a horror and a spoil. (47) And the assembly shall stone them with stones, and they shall be cut down by their swords; their sons and their daughters they shall slay, and burn their houses. (48) And I will cause lewdness to cease from the land, that all the women might be taught that they might not do according to your lewdness. (49) And your lewdness shall be placed upon you, and you shall bear the sins of your idols; and you shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

COMMENTS

Judah actively pursued idolatry. Messengers were sent to far places to invite idolaters to come and teach them pagan rites. Like a harlot attempting to lure men into her house, Judah prepared for her lovers. She washed herself, put make-up about her eyes, bedecked herself with ornaments (v. 40), and then sat on a beautiful bed or couch⁸ at a sumptuous table. It was the custom at meals to burn incense and to rub oneself with scented oils

8. The allusion is to the ancient custom of reclining on couches during a meal.

after the meal. The adulterous Judah took the luxuries which God had bestowed on her and used those luxuries to advance the cause of idolatry (v. 41). Sounds of careless revelry were heard in Jerusalem. Thus were alliances formed with various nations, even with *common men* and *drunkards from the wilderness*, i.e., men of the most degraded type. With *bracelets* and *crowns* Oholibah sought to attract these worthless neighbors (v. 42).

To correctly judge the guilty sisters, Ezekiel must declare to them the abominations which they had committed (v. 36). What a record! Adultery both literal and spiritual, bloodshed, idolatry! Children who had been committed to God in the rite of circumcision were later *set apart to be devoured by* (i.e., sacrificed to) the god Molech (v. 37). Such gross pagan rites were deliberately scheduled for a sabbath day (v. 38). Human sacrifice at the high place of Molech was followed by a trip to the Temple of the Lord. Was this brazen hypocrisy, or evidence of seared conscience? In either case, their presence in the Temple was an affront to God (v. 39).

The two nations never seemed to tire of this profligacy. They persisted in their imported idolatries (v. 43). The immoral sisters had relations with any idolatrous cult which made any effort to enter the country. Oholah and Oholibah became like a harlot who is indiscriminate in her immoral conduct (v. 44). Compared to Jerusalem and Samaria, the Babylonians and Assyrians were righteous men. These "righteous men" were God's appointed judges over the adulterous sisters. Oholah and Oholibah were adulteresses and murderesses and were to be judged accordingly. The blood which stained the hands of the sisters was mainly that of innocent children slain in pagan rites (v. 45).

God was about to bring a great assembly of nations against Jerusalem. The holy city would be treated so mercilessly that it would become an object of horror and spoilation (v. 46). As under the Law of Moses, the adulteress (Jerusalem) would be stoned (cf. Deut. 13:10). The sons and daughters of Jerusalem would be thrust through with swords, and the houses of the city would be burned (v. 47). This drastic action would bring an

end to national lewdness (idolatry). Other women (surrounding nations) would take warning from the fate of Oholibah (v. 48) when Jerusalem received the recompense for her idolatrous harlotry (v. 49).

III. A SIGNIFICANT DATE 24:1-27

Chapter 24 begins with an important chronological note. According to verse one Nebuchadnezzar began his attack against Jerusalem in the ninth year (of Zedekiah), the tenth day of the tenth month.⁹ The Jews commemorated this date for centuries by fasting (Zech. 8:19). Ezekiel was told to write the name of the day of the week and the day of the month (*this very day*). This written record was to be made so that later when the news filtered back to the captives in Babylon the genuine prophetic foresight of Ezekiel would be authenticated. Three things of importance happened in the ministry of Ezekiel at the same time the siege of Jerusalem was beginning several hundred miles away. Ezekiel delivered a proclamation in the form of a parable on that day (vv. 1-14). On that very day Ezekiel lost his beloved wife (vv. 15-24). Finally, the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem marked the end of Ezekiel's divinely imposed dumbness (vv. 25-27).

A. The Parable of the Cooking Pot 24:1-14

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me in the ninth year, the tenth month, the tenth day of the month, saying, (2) Son of man, write for yourself the name of the day, this very day; this very day the king of Babylon has leaned upon Jerusalem. (3) Utter a parable against this rebellious house, and say unto

9. The same date is given in II Kings 25:1; and Jeremiah 52:4.

them; Thus says the Lord GOD: Set on the pot, set it on, and pour water into it. (4) Gather into it the pieces belonging to it, every good piece—the thigh and the shoulder; fill it with the choice bones. (5) Take the choice of the flock, and also pile the bones under it; boil it well, that its bones may boil in the midst of it. (6) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose filth is in it, and whose filth has not gone out of it! Bring it out piece by piece; no lot is fallen upon it. (7) For her blood is in the midst of her; upon the bare rock she set it; she did not pour it out upon the ground to cover it with dust; (8) to cause fury to go up, that vengeance might be taken, I have set the blood upon a bare rock, that it should not be covered. (9) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the bloody city; I also will make the pile great, (10) heaping on the wood, kindling the fire that the flesh may be consumed; and preparing the mixture that the bones may be burned; (11) then I will set it empty upon its coals, that it may be hot, and the bottom of it burn, that its impurity may be melted in it, that its filth may be consumed. (12) She has wearied (Me) with toil; yet its great filth shall not go out from it; its filth shall be in the fire. (13) Because of your filthy lewdness, because I purged you, and you were not purged from your uncleanness, you shall not be purged from your uncleanness anymore until I have satisfied My wrath on you. (14) I the LORD have spoken it; it shall come to pass, and I will do it; I will not go back, nor will I have pity, nor will I repent; according to your ways and according to your deeds they shall judge you (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

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

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

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

Openly and unashamedly crimes had been committed in Jerusalem. Evidence of bloodshed could be seen throughout the place. It was as though Jerusalem had smeared blood on a bare rock which was in plain view. The Law required animal blood to be poured to the ground and covered with dust (cf. Lev. 17:13). However no similar effort had been made to conceal the blood of humankind unjustly slain (v. 7). God would preserve those bloodstains in plain view that He might execute divine wrath on those responsible (v. 8).

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

that the pot itself was melted down and the *filth* thus removed (v. 11). Thus Jerusalem would be purified by the conflagration.

Efforts had been made from time to time to purge Jerusalem, but to no avail. God had become weary with these half-hearted and ineffective efforts. The uncleanness of the city could only be removed by the drastic process of melting down the caldron, i.e., destroying Jerusalem (v. 12). All efforts to reform the nation through prophetic admonition had failed. No further effort in that direction would be attempted. All that remained was for God to pour out His wrath and purge the place by total destruction (v. 13). Such is the irrevocable divine decree.¹⁰ The Lord would hand them over to the Chaldeans who would execute a judgment upon Jerusalem which was appropriate to her sins (v. 14).

B. The Death of Ezekiel's Wife 24:15-24

TRANSLATION

(15) And the word of the LORD came unto me saying, (16) Son of man, behold, I am about to take from you the desire of your eyes with a stroke; yet you shall not lament or weep, nor shall your tears come down. (17) Sigh silently; make no mourning for the dead, your headdress bind upon you, and your sandals put upon your feet, and do not cover your lip, and do not eat the bread of men. (18) So I spoke unto the people in the morning, and my wife died in the evening; and I did in the morning as I was commanded. (19) And the people said unto me: Will you not declare to us what these things are to us that you are doing? (20) And I said unto them, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (21) Say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold I am about to profane My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes, and the longing of your

10. The Hebrew uses the prophetic perfect, viewing the action as so certain it could be described as already completed.

soul; and your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind shall fall by the sword. (22) And you shall do as I have done; you shall not cover your lip, and you shall not eat the bread of men; (23) and your headdress shall be upon your heads, and your sandals upon your feet; you shall not lament nor weep; but you shall waste away in your iniquities, and moan one to another. (24) And Ezekiel shall be to you a sign; according to all which he has done you shall do; when it comes to pass you shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

COMMENTS

A shocking announcement was made to the prophet on that day when Jerusalem came under siege. It was an announcement which caused Ezekiel no little grief. *The desire of your eyes*—your wife—would die *with a stroke*, i.e., she would die suddenly without having been previously sick. The prophet was commanded to refrain from any lamentation or mourning rites (v. 16). He was to *sigh in silence*, i.e., to internalize his agony, and he was not to resort to the customary loud cries of lamentation. He was not to loosen his headgear to let his hair hang down covering his upper lip. He was not to remove his sandals nor *eat . . . the bread of men*, i.e., the mourner's meal supplied by friends and relatives (v. 17). What a difficult burden the Lord laid on His prophet. Ezekiel's silent grief was to symbolize the stupifying effect which the fall of Jerusalem would have on the Jews at home and abroad. They would be too stunned for customary expressions of grief.

Even though he knew his wife would die at any moment, Ezekiel continued his ministry of preaching. That evening his wife died. The next morning Ezekiel carried out the Lord's command to *sigh in silence* (v. 18). The people, perplexed by his strange behavior, sensed that the prophet was trying to convey some symbolic meaning to them. Thus they inquired concerning his conduct (v. 19).

In response to the inquiry of his fellow exiles, Ezekiel first

indicated that what he had been doing and what he was about to say came from God (v. 20). He had just suffered the loss of the desire of his eyes, the one he held most precious. The Jews were about to lose their Temple. The loss thus incurred is indicated in the text by three expressions which underscore the prominent place that sacred structure occupied in the hearts of the Jews. The Temple was (1) *the pride of your power*, i.e., that which guaranteed, so they thought, the invincibility of Jerusalem and permanence of their national existence; (2) *the desire of your eyes*, i.e., that which they held to be most precious; and (3) *the longing of your soul*, i.e., that which they most missed by being exiled to Babylon. That sacred spot was about to be profaned being delivered into the hands of heathen men. Along with the loss of that Temple the exiles would lose their *sons* and *daughters* who had been left behind in the doomed city (v. 21).

When the exiles would hear of the destruction of the Temple and the loss of their children, they would be thrown into shock, unable to observe the conventional mourning customs (v. 22). Added to the news of the unthinkable disaster in Jerusalem would be the pangs of guilty conscience. During that period of grief the once proud exiles would waste away in their iniquities. In almost inaudible expressions they would moan one to another (v. 23). In this way the Lord had appointed Ezekiel as a sign to the exiles. As the prophet had abstained from outward display of mourning, so also would the exiles. When all this came to pass—the news that Jerusalem had fallen and the Temple had been destroyed—they would know that the event had been decreed by the Lord (v. 24).

C. The Termination of Ezekiel's Dumbness 24:25-27

TRANSLATION

(25) And as for you, son of man, shall it not be in the day I take from them their stronghold, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, the longing of their soul, their sons and their daughters, (26) that the one who escapes in that day shall come

unto you to cause you to hear it with your ears? (27) In that day your mouth shall be open, together with the one who escaped, and you shall speak, and shall no more be dumb; and you shall be a sign to them; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

It is hard to understand the love that a Jew had for the Temple. It was their *stronghold* upon which they based their confidence of national permanence. It was the *joy of their glory*, the magnificent edifice of which they were so proud. It was *the desire of their eyes*,¹¹ that which they loved dearly. It was the *yearning of their soul*, that which above all they longed to see again. When that structure fell, and along with it their sons and daughters (v. 25), a fugitive of the slaughter would hasten to Babylon to bear the sad tidings (v. 26). In the day the news of Jerusalem's fall was announced, Ezekiel would no longer be dumb.¹² The message he had been preaching for so many years would thus be authenticated. His mission as a messenger of God would then be accepted by his fellow exiles (v. 27).

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why does Ezekiel refer to Jerusalem as a bloody city?
2. How would the Jews come to be *defiled of name*?
3. What examples of lewdness in Jerusalem does Ezekiel cite?
4. What was the fundamental or root sin of Jerusalem?
5. Why is God said to smite His hand? (22:13)

11. Some commentators take the phrase *desire of their eyes* to refer to the sons and daughters rather than the Temple.

12. The previous discussion of the dumbness of Ezekiel in 3:25-27 should be reviewed at this point.

6. What positive effect would the exile have on the sinful nation?
7. How were Jerusalem's prophets conspiring against God?
8. What charges does Ezekiel bring against the priests of his day?
9. What does it mean to *stand in the breach*?
10. Who were Oholah and Oholibah?
11. How was Oholibah more corrupt than her elder sister?
12. With what foreign powers did the two sisters commit harlotry?
13. Explain the parable of the cooking pot.
14. Why was Ezekiel forbidden to engage in public mourning at the death of his wife?
15. How does chapter 24 indicate the great love which Jews had for their Temple?
16. In what sense was Ezekiel's dumbness terminated when the news of Jerusalem's fall arrived?

Chapter Twelve

JUDGMENT ON NEIGHBORING NATIONS

25:1-17

Ezekiel devotes eight chapters of his book to oracles against foreign nations. Jerusalem had fallen. Yet before Ezekiel related this fact to his readers he recorded the revelation that God would some day judge the heathen nations and cities around Judah. He speaks of seven different nations in all. The small neighboring states of Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia are first denounced (25:1-17). In greater detail he denounced the two commercial centers of the day, Tyre and Sidon (26:1—28:26). The final blast is directed against Egypt (29:1—32:32). The Egyptian oracle itself breaks down into seven distinct oracles. The number seven here is not likely accidental. In prophecy seven is the number of perfection or completeness. Hence, God will completely and fully deal with the enemies of His people.

Some commentators express surprise that Babylon is not singled out in this section for condemnation. Ezekiel deliberately refrained from announcing the destruction of that nation, for to do so would have been too glaring a provocation. However, it did not demand great intelligence to conclude that if God was going to pour out His judgment upon these nations, Babylon surely could not altogether escape. Jeremiah already had written a lengthy condemnation of Babylon, so one from Ezekiel was unnecessary. Furthermore, an anti-Babylon oracle by Ezekiel might have stirred up the exiles to foolish resistance to the Babylonian government.

The foreign nation oracles are arranged topically rather than chronologically. Seven dates from 587 to 571 B.C. are mentioned in this section. About two years have elapsed since the last events and prophecies recorded in the book (cf. 24:1, 2 and 26:1). Arranged in chronological order the oracles in this section were delivered in the following sequence:

CHRONOLOGICAL SEQUENCE OF EZEKIEL'S FOREIGN NATION ORACLES			
Passage	Ezekiel's Dating (Year/Month/Day)	Modern Dating	Foreign Nation
29:1	10/10/10	January 7, 587 B.C.	Egypt
30:20	11/1/7	April 30, 587 B.C.	Egypt
31:1	11/3/1	June 21, 587 B.C.	Egypt
26:1	11/?/1	September 18, 587 B.C.	Tyre
32:1	12/12/1	March 4, 585 B.C.	Egypt
32:17	12/?/15	March 18, 585 B.C.	Egypt
29:17	27/1/1	April 26, 571 B.C.	Egypt

No dates are attached to the first four oracles. They are probably to be dated earlier than the first Egypt oracle.

Throughout history Israel experienced the hostility of the neighboring states of Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia. In the time of Jerusalem's dying agony these countries had tormented and mocked God's people. Their attitude toward Israel was also their attitude toward Israel's God. The four brief oracles in chapter 25 serve the double purpose of (1) declaring God's wrath on all arrogant people who mock Him; and (2) indicating to the repentant exiles that God was still concerned for His people in that He was punishing their enemies.

I. THE WORD AGAINST AMMON 25:1-7

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, set your face against the children of Ammon, and prophesy against them, (3) and say to the children of Ammon, Hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have said, Aha! against My sanctuary when it was defiled, and against the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and against the house of Judah when they went into captivity, (4) therefore, behold I am about to give you to the children of the east for a possession, and they will set their encampments among you, and they will make their dwelling places among you; they will eat your fruit, and they will drink your milk. (5) And I will make Rabbah a pasture for camels, and the children of Ammon for a resting place for flocks. Then you will know that I am the LORD. (6) For thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have clapped the hands, and stamped with the feet, and have rejoiced with all contempt in (your) soul against the land of Israel, (7) therefore, behold, I have stretched forth My hand against you, and I have given you for spoil to the nations. And I will cut you off from the peoples, and I will cause you to perish from the lands; I will destroy you. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

The Ammon oracle begins with the strongest possible declaration of inspiration: *and the word of the LORD came unto me* (v. 1). To this is added the directive to set his face against Ammon and prophesy against them (v. 2). This may have involved an actual facial expression, or it may simply indicate that the prophet was to deliver a negative prophecy. Ezekiel was to address the Ammonites as though he stood in their midst: *Hear the word of the Lord GOD* (Yahweh). Yahweh alone was Lord,

i.e., master (*adonay*), not Chemosh, the god of Ammon. To further underscore the Lordship of Yahweh and the authority of what follows, Ezekiel adds the traditional messenger formula: *Thus says the Lord GOD* (v. 3a).

The Ammonites had been vicious enemies of Israel since the time of the Judges (Jud. 10:9). Their ruthlessness is clearly indicated in the account of the siege of Jabesh-gilead (I Sam. 11). When the territories east of Jordan had fallen to Assyria, and the tribes there had been deported, the Ammonites had taken over the unoccupied area. Now that Jerusalem had fallen, they had designs on the western bank of the Jordan (cf. Jer. 41:10). They had chuckled *Aha* and gleefully watched from afar the desecration and destruction of Jerusalem's sanctuary at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar's agents. They had cast covetous eyes on the now desolate land of Israel once occupied by the house of Judah (v. 3).

For their arrogant pride and blasphemous intentions, God would bring swift judgment on Ammon. Ammon would be delivered over to the *children of the east*, i.e., marauders from the Arabian desert.¹ They would overrun the land, encamp within it, build their permanent dwellings there. These strangers would forcibly take from the Ammonites the fruit of their labor (v. 4). The capital city Rabbah would become a stable for the hoards of camels possessed by the desert invaders. The rest of the land would become grazing pasture for their flocks. The fulfillment of the predictions would vindicate Yahweh in the eyes of the Ammonites (v. 5). They would learn by bitter experience that God is not mocked.

There was yet more that the Lord had to say to Ammon. The Ammonites had rejoiced with utmost glee over the fate of the land of Israel and had outwardly manifested their joy by clapping the hands and stamping the feet (v. 6). Because of their attitude God would stretch out His hand against them, i.e., take active measures to assure their downfall. In four awesome and

1. In 21:28-32 Ezekiel had predicted Nebuchadnezzar would turn his wrath against Ammon after he had destroyed Jerusalem. Grider (*BBC*, p. 579) feels that the children from the east here are the Babylonians.

essentially synonymous "I wills"² God declared that Ammon's national existence would come to an end.

Ammon continued to exist as a nation until the second century before Christ. The great general Judas Maccabaeus launched an awesome attack against that people (I Macc. 5:6). Subsequent thereto the area of Transjordan was overrun by Bedouin Arabs. Today the area has been organized into the Kingdom of Jordan.

II. THE WORD AGAINST MOAB 25:8-11

TRANSLATION

(8) Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Moab and Seir have said, Behold, the house of Judah is like all the nations, (9) therefore, behold, I am about to open the flank³ of Moab on the side of the cities, its cities from its frontier,⁴ the glory of the land, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiriathaim, (10) and I will give it to the children of the east along with the children of Ammon for a possession in order that the children of Ammon may not be remembered among the nations. (11) So in Moab I will execute judgments; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

Ezekiel's attention next fell upon Ammon's brother and neighbor to the south, Moab. From the earliest times the Moabites had manifested hostility toward Israel. Balak, king of Moab, had attempted to curse the children of Israel just before the death of Moses (Num. 22-24). Legend has it that the Moabites slew the parents of David whom he had left there for safety

2. I will (1) deliver you for spoil; (2) cut you off; (3) cause you to perish; (4) destroy you.

3. Literally, *shoulder of Moab*, i.e., the side of Moab exposed to invasion.

4. Literally, *its end*.

during his flight from Saul (cf. I Sam. 22:3). The Moabites warred against Omri and Ahab,⁵ and the combined army of Jehoram of Israel and Jehoshaphat of Judah (II Kings 3). The region of Seir,⁶ jointly occupied by Moab and Edom, is included in the present oracle.

The sin of Moab and Seir was in failing to recognize the distinctiveness of Israel and, consequently, of Israel's God (v. 8). Israel no longer enjoyed the miraculous protection she had enjoyed in the past. Her God was no more able to protect her than were the gods of surrounding nations.

The judgment on Moab was similar to that of Ammon. The *children from the East* would push in out of the desert to occupy the cities of Moab—Beth-jeshimoth ("the house of waters"), Baal-meon ("house of Baal's habitation"), and Kiriathaim ("double city"; v. 9). Thus the desert raiders would dispossess the Moabites as well as the Ammonites (v. 10). These judgments would convince the Moabites that Yahweh of Israel was the powerful and almighty God (v. 11).

III. THE WORD AGAINST EDMON 25:12-14

TRANSLATION

(12) Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Edom's dealings with the house of Judah have been the result of vengeful conduct, and he has incurred enormous guilt by executing vengeance against them, (13) therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: I will stretch out My hand against Edom, and I will cut off from it man and beast. And I will make it a desolation from Teman; even toward Dedan they shall fall by the sword. (14) And I will put My vengeance in Edom by the hand of My people Israel, and they shall deal with Edom according to My wrath and according to My anger; thus they will know My vengeance (oracle of the Lord GOD).

5. The Moabite Stone records the boasts of the king of Moab in this respect.

6. *Seir* is not found in the Greek text of Ezekiel. Due to the fact that Seir is usually associated with Edom, rather than Moab, the Greek translators apparently deliberately omitted the word.

COMMENTS

The Edomites were descended from Esau. They occupied the territory south of the Dead Sea. Although the twins Esau and Jacob were reconciled during their lifetime (Gen. 33), their descendants were involved in perpetual hostilities. The Edomites had not allowed the Israelites to pass through their land in the days of Moses (Num. 20:14-21). Amos (1:11-12) and Obadiah⁷ condemned the Edomites for early attacks against Israel.⁸ Jeremiah lashed out against them (Jer. 49:7-11; Lam. 4:21, 22), and later Malachi would blast them (Mal. 1:2-5).

Edom's sin was a vengeful spirit toward the people of God. Apparently, at the time of the Babylonian invasion of Judah, the Edomites had seized the opportunity to get revenge against Judah. Thus they had committed a grave offense (v. 12).

For the crimes committed against His people God would stretch out His hand against Edom. Man and beast would be *cut off* from the land. Even Teman, one of the leading cities of Edom, would become desolate. The slaughter would extend south of Edom as far as Dedan⁹ (v. 13). The devastation of Edom would be wrought by the hands of the Israelites. Acting as God's agents, they would teach Edom the vengeance of the true Lord, Yahweh of Israel (v. 14).

As in most of the prophecies against foreign nations, the predicted demise of Edom occurred gradually. Edom proper fell into Arab hands in the fifth century B.C. In the third century B.C. the area was overrun by the Nabataeans. In the second

7. The date of Obadiah is in dispute among Bible scholars. Many scholars consider Obadiah as one of the earliest of the writing prophets. He may have been active during the reign of Jehoram of Judah (848-841 B.C.)

8. The historical record indicates that Israel had responded in kind to the viciousness of the Edomites (II Sam. 8:13; I Kings 11:15, 16; II Chron. 25:11, 12).

9. The Dedan most frequently mentioned in the Scripture was located in Arabia, about 300 miles southeast of Teman. Dedan is elsewhere mentioned in connection with Edom only in Jeremiah 49:8. Possibly Jeremiah and Ezekiel are referring to a settlement of Dedanites within the territory of Edom rather than to the famous caravan city of that name. On the other hand, the two prophets may be suggesting that the disaster which would befall Edom would sweep southward even to Dedan.

pre-Christian century the remnant of the Edomites were conquered by the Jewish general Judas Maccabeus (I Macc. 5:65). They were finally forced to accept circumcision and the Jewish faith. In this amalgamation the Edomites disappeared from history.

IV. THE WORD AGAINST PHILISTIA 25:15-17

TRANSLATION

(15) Thus says the Lord GOD: Because the Philistines have acted in revenge, and have taken vengeance with contempt in (their) soul to destroy with eternal enmity, (16) therefore, thus says the LORD: Behold, I am about to stretch out My hand against the Philistines, and I shall cut off the Cherethites, and destroy the remnant of the seacoast. (17) And I will execute great vengeance on them by acts of furious chastisement;¹⁰ and they shall know that I am the LORD when I execute My vengeance on them.

COMMENTS

The Philistines invaded Palestine about 1200 B.C. in the days of the Judges. They hailed from the island of Caphtor (Amos 9:7). Knowing the secret of smelting iron, they immediately gained the advantage over the Israelites who still fought and farmed with bronze weapons and implements. Samson fought valiantly against them, and Samuel inflicted upon them a stinging defeat (I Samuel 7:13). It was David, however, who broke their power. From that point on, in periods of strength Israel dominated Philistia, and in periods of Israelite weakness the Philistines broke free. During these periods of independence the Philistines did all they could to harass the Jews.

Ezekiel condemned the Philistines for their constant enmity against Judah. Filled with ruthless vengeance, they were determined to utterly destroy the people of God (v. 15).

God's mighty hand, which so recently had been stretched out

10. Rendering of the Berkeley Version; NASB, with *wrathful rebukes*.

against Jerusalem, would now be turned against these neighbors who had aided and abetted the Babylonians. The Philistines and the Cherethites¹¹ who lived among them would be destroyed. In fact all the *remnant of the seacoast* was to be destroyed (v. 16). God's vengeance against these people would take place in the form of *wrathful rebukes* (NASB) or *acts of furious chastisement* (BV). This suggests that the demise of the seacoast peoples would be the result of repeated blows (v. 17).

The fulfillment of this prediction began in the sixth century B.C. during the lifetime of Ezekiel. Gaza was attacked and destroyed by Pharaoh Hophra. Later the Babylonians devastated the land. During the intertestamental period the Jewish armies made several campaigns into the area¹² doing substantial damage.

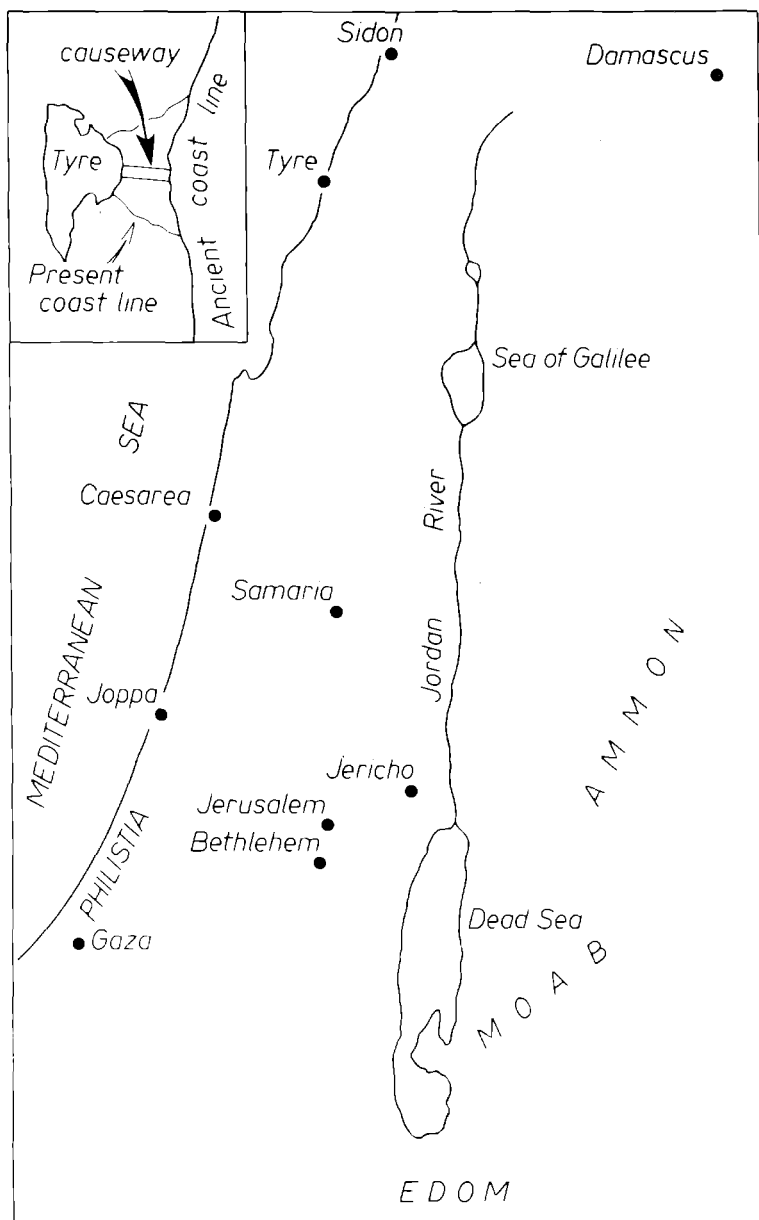
As one reads the four short oracles of chapter 25, one cannot help but recall the promise made to Abraham: "I will bless them that bless you, and curse them that curse you" (Gen. 12:3a). God always has been concerned about worldly attitudes and actions toward His people. People of the world are not in sympathy with God's program and plan. Ammonites who gloat over the misfortune of God's people are still in abundance. Modern day Moabites would secularize the people of God by refusing to acknowledge that He indeed has called out of the world a chosen people. The Edomites are illustrative of those who are vindictive and openly hostile toward God's people. The Philistines are those who act out their hatred and brutality toward God's people. The abiding message of this chapter is that God defends the honor of His people, and ultimately overthrows all who oppose His people.

11. It is thought that the Cherethites were a band of Cretan mercenaries brought to the south coast of Palestine by the Egyptians. David hired them for his personal bodyguards, and they proved intensely loyal to him. In this passage as well as Zephaniah 2:5, Cherethites are condemned along with Philistines. It is not clear whether these terms are synonymous, or whether separate peoples are intended.

12. I Macc. 5:68; 10:84; 13:47, 48.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why does Ezekiel devote so much attention to the fate of foreign nations?
2. Why does Ezekiel include no oracle against Babylon?
3. How many different nations does Ezekiel condemn? Any significance in this number?
4. How had Ammonite hostility toward Judah been manifested throughout the years? What about the hostility of Moab, Edom and Philistia?
5. For what sin was Ammon condemned? Moab? Edom? Philistia?
6. How does Ezekiel describe the judgment on Ammon and Moab? What would happen to Edom and Philistia?
7. What is the abiding lesson derived from Ezekiel 25?



Chapter Thirteen

JUDGMENT ON TYRE AND SIDON

26:1 — 28:26

The Phoenician seaport cities of Tyre and Sidon next come under the purview of the prophet. Tyre, the more important of the two cities, receives far more attention — seventy-six verses as compared to but four verses devoted to Sidon. The lengthy Tyre material is itself divided into four distinct messages. The first two speak of the city itself, the last two of the king of that city. H. L. Ellison has offered the interesting suggestion that Ezekiel saw in the fall of the commercial city of Tyre a picture of the fall of Babylon, a similar commercial metropolis.¹

I. THE DESTRUCTION OF TYRE 26:1-26

The Tyre material is dated to the eleventh year of Jehoiachin's captivity, the same year that Jerusalem fell the final time to the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. The month is not stated in the text, but it was likely the sixth month just after the destruction of Jerusalem. In terms of the modern calendar, Jerusalem was captured by the Chaldeans on July 29; the city was destroyed and burned on August 28, 587 B.C.² If it was the first day of the sixth month on which the oracles against Tyre were composed, the date would be September 18, 587 B.C.³

To appreciate the prophecies regarding Tyre, one needs to be familiar with some of the geography of the place. Tyre is located a mere thirty-five miles as the crow flies from the Sea of Galilee and only a hundred miles or so from Jerusalem. Ancient merchants would traverse this distance by camel in a few days. Tyre was situated in a most advantageous location on the Mediterranean Sea coast. The city possessed two excellent harbors,

1. Ellison, *EMM*, p. 100.

2. Finigan, *HBC*, p. 206.

3. In the eleventh year of Jehoiachin's captivity New Year's Day fell on April 23, 587 B.C. See Finigan, *ibid*.

one on the mainland where a portion of the city was built, and the other on an off-shore island where the main fortress was located. It was this rocky island that gave the city its Hebrew name *tsor*, "rock." The mainland city was connected to the island fortress by a causeway which was built by King Hiram in the tenth century before Christ. The island city helped double the trading capacity of Tyre as well as provide a last refuge for the citizens in time of attack.

The Phoenicians were the merchants of antiquity. Export products included glassware and dyed materials. A beautiful purple dye was made from a shellfish native to the area. Tyre was a prize which conquerors desired above all others. Tyre seems to have suffered less damage than the other states of Syria-Palestine during the Assyrian era, although she had to pay heavy tribute to maintain her commercial freedom.

The prediction of Tyre's destruction can be divided into four paragraphs each introduced by the traditional messenger formula, *thus says the Lord GOD*.

A. The Reason for and Extent of the Destruction 26:1-6

TRANSLATION

(1) And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the first day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,
(2) Son of man, because Tyre has said concerning Jerusalem: Aha, she who was the door of peoples is broken; it has turned unto me; I shall be filled with the one who has been laid waste.
(3) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring up against you many nations, as the sea causes its waves to come up. (4) And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre, and break down her towers; and I will scrape her dust from her, and make her a bare rock. (5) She shall become a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea; for I have spoken it (oracle of the LORD); and she shall become a spoil for the nations. (6) And her daughters who are in the field shall be slain with the sword; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

The first paragraph of the Tyre oracle is couched in the *because . . . therefore* pattern of the previous chapter. Tyre's offense was that she had gloated over the fall of Jerusalem. Jerusalem had been *the gate of the peoples*, a major trading center at the intersection of a large number of international trade-routes. The caravan tolls which once filled Jerusalem's coffers would come to Tyre now that the capital of Judah was laid waste. A bit of greed and selfishness is evidenced in the joyous exclamation, *I shall be filled* (v. 2). Because of this greed and arrogant pride the God of Israel declared Himself to be an adversary of Tyre (v. 3a).

Five specific predictions concerning the future of Tyre are contained in verses 3b-6.

1. Prediction One: Many nations would come against Tyre. Wave after wave of enemy soldiers would storm that place (v. 3). Commencing with the attack of Nebuchadnezzar, Tyre experienced at least five major assaults: Alexander the Great attacked the place in 332 B.C. and succeeded in conquering the city after a siege of seven months. Antigonus besieged Tyre in 314 B.C. and conquered the city after a siege of fifteen months. The Arabs captured the city in A.D. 636 and it was retaken by the Crusaders in A.D. 1124. Finally, the Arabs retook the city in A.D. 1291.

2. Prediction Two: Tyre would be made a bare rock. The proud walls and towers would be broken down (v. 4). Alexander the Great scraped the old mainland site of Tyre clean. With the debris and rubble he built a peninsula out into the sea by means of which he was able to make a land assault on the island fortress.

3. Prediction Three: Fisherman would spread their nets over the site of Tyre (v. 5). The dry rocky island would be a suitable place for such activity. The presence of fish nets implies fishermen. Hence, the prophet is not suggesting that the site of Tyre would be totally abandoned. A small fishing village exists upon

the ancient ruins of Tyre today.⁴

4. Prediction Four: Tyre would become spoil for the nations (v. 5b). History records that each successive wave of attackers enriched itself at the expense of Tyre. See also comments on prediction one above.

5. Prediction Five: Satellite towns and villages (*her daughters*) on the mainland would be *slain by the sword*, i.e., destroyed by warfare. Nebuchadnezzar took the mainland city of Tyre and the surrounding towns and villages during his campaign in that region.

All of the five blows mentioned above would befall Tyre for two reasons: (1) God had so decreed it in a solemn oracle, and He cannot lie (v. 5); and (2) the God of Israel would thereby be vindicated in the eyes of the Phoenician peoples (v. 6).

B. The Agents of Destruction 26:7-14

TRANSLATION

(7) For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am about to bring against Tyre Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, from the north, king of kings, with horses and chariots, horsemen, a company, even much people. (8) He shall slay with the sword your daughters in the field; and he shall make movable towers against you, and cast up a mound against you, and raise up shields against you. (9) And he shall set his battering rams against your walls, and your towers he shall break down by his axes. (10) Because of the multitude of his horses, their dust shall cover you; at the noise of his horsemen, wheels, and chariots your walls shall shake, when he enters into your gates as men would enter a city through a breach. (11) With the hoofs of his horses he shall tread down all your streets; he shall slay your people with the sword, and the pillars of your strength shall go down to the

4. Modern Tyre is not the original city, but was built down the coast from the original site.

ground. (12) And they shall make spoil of your wealth, and confiscate your merchandise; and they shall break down your walls, and tear down your delightful houses; and they shall put your stones, your timber and your dust in the midst of the water. (13) And I will cause the noise of your songs to cease, and the sound of your harps shall be heard no more. (14) And I will make you a bare rock; you shall become a place for the spreading of nets, you shall be built no more; for I the LORD have spoken (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

The generalized predictions regarding the fate of Tyre are amplified in verses 7-14. Particular attention is devoted to the role of Nebuchadnezzar. This constitutes the sixth distinct prediction in the Tyre prophecy.

6. Prediction Six: Nebuchadnezzar⁵ will destroy the mainland city of Tyre.

The Chaldean king is here called *king of kings* because he had dominion over dozens of vassal kingdoms (cf. Dan. 2:37; Ezra 7:12). Nebuchadnezzar would approach Tyre from the north around the hump of the Fertile Crescent. Armed to the teeth, Nebuchadnezzar's cavalry, chariotry and innumerable infantry would approach Tyre (v. 7). First, the mainland towns and villages—Tyre's daughters—would fall. The attack on the island fortress was to follow the standard siege tactics of that day. Forts or *siege towers* would be erected to allow the attacking soldiers to be elevated to the level of the wall where they could more easily engage the defenders. *Mounds* of earth and rubble were heaped up about the city to accomplish the same purpose. Large shields linked together provided protection for the besiegers (v. 8). *Battering rams* were used to

5. The name is spelled two ways in the Bible: (1) Nebuchadnezzar; and (2) Nebuchadrezzar. The latter spelling, which is closer to the actual Babylonian spelling, is used here in the Hebrew text.

attempt to penetrate the stone walls at which time axe-like swords would be used to destroy other fortifications (v. 9).

In hyperbolic language typical of such battle scenes, Ezekiel paints the picture of the coming conqueror. Clouds of dust generated by the approach of innumerable horses would billow up over the walls. The walls of the city would seem to shake from the pounding hoofs and speeding chariot wheels. The hostile conqueror would enter into the *gates* of the trembling city *as men enter into a city wherein is made a breach*, i.e., without resistance (v. 10).

Within the captured city a merciless slaughter would take place. Cavalry units would be dispatched down every street to slay all who might be found there. The sacred and symbolic pillars which had been erected in honor of the national god Melquart⁶ would come crashing to the ground (v. 11).

The destruction of Tyre was not to be accomplished by Nebuchadnezzar alone. Verse three already has alluded to the *many nations* which would be involved. This suggests that the destruction of Tyre would be spread over the centuries. Nebuchadnezzar did besiege Tyre, and his siege lasted thirteen years (587-574 B.C.).⁷ However, while he appears to have conquered the mainland suburbs of Tyre, he was never able to conquer the island fortress. Ezekiel was very much aware that Nebuchadnezzar would not be able to capture the entire city (29:17-20), and for this reason God would give to him the land of Egypt. Nonetheless, the long struggle exhausted the power and resources of Tyre, and its capitulation in 574 B.C. meant the end of Phoenician national life.⁸ During the Persian period Tyre lost its dominating position on the coast to Sidon. She also lost her most important trading colonies. However, Tyre continued to survive as a trading and shipping center throughout the Persian period.

An important shift in pronouns from *he* to *they* occurs in

6. Herodotus makes mention of two such pillars in the city of Tyre.

7. Josephus, *Antiquities* X.11.1; *Against Apion* I.21. No contemporary record of this siege remains.

8. Kapelrud, *IDB*, R-Z, p. 723.

verse 12. This is a point not to be overlooked. At this point the prophet begins to describe a second stage of Tyre's destruction. The first half of verse 12 amplifies a bit prediction four mentioned above; the latter half of the verse expands on prediction two. Verse 14a combines and repeats predictions two and three. The wealth of Tyre would fall into the hands of the enemy. The walls and luxurious houses would be torn down. The stone, timber and even the dust of the place would be pushed into the water of the Mediterranean Sea (v. 12). The joyous sounds of that once vibrant city would be silenced (v. 13). The island fortress would be nothing but a barren rock upon which fishermen would spread their nets.

The allusion in verses 12-14a is likely to the armies of Alexander the Great. The Macedonian conqueror attacked the city in 332 B.C. He rather easily conquered the mainland city as Nebuchadnezzar had done 250 years before. Alexander utterly demolished the place. Then by means of an imaginative strategy and an amazing engineering feat Alexander accomplished what Nebuchadnezzar had failed to accomplish; he conquered the island fortress. Using the debris from the mainland city he constructed a causeway half a mile long and two hundred feet wide across the straits. For a time the Tyrians resisted heroically, employing fire ships to damage the construction work and flinging pots of burning naphtha, sulphur and red-hot sand by means of catapults. Alexander was forced to quickly assemble a fleet of over three hundred ships to protect the construction crews and blockade the city. After about seven months the young general grew impatient with the entire operation. He finally ordered floating batteries to be constructed upon which rams were mounted. His naval vessels were able thereby to force their way into the two island harbors. His troops quickly scaled the walls and captured the city. Eight thousand citizens of Tyre were slaughtered, thirty thousand were sold into slavery, and later on another occasion two thousand were hanged.⁹ The mole which the armies of Alexander

9. Fuller, *EB*, XXII, 653.

built partly from houses and monuments torn down on the mainland, still remains connecting what formerly was an island to the mainland.

7. Prediction Seven: Tyre would never be rebuilt (v. 14b). Freshwater springs at the site of mainland Tyre would make the spot an ideal site for a modern city. But since the destruction by Alexander the *mainland* Tyre has never been rebuilt. Several successive cities were built on the site of what formerly was the island fortress of Tyre. Since the days of Alexander this island has become a man-made peninsula. After the *Phoenician* city of Tyre was conquered by the Moslems it was never rebuilt. The Phoenicians disappeared from history. The insignificant villages built by the Moslems on the site can in no wise be equated with *Phoenician* Tyre any more than a modern American city could be considered the resurrection of some ancient Indian village which might have once occupied the site. A further consideration is that a city in Bible days was not considered to be built (or rebuilt) until it had walls. A wall-less fishing village could not be considered a resurrection of ancient Tyre.¹⁰

C. The Result of Tyre's Destruction 26:15-18

TRANSLATION

(15) Thus says the Lord GOD to Tyre: Shall not the islands shake at the sound of your fall, when the wounded groan, when the slaughter occurs in your midst? (16) Then all the princes of the sea shall go down from upon their thrones, and remove their robes, and strip off their woven garments; they shall clothe themselves with trembling; upon the ground they shall sit, and shall tremble continually, and be appalled over you. (17) And they shall take up for you a lamentation, and they shall say to you: How sad that the one who was populated from the seas,

10. Hall (*WBC*, p. 437) feels the prophecy means only that subsequent cities built on the site would lack the greatness of Phoenician Tyre.

has been destroyed—the famous city, which was strong in the sea, she and her inhabitants, which caused their terror to be on all its inhabitants. (18) Now shall the islands tremble in the day of your fall; the islands which are in the sea shall be frightened because of your departure.

COMMENTS

A whole network of satellite trading colonies would be affected by the fall of Tyre. The coastal states along the Mediterranean would quake in consternation and dismay at the news of the fall of Tyre and the terrible slaughter which had transpired there (v. 15). Again using prophetic hyperbole, the prophet describes the rulers of these trading partners removing their royal robes and clothing themselves with *trembling*, i.e., they would take on the disposition and demeanor of mourners. They would sit on the ground trembling, visibly shaken by the news that such a powerful overlord had been destroyed (v. 16).

News of the demise of Tyre would evoke a lament from neighboring princes. *How sad it is*,¹¹ they would wail. The most famous and most powerful of all the seafaring people had been destroyed! (v. 17). If Tyre has fallen, who would be next? The shipping communities on the islands and coastlands of the Mediterranean would tremble as they contemplated their own prospects for survival (v. 18).

D. The Doom of Tyre 26:19-21

TRANSLATION

(19) For thus says the Lord GOD: When I shall make you a desolation, like the cities which are not inhabited; when I shall

11. The Hebrew *ech* (elsewhere *echah*) introduces a dirge.

bring up the deep upon you, and the great waters shall cover you; (20) then will I bring you down with them that go down to the pit, to the people of old, and I will make you dwell in the lower parts of the earth, like the places which are desolate from of old, with those who go down to the pit, in order that you may not be inhabited; and I will set glory in the land of the living. (21) I will make you a terror, and you shall be no more; though you be sought for, you shall never be found again (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

Tyre would become as desolate as an uninhabited city. The sea would wash over the bare rock that once was covered with the palaces of merchant princes (v. 19).¹² The prophet apparently thought of the sinking into the depth of the water as leading to the world of the dead that lay beneath them. Tyre would descend into the nether world—the *pit*—the abode of the dead.¹³ There she would join the *people of old*, the dead of former ages, the inhabitants of other cities left desolate. From the time of its destruction the city would not be re-inhabited. But while Tyre with all its pomp and power would exist only in the spirit world beyond, God would manifest His glory *in the land of the living*, i.e., in this present world. The everlasting kingdom of God in all of its power and glory would be established (v. 20).

God would use the destruction of Tyre to bring terror to the hearts of other pompous powers (*I will make you a terror*).¹⁴ The once proud metropolis would leave no trace of her former glory. Tyre would be in the abode of the dead. No one would be able to find her in the land of the living (v. 21). Two more

12. Massive walls about the fortress island kept the water of the sea at bay.

13. The image may have been suggested by Isaiah 14:9 where it is used of Babylon.

14. NASB renders, *I will bring terrors upon you*, which is a possible translation. This translation would raise the question as to whether the *terrors* referred to what transpired prior to the destruction of Tyre, or after Tyre descended into the *pit*.

specific predictions regarding Tyre come to view in the last two verses of chapter 26.

8. Prediction Eight: Tyre to be depopulated. *You will not be inhabited* (v. 20). Again, the prediction applies to *Phoenician* Tyre, not subsequent villages which may have had the same name or partially occupied the same site. See comments on prediction seven.

9. Prediction Nine: Tyre would never be found again (v. 21). Does the prophet mean to say that the city would be so destroyed that its very location would be lost? It is difficult to believe that the actual location of the city could be lost when it formerly occupied completely an island. Probably the meaning is that *Phoenician* Tyre once destroyed would never be found. The glorious and glamorous city would disappear forever.

II. THE LAMENTATION OVER TYRE 27:1-36

Chapter 27 consists of an allegorical dirge song artistically interrupted by a prose section. Tyre is pictured as a beautiful ship superbly fitted out and manned by a skilled crew (vv. 3-11). In the prose section the ship is said to stop at various ports to collect her cargo (vv. 12-25a). The ship becomes so laden with merchandise that she sinks into the depths of a stormy sea (vv. 25b-36). This exquisite composition stresses the abiding truth that worldly wealth is transitory and ultimately self-defeating to those who worship it.

A. The Ship Prepared for Sailing 27:1-11

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Now as for you, son of man, take up a lamentation over Tyre, (3) and say to Tyre, who dwells beside the entrances of the sea, merchant of the peoples unto many coastlands, Thus says the

Lord GOD: O Tyre, you have said, I am perfect in beauty. (4) Your borders are in the heart of the sea, your builders have perfected your beauty. (5) With fir trees from Senir they have constructed all the planks; cedars from Lebanon they have taken to make the most for you. (6) With oaks of Bashan they have fashioned your oars; your deck they made of ivory inlaid in boxwood from the coastlands of Cypress. (7) Of exquisitely embroidered work from Egypt was your sail, which served as your ensign; purple and blue from the coastlands of Elishah was your awning. (8) The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your rowers; your skilled men, O Tyre, were on board as pilots. (9) The elders of Gebal and her skilled men were on board as repairmen; ¹⁵ all the ships of the sea with their sailors were on board in order to barter for your merchandise. (10) Persia, Lud and Put were in your army, your men of war; shield and helmet they hung on you, they enhanced¹⁶ your splendor. (11) The sons of Arvad and your army were upon your walls round about, and the Gammadim were in your towers. They hung their shields upon your walls round about; they perfected your beauty.

COMMENTS

In 26:16f. the princes of the sea take up a lament over the fall of Tyre. Here Ezekiel is told to join them by lifting up¹⁷ a lament. Two phrases describe Tyre, the object of this lament. Tyre is addressed first as *she who dwells beside the entrances of the sea*. The plural *entrances* probably refers to the two sections of the harbor which were known respectively as "the Sidonian" and "the Egyptian" because of the directions which they faced. The second address to Tyre refers to her as *the merchant of the people unto many isles*. The far-flung trading colonies of the

15. Lit., *the strengtheners of your breach*.

16. Lit., *gave forth*.

17. This verb is always used in connection with a lamentation because it was uttered in a loud voice.

Phoenician city-states are one of the marvels of ancient history.

Tyre was a proud city. She boasted of her perfect beauty (v. 3). The boast was not without foundation. However, such national arrogance was the root of her downfall.

Because of her situation on a Mediterranean island, and because of her sea-faring enterprises, Tyre is likened to a ship which roams the seas. Her *borders were in the midst of the sea*.¹⁸ The builders had spared nothing to make that ship of state a magnificent vessel (v. 4).

The construction was sound. Planks of fir from Senir (Mt. Hermon, Deut. 3:9), masts of Lebanon Cedar, oars of Bashan¹⁹ oak, the decking material was made of boxwood (from Cyprus) inlaid with ivory (vv. 5-6). The sails were of the most costly Egyptian linen embroidered with distinctive colors so as to serve as an ensign for the ship. Her deck awning was of two shades of purple from Elishah.²⁰

The crew on board the good ship Tyre were also the finest in the world. The rowers hailed from Sidon and the island Arvad a hundred miles north of Sidon; the wisest men of Tyre²¹ were at the helm²² (v. 8); skilled craftsmen from Gebal²³ served as ship-carpenters (KJV, *calkers*; lit., *repairers of the seams*). Furthermore, all the navies of the world assisted her in the transference of her cargo (v. 9). The marines on board the ship were mercenaries from distant lands attracted, no doubt, by the handsome wages offered by the wealthy merchants of Tyre. They came from *Persia*²⁴ to the east, *Lud* (Lydia) in Asia Minor,

18. The Assyrians referred to the Tyrians as those who "dwelt in the midst of the sea." Prichard, *ANET*, pp. 296f.

19. Bashan was east of Jordan. The region was famous for its oaks (Isa. 2:13; Zech. 11:2).

20. Opinions differ on the location of Elishah. Some argue for a site on Cyprus; others for a Syrian location.

21. RSV has "corrected" the Hebrew text to read Zemer, a city associated with Arvad. Such arbitrary alterations of the text are unnecessary and unwarranted.

22. *Pilots*, lit., *rope pullers* or sailors.

23. Gebal (modern Byblos) supplied skilled craftsmen for work on Solomon's Temple (cf. I Kings. 5:32).

24. Persia is mentioned here for the first time in the Bible.

and *Put* (Punt) on the western coast of the Red Sea. The colorful shields and helmets of these soldiers were hung in awesome array along the sides of the good ship Tyre (v. 10). Add to this the presence of yet other armed personnel—the men of Arvad (see on v. 8), and the Gammadim, a people not elsewhere mentioned in the Bible. These soldiers, as well as the army²⁵ of Tyre itself, would hang their shields on the ship's sides to further enhance the splendor of the vessel.

B. The Ship in her Ports of Call 27:12-25a

TRANSLATION

(12) Tarshish was your client because of the abundance of all kinds of wealth; silver, iron, tin and lead they traded for your wares. (13) Javan, Tubal and Meshech were your trading partners; persons of men and vessels of bronze they traded for your merchandise. (14) Those from Beth-togarmah traded horses, war horses and mules for your wares. (15) The children of Dedan were your trading partners. Many coastlands were your market; horns of ivory and ebony they brought as your gift. (16) Aram was your client because of the abundance of your works; emeralds, purple, embroidered work, fine linen, coral and rubies they traded for your wares. (17) Judah and the land of Israel were your trading partners; the wheat of Minnith, cakes²⁶ honey, oil and balm they have traded for your merchandise. (18) Damascus was your client because of the multitude of your works, because of the abundance of all kinds of wealth, with the wine of Helbon and white wool. (19) Vedan and Javan traded for your wares from Uzal; iron, cassia and calamus were among your merchandise. (20) Dedan was your trading

25. *Your army* (NASB; KJV) is made a proper name in the RSV, *Helech* which is thought to be Cilicia. Such a rendering involves a change in the vowel points of the word in question.

26. The Hebrew is of uncertain meaning.

partner in saddle-cloths for riding. (21) Arabia and all the princes of Kedar were your clients; in lambs, rams, and goats, for these were they your clients. (22) The traders of Sheba and Raamah were your trading partners; the best of all kind of spices, and all kinds of precious stones, and gold they traded for your wares. (23) Haran, Canneh, Eden and the traders of Sheba, Assyria (and) Chilmad were your trading partners. (24) These were your trading partners in gorgeous fabrics, in cloth of blue and embroidered work and chests²⁷ of rich apparel, bound with cords and cedar-lined, among your merchandise (v. 25a). The ships of Tarshish were the carriers for your merchandise.

COMMENTS

The cities which traded with Tyre are given in geographical order in three groupings. The first group of cities consists of those which lie along the Mediterranean trade route. The list begins with *Tarshish* at the western end of the sea. Tarshish, a mining district in southern Spain,²⁸ was attracted by the wealth of Tyre to become one of her trading partners. They traded valuable metals for the export products of Tyre (v. 12). *Javan* is Greece; *Tubal* and *Meshech* were tribes in Asia Minor. With these regions Tyre trafficked in slaves (v. 13; cf. Joel 3:6) and copper ore²⁹ (v. 13). From Beth-togarmah (probably Armenia) Tyre secured horses, war horses,³⁰ and mules (v. 14). *Dedan* (island of Rhodes)³¹ traded with Tyre too. Many other islands

27. RSV and NAAB and BV render *carpets*; KJV renders *chests*.

28. Others have suggested that Tarshish may have been the Phoenician name for the ancient city of Nora in Sardinia.

29. The Hebrew *nechoshet* may refer to either copper, bronze (an alloy of copper and tin) or brass (alloy of copper and zinc). See *NBD*, p. 825.

30. *Parashim* frequently means *horsemen*. In some passages the word refers to the horses used with war chariots. Cf. Isa. 28:28; Jer. 46:4; Joel 2:4.

31. *Dedan* in verse 15 obviously is not the same as the Arabian Dedan mentioned in verse 20. The Septuagint (Greek version) preserves the tradition that this Dedan is the island of Rhodes in the Mediterranean. Some think that a port on the Persian Gulf is meant.

were part of Tyre's commercial network (*the mart of your hand*). Vessels of ivory and ebony were paid as tribute to Tyre for the privilege of belonging to this commercial community (v. 15). These products would come from the African interior via the Phoenician traders on the coast of North Africa.

*Aram*³² (Syria) provided Tyre with precious stones and beautiful fabrics (v. 16). *Judah* exported agricultural products to Tyre—wheat,³³ cakes,³⁴ honey, oil and balm. Damascus supplied Tyre with the finest wine, the wine of Helbon, and white³⁵ wool (v. 18). *Vedan*³⁶ was probably an Arab city. *Javan* here in verse 19 may refer to a Greek colony in Arabia. Both cities are said to export the trading merchandise from *Uzzal*³⁷—iron bars,³⁸ perfume (*cassia*) and sweet cane (*calamus*).³⁹ The entire nineteenth verse is difficult to translate and opinions differ widely on its meaning. From Arabian *Dedan*, Tyre received saddle-cloths (v. 20). The nomadic *Arabs* and the *princes of Kedar* were famous for their flocks (cf. Isa. 60:7). They supplied Tyre with livestock (v. 20). *Sheba* in southwest Arabia and *Raamah*, thought to be along the Persian Gulf, were famous trading people (cf. Job 6:19). Gold, precious stones and aromatics were among the items these traders bartered with Tyre (v. 22).

The next three “ports” mentioned were located in Mesopotamia. *Haran*, a stopping point in Abram's migration (Gen. 12:4) was an important commercial center on the main trade route from Babylon to Syria. *Canneh* is probably to be identified

32. Some Hebrew manuscripts and the Septuagint read *Edom*. In Hebrew, only a small curve in one letter makes the difference between *Aram* and *Edom*.

33. *Minnith* was an Ammonite town (cf. Jud. 11:33) which apparently sent wheat as tribute to Judah (cf. 11 Chron. 27:5).

34. The Hebrew word *pannag* occurs only here and is of doubtful meaning. It has been rendered *Pannag* (KJV), *early figs* (BV; RSV); and *cakes* (NASB). Some kind of foodstuff is intended.

35. Exact translation uncertain.

36. Could also be translated *and Dan*. *Vedan* has conjecturally been identified with Aden or Waddan near the Arab city of Medina.

37. Several Hebrew manuscripts and the Septuagint support this translation.

38. Again the exact meaning is uncertain. KJV has *bright iron*.

39. Cassia and Calamus were ingredients of anointing oil (cf. Ex. 30:23f.).

as Calneh (Gen. 10:10) otherwise called Calno (Isa. 10:9), a city in Babylonia. *Eden* is known on Assyrian inscriptions as Bit-Adini which occupied both sides of the Euphrates river due south of Haran. Through these trading centers the merchandise of *Sheba* (see previous verse), *Asshur* (Assyria) and *Chilmad* (location unknown) moved toward Tyre (v. 23). The Mesopotamian trading partners brought to Tyre *gorgeous fabrics* (lit., *things perfected*), *cloaks* of blue and richly woven work, and beautiful cedar chests containing other kinds of luxurious wearing apparel (v. 24). The list concludes with a reference to the ships of *Tarshish* (see verse 12) which brought their dues to Tyre, the queen of the merchant marine (v. 25a).

C. The Ship Sinking Beneath the Waves 27:25b-36

TRANSLATION

(25b) So you became full and very heavy⁴⁰ in the heart of the seas. (26) Into great waters your rowers have brought you; the east wind has broken you in the heart of the seas. (27) Your wealth, your wares, your merchandise, your sailors, your pilots, your repairmen and your merchant men, all your men of war which were on board, with all your company that is in your midst, will fall into the heart of the seas in the day of your collapse. (28) At the sound of the cry of your pilots the countryside will shake. (29) All who handle the oar, the sailors, all the pilots of the sea shall come down from their ships, shall stand upon the land, (30) and shall cause their voice to be heard over you, and shall cry bitterly, and shall cast dust upon their heads, wallow in ashes; (31) and they shall make themselves bald because of you, and gird themselves with sackcloth; and they shall weep over you in bitterness of soul, with bitter mourning. (32) Moreover in their wailing they shall take up a lamentation

40. NASB, *very glorious*.

for you, and they shall lament over you: Who is like Tyre, like she that is silent in the midst of the sea. (33) When your wares went out from the seas, you satisfied many peoples; with the multitude of your wealth and your merchandise you enriched the kings of the earth. (34) Now you are broken by the seas in the depths of the waters; your merchandise and all your company have fallen in your midst. (35) All the inhabitants of the coastlands are appalled over you, and their kings are horribly afraid; they are troubled in their countenance. (36) The merchants among the people whistle in astonishment over you; you have become a terror, and you will be no more.

COMMENTS

Through all this commercial activity the good ship Tyre became overloaded *in the midst of the sea*, in the very place where she was thought to be supreme (v. 25b). Into the deep and dangerous open sea the sailors have rowed the vessel. There she would meet disaster. The east wind (cf. Ps. 48:7) stirred up the waves and battered the ship until it broke apart under the pressure (v. 26). All was lost—the merchandise, and all the individuals associated with transporting and protecting it (v. 27). The countryside⁴¹ (KJV, *suburbs*) which had supplied so many of the personnel on board would shake at the desperate cries of Tyre's crew sinking beneath the waves (v. 28). World-wide shipping would come to a halt as sailors paused on land to express sympathy for the departed Queen of the Seas (v. 29). The lament would be bitter, and accompanied by all the outward signs of mourning which were customary in the ancient world—dust on the head, baldness, sackcloth (vv. 30-31).

Verse 32 introduces a rather unusual lament within a lament (cf. 27:2). What other city could be compared to Tyre that now lies silent in a watery grave (v. 32). In their lament the sailors emphasize the benefits which Tyre had brought to the kings of

41. Literally, *the open spaces*.

the earth (v. 33). Her exports along the shipping lanes had contributed to international wealth. But now the sea had rebelled against her mistress, and the good ship Tyre with crew and cargo had gone to the bottom (v. 34). Other seafaring peoples now feared for their own future. The outward signs of sympathy for Tyre were but a mask to conceal the selfish fears that they too might experience a similar fate (v. 35). Merchants throughout the world would express their astonishment by hissing (whistling; v. 36).

III. THE PRINCE OF TYRE 28:1-19

The three chapters dealing with Tyre conclude with a vigorous attack against the prince of Tyre for his claims to deity. This attack is not to be interpreted personally of any one Tyrian king.⁴² Rather the king of Tyre becomes an embodiment of the entire nation. The attitude of the prince was that of the city and vice versa. This section divides naturally into two parts: (1) the death of the prince (vv. 1-10); and (2) the dirge over the prince (vv. 11-19).

A. The Death of the Prince 28:1-10

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me saying, (2) Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre: Thus says the Lord GOD: Because your heart is lifted up, and you have said, I am God, I sit in the seat of God in the heart of the seas; yet you are a man and not God, even though you consider yourself as wise as God.⁴³ (3) Behold, you are wiser than Daniel; no secret can be hidden from you! (4) By your wisdom and understanding you have

42. It is conjectured that Ithobal II was ruler of Tyre in the days of Ezekiel.

43. Literally, *you set your heart as the heart of God*.

acquired for yourself wealth, and you have amassed gold and silver in your treasuries. (5) By your great wisdom in your trading ventures you have increased your wealth, and your heart is lifted up because of your wealth. (6) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Because you considered yourself as wise as God, (7) therefore, behold, I am about to bring strangers upon you, the most ruthless of the nations, and they shall bring their swords against the beauty of your wisdom, and defile your splendor. (8) They shall thrust you down to the pit, and you shall die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas. (9) Will you still say before the one who slays you, I am God, although you are a man and not God in the hand of those who wound you? (10) You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers; for I have spoken (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

Obnoxious haughtiness and national arrogance were the besetting sins of Tyre. The prince of Tyre is pictured as exalting himself to the position of God. His island fortress in the midst of the sea he regarded as a divine abode. The splendor of the place combined with its richness and isolation caused the proud monarch to regard his realm as not of this world—*the seat of God*. In his *heart* (intellect) he considered himself as smart as God Himself. Yet in reality this pompous ruler was only a man, subject to all the frailties and limitations of the flesh (v. 2).

The prince's claim to wisdom is not denied by the prophet. Daniel was famous for his piety (14:14) and for his wisdom.⁴⁴ In the latter quality the prince of Tyre exceeded Daniel. Ezekiel is probably speaking sarcastically here. Like Daniel who could understand the dark mysteries of dream revelations, no secret could elude the prince of Tyre (v. 3). His wisdom in commercial transactions had resulted in the amassing of wealth into the

44. One can sense in Ezekiel's references to Daniel a humble respect. Daniel for Ezekiel was the epitome of righteousness and wisdom.

treasuries of Tyre (v. 4). However, as is so often the case with those who know material success, the prince's heart was lifted up because of those riches (v. 5).

Because the prince of Tyre regarded his intelligence as equal to that of God (v. 6), he was destined to face the wrath of the God of Israel. Foreigners—the most ruthless of the nations—would come against Tyre. All which the prince of Tyre had acquired through his wisdom would fall to the invading forces. The splendor of the king, considered by himself to be God-like, would be profaned by the sword (v. 7). The prince himself would die in the attack. His island fortress would afford no protection. He would go down to the pit (grave) with all those slain in battle (v. 8). Will the vainglorious, self-deified prince still proclaim his deity in the face of execution by the blade of the enemy? Obviously not! Gods do not bleed! The humanity of the prince would be perfectly obvious in that day (v. 9). In death all men realize their humanity. The once proud prince would be treated with the contempt reserved for uncircumcised men.⁴⁵ He would be dishonored and unlamented with no outward sign of reverence (v. 10). What a way for a “god” to go!

B. The Lament over the Prince 28:11-19

TRANSLATION

(11) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (12) Son of man, lift up a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him: Thus says the Lord GOD: You had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. (13) You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering:

45. It is unclear whether the treatment of the uncircumcised would be accorded the dead body of the prince in this world, or in Sheol, the realm of the dead. The Phoenicians practiced circumcision until their contact with the Greeks in the fourth century. The *death of the uncircumcised* is a threat of violent death, marked by the absence of God's care and concern. See Hall, *WBC*, p. 441.

ruby, topaz, diamond, beryl, onyx, jasper, lapis lazuli, turquoise, and emerald; and the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, was in you. On the day you were created they were prepared. (14) You were an anointed guardian cherub; and I placed you on the holy mountain of God; you walked about in the midst of the stones of fire. (15) You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, until iniquity was found in you. (16) By your many trading ventures you were filled with violence and you sinned; therefore, I have cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I have destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. (17) Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you have corrupted your wisdom on account of your splendor. I have cast you to the ground before kings that they may gaze upon you, (18) By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trading ventures you have profaned your sanctuaries; therefore, I have brought out a fire from your midst; it has consumed you, and I have made you to become ashes upon the ground in the eyes of all who see you. (19) All who know you among the people shall be appalled at you; you have become a terror, and you will be no more.

COMMENTS

Ezekiel 28:11-19 is one of the most obscure passages in the Old Testament. The text is notoriously difficult. God ordered Ezekiel to lament the death of the king of Tyre. Such prophetic laments are anticipatory of the calamity which would occur in the near future. In carrying out this command Ezekiel was partially fulfilling his ministerial commission (cf. 2:10).

The overall thrust of this passage is clear; the details are not. Ezekiel is comparing the fall of the king of Tyre to the fall of Adam.⁴⁶ Both fell from a position of prominence and privilege

46. It is not impossible that Ezekiel here is alluding to a pagan version of the paradise story. This would account for both the similarities and differences between this passage and Genesis 2-3. However, no such Canaanite paradise account has been found.

to death and disaster. The passage refers *only* to the king of Tyre, not to Satan.⁴⁷ The language is poetic and highly metaphorical and figurative.

The lament has two distinct divisions of thought. In verses 12-15a the prophet describes the person and position of the king of Tyre; and in verses 15b-19, his sin and sentence.

1. *The person and position of the king (28:12-15a)*. The king of Tyre is likened to the first inhabitant of Paradise. He is depicted as perfect in physical form (*you had the seal of perfection*⁴⁸), intellectual capabilities (*wisdom*) and *beauty* (v. 12). At least this was his own self-estimate. He occupied a paradise *in Eden* known as *the garden of God* (or a garden of gods). This garden dweller was not naked as was Adam in the Biblical Garden of Eden. Rather he walks in his garden wearing a luxurious robe or breastplate on which were nine⁴⁹ precious stones displayed in the most exquisite settings of gold.⁵⁰ It seemed that his magnificent garb had been prepared especially for the garden dweller from the day of his creation, (i.e., his enthronement) (v. 13).

The figure changes a bit in verse 14. The king of Tyre is now likened to a cherub.⁵¹ Cherubim in the Old Testament are always

47. Several of the early Church Fathers suggested that Satan is in view here. Among the modern scholars who have set forth this position are Barnhouse, Chafer and Scofield.

48. The translation of the NASB has been followed. Literally the Hebrew reads, *the one sealing (the) measure*. The RSV gives another possible rendering, *the signet of perfection*, i.e., a seal that everyone recognizes as the pattern for others.

49. The nine stones enumerated are identical with those which were set in three of the four rows of the breastplate of the High Priest (Ex. 28:17-20). The Septuagint adds three stones which are omitted in the Hebrew text to complete the set of twelve. However, the stones in the Hebrew text are not listed in the same order as they appeared on the High Priest's breastplate, and there is no reason to think that Ezekiel had that breastplate in mind.

50. The KJV renders, *the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes*, a reference to his musical instruments. This translation is not impossible. Keil (*BCOT*, I, 409) renders *the service of your timbrels and of your women* which he takes to be a reference to the festivities when the king took over the harem of his predecessor.

51. Most commentators follow the Septuagint in reading, "you were *with* the anointed cherub."

depicted as guarding something. Cherubim guarded the entrance to the original garden (Gen. 3:24), so the king guarded his paradise, Tyre, spreading his wings over the place like the cherubim who guarded the ark of God in the Tabernacle and Temple. The king is said to have been *on the holy mountain of God*⁵² (v. 14). The phrase is probably synonymous with the *garden of God* and would be a further description of Tyre situated on its rocky isle. The garden dweller walked in the midst of *the stones of fire* (v. 14). The most popular view is that the expression *stones of fire* refers to the lightning which issues forth from above the towering mountain of God⁵³ (cf. Ex. 19:16; Ps. 18:8, 12).

2. *The sin and sentence of the king (28:15b-19)*. Before his vast wealth filled his heart with pride, the king of Tyre was *perfect*, i.e., no fault could be found with his conduct as a ruler. However, *unrighteousness* was found in the character of this king (v. 15) eventually. Increasing commerce led to increasing corruption. The midst of Tyre was filled with goods taken by violence, i.e., force of arms or fraudulent business tactics. He who was "anointed guardian cherub" over this city must bear the blame for what transpired there. Thus because of his sin of profaning the garden spot in which God had placed him, the prince of Tyre, like Adam of old, must be thrust forth from paradise. Holiness and purity are essential to those who might aspire to dwell in the *mountain of God*. The fallen prince must be stripped of his royal rank and insignia. He would be removed from the midst of the stones of fire, the flashing thunders and lightnings of divine majesty which had protected him. He would cease to be the protector of Tyre, the *guardian cherub* (v. 16).

At the root of the fall of the king of Tyre was pride. The king's heart was lifted up because of his *beauty* and *brightness*, his splendor and magnificence. The *wisdom* with which the

52. The mountain of the gods was important in ancient Near Eastern mythology. This was the mountain where pagans believed their gods assembled to determine the decrees of fate (cf. Isa. 14:13).

53. Cook (ICC, II, 318) contends that the stones of fire are gems which give splendor and brilliance to the garden.

prince of Tyre had been endowed was corrupted by arrogance. "True wisdom cannot be exercised where there is a spirit of arrogance."⁵⁴ Therefore, the prince of Tyre would be humbled, cast down to the ground. There on the ground the fallen prince would be the object of wonderment, sadness and perhaps even some gloating by the kings of the earth (v. 17).

The multitude of iniquities committed through unrighteous business dealings had *profaned* the sanctuary,⁵⁵ the garden of God, the mountain of God, in which this king ruled. The evil in the midst of Tyre would be like a fire that would reduce the place to a pile of ashes (v. 18). The fall of the once proud city and its pompous prince would send shock waves throughout her commercial empire. Never again would Phoenician Tyre be rebuilt (v. 19).

IV. THE RIVAL OF TYRE 28:20-24

TRANSLATION

(20) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (21) Son of man, set your face against Sidon, and prophesy against her, (22) and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold I am against you, O Sidon, and I will be glorified in the midst of you; and they shall know that I am the LORD when I execute judgments in her, and manifest My holiness in her; (23) for I shall send into her pestilence and blood in her streets; and the slain shall fall in the midst of her, by the sword upon her on every side. Then they shall know that I am the LORD. (24) And there shall be no more for the house of Israel a pricking brier nor a piercing thorn of any that are round about them, who treated them with contempt; and they shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

54. Fisch, *SBB*, p. 192.

55. The Hebrew text reads plural, *your sanctuaries*; but several manuscripts, the Syriac and Targum read singular. If the plural is original it is probably a plural of amplification, meaning something like sanctuary *par excellence*.

COMMENTS

Not only would Tyre experience the wrath of the living God, her rival to the north would fall as well. In early times Sidon was larger and more prestigious than Tyre. But from the eleventh to the fourth century B.C. Tyre controlled, almost without dispute on the part of Sidon, the affairs of Phoenicia. In Biblical prophecy the two cities are closely connected (cf. Isa. 23). As far as the Hebrew prophets were concerned, Tyre and Sidon were "seaside partners in sin."⁵⁶ However, Sidon was sufficiently independent from Tyre to justify a separate oracle, sufficiently identified with Tyre not to call for any longer oracle. No indication of Sidon's offenses is given in this oracle; but it is assumed that her sins were the same as those of Tyre and required a similar punishment.

God declares that He is an adversary of Sidon as well as of Tyre. By dispensing a just judgment on this city, God would be vindicated. He would receive glory and He would be sanctified (reverenced) as a result of such activity (v. 22).

Sidon would experience the pestilence which usually accompanied ancient sieges. When the enemies breached the walls the blood would flow in her streets. The slain would fall in heaps⁵⁷ (v. 23). When all of this occurred men would acknowledge that the doom of Sidon had not occurred by chance, but was an act of God (v. 24). Such judgments would serve the purpose of removing all source of danger, opposition, and ridicule (*a pricking brier, a piercing thorn*)⁵⁸ to the people of God. In time past Israel had been wounded by those thorns and briars, i.e., had been tainted by the wicked worship and lascivious life of these Canaanite neighbors. But in the future restoration the corrupting Canaanite influence would be forever removed.

56. Grider, *BBC*, p. 582.

57. A rare form of the verb *fall* is used in this verse which probably denotes intensity.

58. The same words are used in Numbers 33:55 of the Canaanite peoples. Ezekiel applies the terms to the Phoenician cities which were the last vestige of the old Canaanite culture.

The bloody history of Sidon after the time of Ezekiel⁵⁹ can be summarized as follows:

1. Sidon was devastated during Nebuchadnezzar's thirteen-year siege of Tyre (587-572 B.C.).

2. With the fall of Babylon, Sidon regained some of its old importance. For a time the city served faithfully the new Persian world rulers. However, in 351 B.C. the Sidonians revolted against Artaxerxes II Ochus. In the face of the siege of the Persian monarch the king of Sidon fled, leaving the city to its fate. The city fathers ordered all ships in the harbor to be destroyed to prevent any flight by the citizens. More than forty thousand are said to have lost their lives when the city was sacked and burned.

3. Sidon meekly surrendered to Alexander the Great in 333 B.C.

4. Under the Seleucid rulers, Sidon again attained a rather independent status.

5. In 64 B.C. Pompey imposed Roman rule throughout Phoenicia. Sidon still flourished, but its importance gradually vanished.

6. In the days of the crusades Sidon was taken and retaken several times by opposing forces.

7. Under Turkish rule the site of Sidon continued to suffer tribulation. In 1840 Sidon was bombarded by the combined fleets of England, France and Turkey.

8. The modern Arab city of Saeda (population, 50,000) which occupies the site of ancient Sidon, has not escaped the bloody religious warfare which erupted in Lebanon in 1976.

59. The city was destroyed by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon in 677 B.C. long before the time of Ezekiel. However, Sidon grew up again. For a time (609-593 B.C.) the city was dominated by the Egyptians. Nebuchadnezzar conquered the place in 593 B.C.

V. THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL 28:25-26

TRANSLATION

(25) Thus says the Lord GOD: When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and I manifest My holiness in them in the eyes of the nations, then they shall dwell upon their land which I gave to My servant Jacob. (26) And they shall dwell safely upon it, and they shall build houses and plant vineyards; yea, they shall dwell safely when I have executed judgments on all those who treated them with contempt round about them. Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God.

COMMENTS

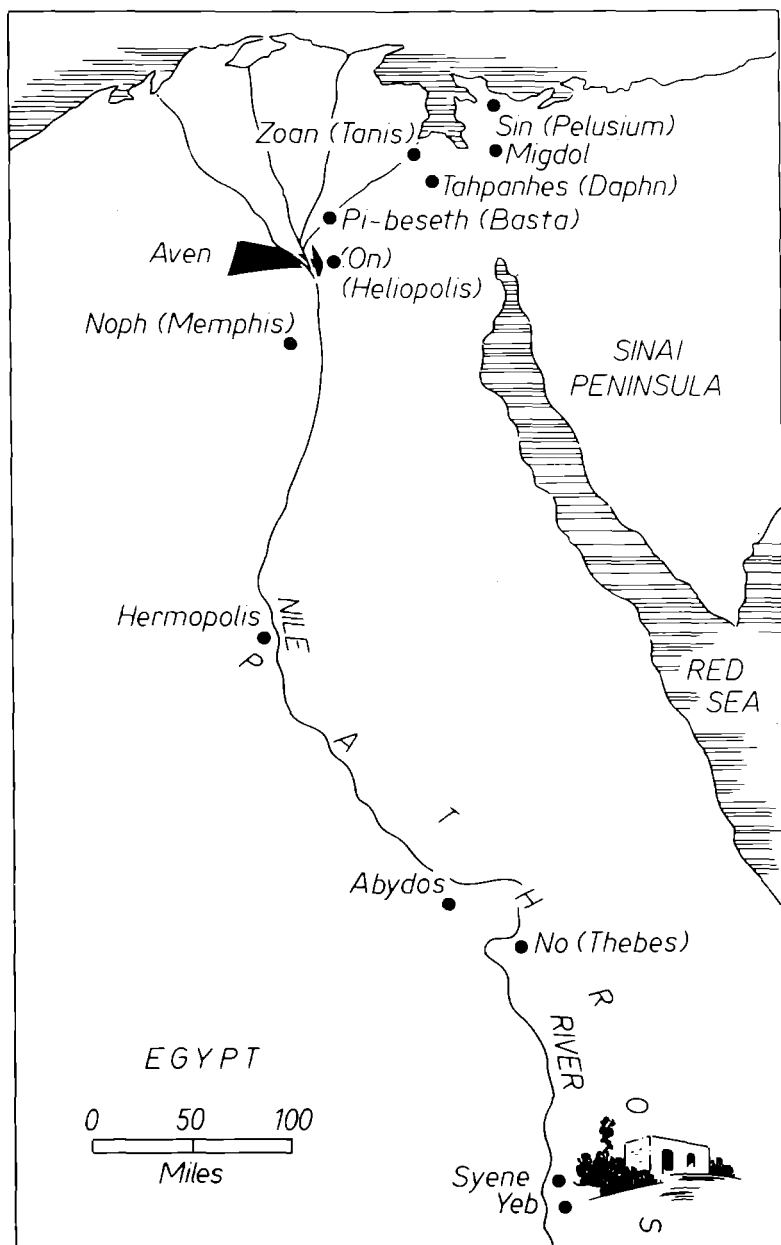
In contrast to the bloody future of Sidon is the glorious future of God's people Israel. God will gather His people from the foreign lands to which they have been scattered. God's servant Jacob (a name for the nation Israel) would again dwell on the land God had given him (v. 25). With hostile neighbors removed, Israel would dwell in safety and give herself over to peaceful pursuits (v. 26). All that God does for Israel is done with one grand purpose in view, viz, that all the world might acknowledge Him as the one true and living God—that He might be *sanctified* (reverenced, revered) in the eyes of the nations (vv. 25-26). The wonderful thoughts embraced in the last verses of chapter 28 are developed at length in chapters 33-48.

As a footnote to the Tyre and Sidon oracles it may be pointed out that Jesus once passed through the region (Matt. 15:21), and probably, according to the best text of Mark 7:24, actually trod the streets of Sidon. Some of the great multitude which heard Him teach in Mark 3:8 came from these two Phoenician cities. Jesus remarked that it would be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for the faithless cities of

Galilee (Matt. 11:21; Luke 10:13). In this statement Jesus seems to be affirming that the day of judgment had not yet fully come to the two cities even though they had suffered much before His time. Jesus may be referring to the Roman campaigns in the region of Palestine in the latter part of the seventh decade A.D. Jerusalem was destroyed in that judgment; Tyre and Sidon survived.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. List five specific predictions made against Tyre. How was each fulfilled?
2. Who does Ezekiel name specifically as an agent of Tyre's destruction?
3. What damage did Alexander the Great inflict upon Tyre?
4. Has the prediction about Tyre never being rebuilt been fulfilled literally?
5. What effect would the fall of Tyre have on her trading allies?
6. To what does Ezekiel liken Tyre in his allegorical dirge song?
7. What comparison is made between Daniel and the king of Tyre?
8. Why did the king of Tyre consider himself deity?
9. What comparison is made between the king of Tyre and Adam?
10. Why do some scholars think that the fall of Satan is being described in 28:11-19?
11. In what sense did the king of Tyre dwell in "the garden of God"? In what way could he be compared to a cherub?
12. What was the "mountain of the gods" in pagan mythology?
13. What was the bloody fate of Sidon?
14. In contrast to the destiny of Tyre and Sidon, what did Ezekiel foresee for the people of God?
15. How did Tyre and Sidon figure in the ministry of Jesus?



Chapter Fourteen

THE ECLIPSE OF EGYPT

29:1 — 32:32

In the four chapters devoted to Egypt Ezekiel speaks seven "words" from the Lord. All but one of these "words" are given specific dating. Why such a large section devoted to this one heathen power? Because the affairs of tiny Judah were so intertwined with that of the superpowers of the sixth century. Egypt had been very much involved in encouraging Judah's final revolt against Babylon. The main point stressed by Ezekiel and the other Hebrew prophets is that the final destiny of Israel was in the hands of God, not the hands of human monarchs. Furthermore, the prophets dared to preach what was in their day a revolutionary doctrine: even the destiny of the superpowers was determined by God—and God was Yahweh! Israel might be little; but Israel's God was great to the ends of the earth. Israel appeared to be only a pawn in the hands of political strategists; but Israel's God was powerful, and in reality those strategists were but pawns in His hand. Thus the oracles against Egypt—and others like them—were not merely designed to vent the frustrations and hostilities which Israel felt toward her neighbors. These oracles served to underscore vital points of theology—the sovereignty, omniscience and omnipotence of Israel's God.

In chapters 29-32 ninety-seven verses are devoted to the fall of Egypt, more verses than are contained in I Peter, more than II Timothy and more than are in Paul's letter to the Colossians. With the exception of one paragraph these chapters were written during the years 587-585 B.C. The chapters follow a similar pattern: a general threat against Pharaoh under some allegorical designation; amplification of the general threat with regard to the instrument of punishment, the destruction of the country and the disposition of its inhabitants; a description of the effect which the fall of Egypt would have on other nations.

I. THE SINS OF EGYPT 29:1-16

TRANSLATION

(1) In the tenth year, in the tenth month, in the twelfth day of the month, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt; (3) speak and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great monster that lies in the midst of his rivers, that has said, the river is mine, and I myself made it. (4) And I will put hooks in your jaws, and make the fish of your rivers to cling to your scales; and I will bring you up from the midst of your rivers, and all the fish of your rivers will cling to your scales. (5) And I will cast you into the wilderness, you and all the fish of your rivers. Upon the face of the open field you will fall; you will not be gathered nor brought together. To the beasts of the land and the fowl of the heavens I have given you for food. (6) And all the inhabitants of Egypt will know that I am the LORD, because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel. (7) When anyone takes hold of you with the hand you broke and tore every shoulder;¹ and when they lean upon you, you broke and made all their loins stand up.² (8) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I bring upon you a sword, and I will cut off from you man and beast. (9) And the land of Egypt shall become a desolation and a waste. Then shall they know that I am the LORD; because he has said, The river is mine, and I made it. (10) Therefore, behold I am against you and against your rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from Migdol to Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia. (11) No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, and it shall not be inhabited forty years. (12) And I will make the land of Egypt a desolation in the midst of lands that are desolate. And her cities

1. Some manuscripts read *hand*.

2. NASB, *quake*; RSV, *shake*.

in the midst of cities that are laid waste shall be desolate forty years; and I will scatter Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them through the lands. (13) For thus says the Lord GOD: At the end of forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the peoples among whom they were scattered. (14) And I will turn the fortunes of Egypt, and will cause them to return to the land of Pathros, to the land of their origin; and they shall be there a lowly people. (15) It shall be the lowliest of all kingdoms, and she shall not lift herself up again over the nations; and I will diminish them so that they shall no more rule over the nations. (16) And it shall never again be the confidence of the house of Israel bringing to remembrance iniquity, when they turned after them; and they shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

COMMENTS

The first word against Egypt is dated, according to the modern calendar, to January 7, 587 B.C. This was almost exactly a year after the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem began (cf. 24:1), and seven months earlier than the preceding oracle against Tyre (v. 1). This oracle emphasizes the pride of Egypt, and the desolation which God would bring on her for her arrogance.

Ezekiel was to *set his face against Pharaoh*³ in a gesture of defiance (v. 2), and announce God's hostility toward him. Pharaoh is called *the great dragon that dwells in the midst of the rivers*. The reference is to the crocodile, and to the various branches of the Nile river in northern Egypt. The wealth—and in fact the very existence of Egypt—depended upon the Nile river. Like the prince of Tyre, Pharaoh regarded himself as more than human. He thought of himself as the creator of all the wealth and prosperity of Egypt. This is undoubtedly what he means when Pharaoh declares that he owns the river, and in fact had created it.

3. The current Pharaoh was Hophra (Jer. 44:30), fourth king of the twenty-sixth dynasty who reigned 589-570 B.C.

Pharaoh would fall prey to his enemies. Like a crocodile drug from the river by captors, so Pharaoh would be removed from his domain by his enemies. Along with all his people, allies and mercenaries (*fish of the river which stick to your scales*; v. 4). There on dry land—the wilderness—the crocodile and fish joined to it would die. No one would gather up the carcass of the crocodile for burial. The birds and beasts of prey would devour the remains (v. 5). In this demise of Pharaoh the Egyptians would recognize a divine judgment (v. 6a).

Another metaphor for Egypt is introduced in verse 6. Egypt had proved itself to be *a staff of reed⁴ to the house of Israel*. In Israel's moment of need, when Nebuchadnezzar was literally banging on the gates of Jerusalem, Egypt had failed to send effective aid. This is a clear allusion to the half-hearted assistance which Pharaoh Hophra offered in response to King Zedekiah's appeal for help (cf. Jer. 37:7). The Egyptian foray into Palestine brought only a temporary lull in the siege of the city. This most recent example of the unreliability of Egypt had occurred only six to eight months prior to this oracle, in the summer of 588 B.C. Once again Israel had found to be true through bitter experience what the prophets had emphasized in public exhortation. If one tried to make Egypt his crutch, he was destined for a fall. That crutch would break causing those who were dependent upon it to fall and dislocate their shoulder. They would then have to stand erect (*make all their loins to stand erect*), and carry their own weight (v. 7).

Because of Egypt's arrogance God would bring *a sword* upon that land, resulting in the destruction of man and beast (v. 8). The fertile land of Pharaoh would be left desolate and waste. Then what would become of the boast that he had made about owning and making the Nile! The gods of Egypt having been discredited, knowledgeable people would be forced to acknowledge the sovereignty of Yahweh (v. 9). God was about to assume

4. Just over a century earlier an Assyrian officer gave Egypt a similar description—*a bruised reed . . . which if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it* (Isa. 36:6).

an active role as the adversary of Egypt. He would lay waste the land from north to south (*Migdol*⁵ to *Syene*⁶), even as far as the Ethiopian border (v. 10).

The extreme desolation of Egypt as a result of the invading army is set forth in verses 11-12. Even animals would desert the land owing to the lack of pasture (v. 11). In comparison to other countries ravished by war Egypt would stand out as a most unfortunate land (*desolate in the midst of countries that are desolate*). Egyptian cities would be *laid waste*, i.e., in a ruinous condition and unpopulated for *forty years*. During that time the Egyptians would be scattered among the nations (v. 12).

The reference to the forty years of Egypt's desolation has occasioned lengthy discussion among the commentators. No evidence of mass deportation of Egyptians subsequent to the time of Ezekiel has yet come to light. However, it is known that Nebuchadnezzar made at least two invasions into Egypt. The Jewish historian Josephus tells of an invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar five years after the fall of Jerusalem (582 B.C.). In this invasion the king of Egypt was killed. A fragmentary inscription from the archives of Nebuchadnezzar tells of an invasion of Egypt in the thirty-seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar (i.e., 568 B.C.). It appears that Nebuchadnezzar was aiming to cripple Egypt so as to prevent Pharaoh from ever again meddling in Syria-Palestine. Since it is known that deportations of captive peoples was a standard procedure employed by great empires of that time, one is certainly on safe ground in assuming that it was the Chaldean king who fulfilled the prediction that God would scatter the Egyptians among the nations.

Keil regards the forty years as a symbolic period — the period denoted by God for punishment and penitence. However, it is best to regard the forty years as a definite historical epoch. The forty years of Egypt's desolation may be said to fall between 568 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land, and 530 B.C. In the latter year the Persians entered the land. It may have been

5. Migdol (*Tower*) was a frontier fortress at the northeast border of Egypt (cf. Ex. 14:2; Jer. 44:1).

6. Modern Aswan near the Ethiopian border.

they who initiated the policy of reconstruction in Egypt even as they encouraged reconstruction in Judaea (v. 13). However, positive evidence is lacking at this point.

God said through Ezekiel that He would *turn the captivity of Egypt*. After the forty years Egyptians would *return into the land of Pathros*, the southern part of the land known as Upper Egypt. This was the land of their origin, i.e., the area in which the Egyptian government first rose to prominence. But the restored Egypt would only be a shadow of the glorious kingdom which once graced the banks of the Nile (v. 14). No more would Egypt be able to dominate other peoples. Egypt would be inferior to all other nations (v. 15). No more would Egypt allure Israel into disastrous alliances. Israel would not repeat the great mistake of her past which was trusting in Egypt rather than in God. Israel in that future day would know assuredly that Yahweh is God (v. 16).

II. THE PRIZE OF EGYPT 29:17-21

TRANSLATION

(17) And it came to pass in the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, in the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (18) Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyre; every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled; yet neither he nor his army received any wages from Tyre for the service which he performed against it; (19) therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am about to give to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon the land of Egypt; and he shall carry off her abundance, take her spoil and seize her prey; and she shall be the wages for his army. (20) I have given him the land of Egypt as his hire for which he served, because they did it for Me (oracle of the Lord GOD). (21) In that day I will cause a horn to shoot up unto the house of Israel, and I will give you the

opening of the mouth in the midst of them; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

The second Egypt oracle dates to New Years day (April²⁶) 571 B.C. (v. 17). It is the latest oracle in the entire book. The placement here is appropriate, however, because the oracle connects the invasion of Egypt with the cessation of the Babylonian siege of Tyre which took place about 574 B.C.

Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre for thirteen years, and in so doing he had rendered a great service to God. His soldiers were weary with that warfare. Bald spots worn by ill-fitting helmets marked the heads of the besiegers. The skin of their shoulders was raw from carrying heavy loads of timber and stone to construct the siege works. But in spite of his determined effort to cross the narrow arm of the sea and reach the island fortress, Nebuchadnezzar had been unsuccessful.⁷ Neither he nor his troops had been enriched through the spoils of war which generally made a lengthy siege operation rewarding (v. 18).

To compensate Nebuchadnezzar for the service he rendered at Tyre, God decreed that he should be given the land of Egypt.⁸ The spoils of that great north African nation would fall into the hands of the Chaldeans (v. 19). Nebuchadnezzar was entitled to this booty, for all that he had done at Tyre he had done in the service of the Lord (*they worked for me*; v. 20).

A Babylonian force invaded Egypt in 568 B.C. Owing to the damaged state of the inscription which alludes to this campaign it is impossible to accurately gauge the success of the effort. It is known that Pharaoh Ahmose II came to terms with the invaders.

7. What exactly took place at Tyre is uncertain. Ezekiel does not actually say Nebuchadnezzar was unsuccessful there. He only indicates that the material reward for his siege efforts was not sufficient.

8. Jeremiah also foretold Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt. Cf. Jer. 43:8-13; 46:1-25.

In 29:21 Ezekiel indicates three results of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt: (1) a *horn*, symbol of power and prosperity would spring forth for the house of Israel. This prophecy seems to be saying that Israel's restoration would correspond to Egypt's humiliation. Egypt's period of humiliation ended in 530 B.C. Israel's period of restoration began some eight or nine years earlier when Cyrus allowed the Jews to return home. (2) Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt in 568 B.C. would cause Ezekiel's dumbness to be removed. His prophetic ministry would be vindicated. No longer would he feel his tongue restrained by the skepticism of his people. (3) They would know that Yahweh is God, and that He truly had revealed Himself to Ezekiel His messenger (v. 21).

III. THE IMMINENT FALL OF EGYPT 30:1-19

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, prophesy, and say: Thus says the Lord GOD: Wail, woe be the day! (3) For the day is near, yes the day of the LORD is near, a cloudy day, it shall be the time of the nations. (4) And a sword shall come upon Egypt, and consternation shall be in Cush, when the slain shall fall in Egypt; and they shall take away her abundance, and her foundations shall be broken down. (5) Ethiopia, Put, Lud, all the mingled peoples, Cub, and the children of the land that are in league, shall fall with them by the sword. (6) Thus says the LORD: those who uphold Egypt shall fall, and the pride of her strength shall come down; from Migdol to Syene they shall fall in her by the sword (oracle of the Lord GOD). (7) And they shall be desolate in the midst of lands that are desolate, and her cities in the midst of cities that lie in ruins. (8) And they shall know that I am the LORD when I place a fire in Egypt, and all her helpers are shattered. (9) In that day messengers shall go from before Me in ships to terrify the secure Ethiopians; and confusion shall come on them in the day

of Egypt; for behold, it comes. (10) Thus says the Lord GOD: I will cause the multitude of Egypt to cease, by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. (11) He and his people with him, the most ruthless of the nations shall be brought in to destroy the land, and they shall empty their swords against Egypt, and fill the land with the slain. (12) And I will make the rivers dry, and I will deliver the land into the hand of evil men; and I will make the land and all that is in it desolate by the hand of strangers; I the LORD have spoken. (13) Thus says the Lord GOD: I will destroy the idols, and cause the non-entities to cease from Noph; and there shall no longer be a prince out of the land of Egypt; and I will put a fear in the land of Egypt. (14) And I will make Pathros desolate, and set a fire in Zion; and I will execute judgments in No. (15) And I will pour out My wrath upon Sin, the stronghold of Egypt; and I will cut off the multitude of No. (16) And I will set a fire in Egypt; Sin shall be in great upheaval, and No shall be torn asunder; and against Noph adversaries shall come by day. (17) The young men of Aven and of Pi-beseth shall fall by the sword; and these (cities) shall go into captivity. (18) At Tehaphnehes the day will withdraw itself, when I break there the yokes of Egypt, and the pride of her strength shall cease in her; as for her, a cloud shall cover her, and her daughters shall go into captivity. (19) Thus will I execute judgments in Egypt; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

This prophecy against Egypt is likely to be dated the same as the previous one (see 29:1). The section consists of four carefully constructed oracles. In the first oracle the Egyptians are directly addressed and urged rhetorically to wail over their fate. Egypt's day of reckoning looms on the horizon (v. 2). The day of the Lord—divine judgment day—will be a cloudy, gloomy day for the Gentile nations (v. 3). Egypt will be invaded in that day. Her satellite state Ethiopia will fear for her own safety when she sees what transpires across the border in Egypt. The

foundations of Egypt — the allies and mercenaries — upon whom the Egyptian state rested would be broken down (v. 4). Ethiopia (Cush), Put, Lud (see on 27:10) and Cub, a people not as yet identified, had alliances with Egypt. The multi-racial character of the Egyptian army is indicated by the expression *all the mingled people*. However, those helpers would fall by the sword of the invaders (v. 5).

Throughout the land of Egypt, from Migdol to Syene (see on 29:10) the slaughter would occur. Egypt's pride was in her military and economic power. However, this pride would be humbled (v. 6). Desolation would follow invasion (v. 7; cf. 29:12). The desolation caused by war here, as frequently in the Bible, is likened to *fire*. The fulfillment of this prediction to bring conflagration to Egypt would be a demonstration of the sovereignty of the true God (v. 8). In the day of Egypt's downfall messengers would be dispatched as though by God Himself. Traveling the waterways to every part of the land of Ethiopia, the messengers would spread the alarming news of Egypt's fall. Consternation and confusion would fill their land as they contemplated the possibility that their own country might be invaded.

In the third oracle Ezekiel emphasizes that the native population (*multitude of Egypt*) as well as the mercenary forces would perish in the overthrow of Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar is specifically named as the conqueror (cf. 29:19). He and his ruthless warriors (cf. 28:7) would leave a trail of corpses wherever they went (v. 11). The much heralded Egyptian irrigation system would be destroyed by the *evil men*, i.e., the pitiless and lawless troops, who comprised Nebuchadnezzar's army. Without irrigation the land would become (temporarily) desolate (v. 12).

In the fourth oracle (vv. 13-19) Ezekiel employs a typical prophetic technique of emphasis by enumeration. The complete collapse of Egypt is underscored by reference to the fate of the leading cities of the land. These verses reveal an amazing knowledge of Egyptian geography.⁹

9. For other examples of geographical enumeration in a judgment context see Isaiah 10:27-32; Micah 1:10-15; Zephaniah 2:4.

A new theme emerges in verse 13. The gods of Egypt would prove worthless in the face of the mighty conqueror raised up by the Lord. Noph (Memphis) was famous for its numerous gods and elaborate temples, especially those of Ptah and Apis. But the worthless (lit., *things of naught*) images would be made to cease from Noph. So it has happened. An enormous, albeit prostrate, figure of Pharaoh Ramases is the only image of note to mark the spot where once stood the magnificent capital of Egypt. Wilbur Smith summarizes the situation well when he writes:

The temples of Egypt and the elaborate carvings and drawings of her gods and goddesses are still the wonder of modern students; but her gods are gone. No temple to an Egyptian god or goddess has a priest in attendance today; no offering is presented to any of these once powerful deities representing the sun, the stellar bodies, the river Nile, and the underworld; no one bows the knee to any of these ancient images.¹⁰

Following her destruction, Egypt would never again be ruled by a native prince. So it has been. Persians, Greeks, Ptolemies, and Romans ruled Egypt in olden times. Today Egypt is ruled by Moselms who invaded the land in A.D. 638.

The other place-names in these verses deserve brief comment. Pathros is southern or Upper Egypt extending as far south as Aswan. *Zoan*, classical Tanis, was an important city in the eastern Nile delta. *No* (or No-Amon) is classical Thebes (RSV), modern Karnak and Luxor, located about five hundred miles south of Cairo. No was capital of Egypt during much of Egyptian history, and worship center for the sun-god Amon (v. 14). Three prophecies are made about this proud city: (1) God will execute judgments there (v. 14); (2) multitudes of No would be cut off, i.e., the place would be uninhabited (v. 15); and No would be *rent asunder*, i.e., breached and penetrated by an invading army.

Sin (vv. 15, 16) is probably Pelusium (RSV) on the Mediterranean coast. This stronghold guarded Egypt from attack from

10. Wilbur Smith, *EBP*, p. 115.

the north. *Aven* (v. 17) is also called On in the Old Testament. In Greek times it was known as Heliopolis, the city of the sun god. The ruins are found in the outskirts of modern Cairo. *Pi-beseth* (v. 17) is the modern Basta about forty miles northeast of Cairo. Like the other cities mentioned in verses 13-18, Pi-beseth was a cultic center. The cat was particularly sacred here. *Tehaph-nehes* (v. 18), spelled Tahpanhes in Jeremiah, was known to the Greeks as Daphni. The modern Tel Defenneh on the Suez canal is the spot to which Ezekiel refers. Jeremiah was taken here after the assassination of Gedaliah (Jer. 43:7).

What a dark day that would be for Egypt! A great cloud of despair would hover over that land. *The yokes of Egypt*—the tyranny which Egypt inflicted on other nations—would be broken. The daughters of Egypt, i.e., her various cities, would go into captivity (v. 18). The ultimate purpose of these judgments was the vindication of the sovereignty of Israel's God (v. 19).

IV. THE FALL OF PHARAOH 30:20-26

TRANSLATION

(20) And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the first month, in the seventh day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (21) Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and behold, it has not been bound up to be healed, to put a bandage that it be bound up to become strong that it hold a sword. (22) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and I will break his arms, the strong, that which was broken; and I will cause the sword to fall out of his hand. (23) And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them through countries. (24) And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and I will put My sword in his hand; but I will shatter the arms of Pharaoh, and he shall groan with the groanings of the slain before him. (25) And I will uphold the arms of the king

of Babylon, but the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down; and they shall know that I am the LORD when I put My sword in the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall stretch it out against the land of Egypt. (26) And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them through the lands; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

About four months before the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, (April 30, 587 B.C.) Ezekiel received another revelation against Egypt (v. 20). Pharaoh's arm had been broken. The allusion is probably to the defeat of Pharaoh Hophra when he tried to come to the aid of beleaguered Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 37:1-10). Nebuchadnezzar had inflicted irreparable damage upon the military machine of Egypt (cf. II Kings 24:7). Pharaoh's arm, symbol of his military might, would not and could not be mended. Never again would he attempt to launch a military offensive against Nebuchadnezzar (v. 21).

This defeat at the borders of Judah indicated that God was opposing Pharaoh. That setback signaled the beginning of a succession of defeats. Both of Pharaoh's arms, the good one and the bad one, would be broken. The sword would drop from his hand. Egypt would be rendered completely powerless (v. 22). Egyptians would be scattered among the nations (v. 23; cf. 29:12; 30:26). The king of Egypt would decrease, while the king of Babylon would increase in power. Before the advancing army of Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh would appear as helpless as a mortally wounded soldier (v. 24). The king of Babylon would wield the sword of divine judgment against the helpless land of Egypt (v. 25). The dispersement of the Egyptians would establish the sole divinity of Israel's God (v. 26).

V. THE GREAT CEDAR TREE 31:1-18

This oracle follows the preceding one by some two months. The date according to the present calendar would be June 21, 587 B.C. (v. 1). In the first unit of this chapter Egypt is likened to a cedar (vv. 2-9). This poetic comparison is followed by two prose oracles describing the downfall of the magnificent tree at the hands of foreigners (vv. 10-14) and its descent into Sheol (vv. 15-18).

A. The Description of the Cedar 31:1-9

TRANSLATION

(1) And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the third month, in the first day of the month that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, say unto Pharaoh king of Egypt and unto his multitude: Unto whom would you compare yourself in greatness? (3) Behold, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon with beautiful branches, a foliage that provided shade, and a high stature; and its top was among the thick boughs. (4) Waters nourished it, the deep made it grow; her rivers ran around about her plantation, and she sent forth her channels unto all the trees of the field. (5) Therefore, its height was exalted above all the trees of the field; and its boughs were multiplied, and its branches became long, because of the many waters when it put them forth. (6) In its boughs all the birds of the heaven made their nests, and under its branches all the beasts of the field bring forth young, and in its shadow all great nations dwell. (7) Thus it was fair in its greatness, in the length of its branches; for its root was by many waters. (8) The cedars could not hide it in the garden of God; the cypress trees could not compare to its boughs, and the plane trees were not like its branches; no tree in the garden of God could compare to it in beauty. (9) I made it beautiful by the multitude of its branches, and all the trees of Eden which were in the garden of God were jealous of it.

COMMENTS

Pharaoh and his multitude (the Egyptian people) thought themselves to be incomparably great and powerful, yet they would not escape the judgment of God (v. 2). Assyria was once a lofty Lebanon cedar encircled at the top by leafy and thick boughs (v. 3). The subterranean reservoir of waters (the *deep*) sent forth a river to nourish the cedar, and smaller rivulets to water the other trees (v. 4). As a result, the cedar (Assyria) grew taller, stronger and more luxurious than the other trees (nations; v. 5). All the fowl of the heavens and beasts of the field—symbolic of the peoples of the earth—passed under the control of Assyria (v. 6). Receiving constant nourishment from many waters, the Assyrian cedar continued to spread out its branches—to annex additional territories (v. 7). There were other great trees in the *garden of God*, i.e., the world; but none of them could compare to that mighty cedar (v. 8). That tree attained its stature and beauty from the God of Israel. It was an enemy of all the other trees which God had planted in His Eden, i.e., in the world (v. 9).

B. The Downfall of the Tree 31:10-14

TRANSLATION

(10) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Because you were exalted in height, and he has set his top among the thick boughs, and his heart was lifted up in his height; (11) therefore, I will give him into the hand of the mighty one of the nations; he will surely deal with him in the midst of his wickedness; I have driven him out. (12) And strangers, the most ruthless of the nations, have cut him off, and have cast him down; upon the mountains and in all the valleys his branches have fallen, and his boughs are broken in all the channels of the land; and all the peoples of the earth have gone down from his shadow, and have left him. (13) Upon his carcass all the birds of the heavens shall

dwell, and upon his boughs every beast of the field; (14) to the end that no tree by the waters shall exalt itself in its height, nor set its top among the thick boughs, nor their mighty ones stand up in their height, even all who drink water; for they are all given over to death, unto the lower parts of the earth, in the midst of the children of men, with those who go down to the pit.

COMMENTS

Because the Assyrian had manifested such arrogant pride (v. 10) God would deliver him into the hand of *the mighty one of the nations*, i.e., Nebuchadnezzar. The Assyrian would be driven out of the garden of God as surely as Adam had been driven out of primeval Eden (v. 11). The most ruthless of foreign invaders (cf. 28:7) would fell that cedar and abandon it as something useless. The boughs of that once glorious tree—the Assyrian armies—would be broken and dispersed about the countryside. Those vassal states which had resided in the protective shadow of Assyria would now desert their master (v. 12). The birds and beasts would feed upon the dead bodies of the Assyrian soldiers (v. 13). All of this would befall Assyria so that other trees (nations) in the world would not be tempted to follow her example. Nations, like men, are mortal; they die. They depart the scene of history to descend, as it were, into Sheol—the pit—the abode of the dead (v. 14).

C. The Descent of the Cedar 31:15-18

TRANSLATION

(15) Thus says the Lord GOD: In the day he went down to Sheol I caused the deep to mourn and cover over him, and I held back her rivers, and the great waters were stayed; and I caused Lebanon to mourn over him, and all the trees of the field fainted for him. (16) At the sound of his fall I caused the nations to

shake, when I brought him down to Sheol with those who go down to the pit; and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, were comforted in the lower parts of the earth. (17) They also went down with him to Sheol unto those who were slain by the sword; and they who were his arm, who dwelt in his shadow, in the midst of nations. (18) To whom are you like in glory and greatness among the trees of Eden? Yet you shall be brought down with the trees of Eden unto the lower parts of the earth; you shall lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword. This is Pharaoh and all his multitude (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

The fall of Assyria caused a great upheaval in the world. Even *the deep* from which all the nations of the earth were watered was plunged into mourning.¹¹ The rivers which formerly nourished the great tree (cf. v. 4) now had dried up. All the trees of Lebanon—other notable nations of the time—*fainted* in fear for their own safety (v. 15). Previous world powers (*all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon*) were comforted by the thought that now Assyria had joined them in the lower parts of the earth—in Sheol the realm of the departed (v. 16). The allies of Assyria (*they that were his arm*) were destroyed once their protector was gone. They too joined their once proud master in the most disgraceful of deaths (*them that are slain by the sword*; v. 17).

In the final verse of chapter 31 Ezekiel drives home the application of his lengthy allegory. If the giant Assyrian cedar has been cut down, how can Egypt hope to escape? Pharaoh and his people will be brought down to a humiliating defeat and death. He would lie among the uncircumcised, i.e., those who suffer death by the sword and whose bodies lie unburied on the ground (v. 18).

11. Cf. 32:7 where the *sun* is plunged into mourning.

VI. DIRGE OVER PHARAOH 32:1-16

TRANSLATION

(1) And it came to pass in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, in the first day of the month that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, lift up a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say unto him, You likened yourself to a young lion of the nations, but you are like a crocodile in the seas, and you burst forth in your rivers, and you troubled the waters with your feet and you polluted their rivers. (3) Thus says the Lord GOD: I will spread out over you My net with a company of many peoples; and they shall bring you up in My net. (4) And I will leave you in the land, upon the field I will cast you forth, and I will cause all the birds of the heaven to remain upon you, and I will fill the beasts of all the earth with you. (5) And I will put your flesh upon the mountains, and fill the valleys with your height. (6) And I will water the land where you swim with your blood even to the mountains; and the rivers shall be full of you. (7) When you are extinguished I will cover the heavens, and I will make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. (8) All the light bearing bodies in the heavens I will make dark over you, and set darkness over your land (oracle of the Lord GOD). (9) And I will provoke the heart of many people, when I bring your destruction among the nations, unto countries which you have not known. (10) And I will make many people astonished concerning you, and their kings shall be horrified on account of you when I shall unsheath My sword before them; and they shall tremble at every moment, each man for his life, in the day of your fall. (11) For thus says the Lord GOD: the sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon you. (12) By the swords of the mighty I will cause your multitude to fall; the most ruthless of the nations are all of them; and they shall spoil the pride of Egypt, and all her multitude shall be destroyed. (13) And I will destroy all her cattle from beside many waters; and the foot of man shall not trouble them any more, nor shall the hoofs of

cattle trouble them. (14) Then I will make their waters to settle, and their rivers I will cause to go as oil (oracle of the Lord GOD). (15) When I make the land of Egypt a desolation and waste, a land devoid of fullness, when I smite all the inhabitants in it, then shall they know that I am the LORD. (16) With this lamentation shall they lament over it; the daughters of the nations shall lament over her; on account of Egypt and all her multitude they shall lament her (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

The last oracle against Egypt is dated about a year and a half after the fall of Jerusalem. The date, according to the modern calendar would be March 4, 585 B.C.¹² (v. 1). The prophet is told to take up a *lamentation*—a prophetic doom-song—over Pharaoh.

Pharaoh fancied himself to be like a lion roaming among the nations striking fear into all who saw him. In reality Pharaoh was more like a crocodile (see on 29:3) whose movement was restricted to the waters. Occasionally Egypt's army would *burst forth* from his waters, i.e., venture forth beyond the national frontiers. Moving into yet other rivers the Egyptian crocodile would thrash about, churning up the waters and befouling them (v. 2).

God had decreed the end of the disruptive crocodile. He would spread out His net to capture and immobilize the vicious beast. A company of many people—Babylon and her allies—would assist in drawing up that divine net (v. 3). The crocodile would be cast upon dry land out of his natural habitat. Thus his doom would be sealed. The birds of prey and beasts of the field would take their fill of him (v. 4). The mountains and valleys would be filled with the long carcass of the crocodile

12. Some confusion exists in the ancient versions on the date of this oracle. Some ancient scribes, determined to keep the oracles in Ezekiel in chronological order, emended the Hebrew text to read *eleventh year* and *twelfth month*. Others retained the reading *twelfth year* but altered the month to read *tenth month*. The reading of the standard Hebrew text is not to be surrendered.

(v. 5). The blood of the beast would saturate the land and fill the rivlets (v. 6).

A second figure depicts the demise of Egypt. The once bright star (Egypt) would be extinguished. This day of divine judgment is depicted as a day of darkness. The sun, moon and stars would refuse to give their light (vv. 7-8). Such passages are not to be interpreted literally, but rather are the traditional way of depicting the fall of a great nation.¹³

Many other nations including some unknown to Egypt would be terrified by the news of the destruction of that empire (v. 9). Other kings would tremble before the sword of God—the agent of God’s judgment upon the world (v. 10).

The agent of God’s judgment on the sixth century world was Babylon (v. 11). The Babylonians are called *the mighty, the ruthless of the nations* (cf. 28:7). The *pride of Egypt*, all the multitude of her population, would be spoiled by the northern invaders (v. 12). Even the cattle that fed along the banks of the Nile and its canals would be destroyed. Neither man nor beast would befoul the waters of the land anymore, for the land would be temporarily desolate (v. 13). The undisturbed waters would flow as smoothly as a river of oil (v. 14). The desolation with which God would smite Egypt would cause men to recognize His sovereignty (v. 15). This section closes as it began, with emphasis being placed on the nature of the oracle. It is a lament which the daughter of the nations—the professional mourners—would take up over Egypt (v. 16).

VII. THE DESCENT INTO SHEOL 32:17-32

TRANSLATION

(17) And it came to pass in the twelfth year, in the fifteenth day of the month the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

13. See Isaiah 13:10; Joel 2:10; Amos 8:9.

(18) Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and cast them down, even her and the daughters of the mighty nations unto the lower parts of the earth, with those who go down to the pit. (19) Who do you surpass in beauty? Go down and be laid with the uncircumcised. (20) They shall fall in the midst of those who fall with the sword; to the sword she is given; draw her down and all her multitude. (21) The strong ones among the mighty shall speak to him from the midst of Sheol with his helpers: they have gone down, they lie still even the uncircumcised, those slain by the sword! (22) Assyria is there and all her company; round about them are their graves; all of them slain, fallen by the sword; (23) whose graves are in the uttermost parts of the pit, and her company is round about her grave; all of them slain, fallen by the sword who caused terror in the land of the living. (24) There is Elam and all her multitude round about her grave; all of them slain, fallen by the sword who have gone down uncircumcised unto the lower parts of the earth, who caused terror in the land of the living; yet they have borne their shame with those who go down to the pit. (25) They have put for her a bed in the midst of the slain with all her multitude; her graves are round about them; all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword, because their terror was caused in the land of the living, yet they have borne their shame, with those who go down to the pit; they are put in the midst of the slain. (26) There is Meshech, Tubal and all her multitude; her graves are round about them; all of them are uncircumcised, slain by the sword; because they caused their terror in the land of the living. (27) The ones who are inferior to the uncircumcised shall not lie down with the mighty ones who went down to Sheol with all their war weapons, with their swords laid under their heads, and their iniquities upon their bones; because the terror of the mighty ones was in the land of the living. (28) But you, in the midst of the uncircumcised shall be broken, and shall lie with those slain by the sword. (29) There was Edom, her kings and all her princes who in their might are put with those slain by the sword; they with the uncircumcised shall lie with those who go down to the pit. (30) There are the princes of the north, all of them,

and all the Zidonians who went down with the slain, ashamed for the terror which was caused by their might, and they lie down uncircumcised with those slain by the sword, and they bear their shame with those that go down to the pit. (31) Pharaoh shall see them and shall be comforted concerning all his multitude, even Pharaoh and all his army, slain by the sword, (oracle of the LORD). (32) For I have put My terror in the land of the living; and he shall be laid in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those slain by the sword, even Pharaoh and all his multitude (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

Lofthouse calls the sixteen verses of the final Egyptian oracle "the death song of the world in which Israel had grown up." The language here is highly poetical and one must be careful not to press it too far in formulating the Biblical doctrine of the afterlife. In this chapter Sheol is envisioned as consisting of compartments where nations lie together in graves gathered about their king. Warriors who had experienced proper burial are thought of as occupying a higher status than those who did not.

The month is missing in the Hebrew text of verse 17. The Greek version supplies *the first month*. However, it is more likely that this oracle should be dated to the same month as the preceding one, the twelfth month. It would then have been composed two weeks after the oracle contained in verses 1-16. According to our calendar the date would be March 18, 585 B.C.

Ezekiel is told to wail over Egypt. A prophetic lament had the power to actually set in motion the wheels of judgment. In this sense Ezekiel is to *cast down the multitude of Egypt* into the *lower parts of the earth*. This is Sheol, the abode of the dead in which the once powerful nations on earth are thought of as continuing their collective identity. The *daughters of the mighty nations* are the countries which share the fate of Egypt in

going down to Sheol. The *pit* is still another designation for Sheol (v. 18).

Egypt is in no way superior to the other powers of that day. She would go down in defeat. She would lie with the *uncircumcised*, those who have experienced the most dishonorable death (v. 19). Egyptian soldiers would fall by the sword and their corpses would be abandoned on the field of battle. Nations already in Sheol are exhorted to drag the slain Egyptian forces on down into their midst (*draw her down and all her multitude*; v. 20). The irony here is obvious. No nation in history put more emphasis on life after death—the elaborate pyramids and subterranean burial vaults; the art of embalming; the amassing of enormous wealth and every conceivable provision for abundant life in the world to come. But none of this would prevent the mighty Pharaohs from being brought down in shame to the pit.

The leaders of nations already in Sheol are represented as greeting Pharaoh and his allies with mocking words upon their arrival in the pit. The mighty Egyptians have died an ignominious death—the death of the uncircumcised—by the sword (v. 21). Egypt has joined Assyria and her allies in Sheol. The Egyptian graves lie scattered about those of the Assyrians (v. 22) in the *uttermost part of the pit*. This expression may point to degrees of ignominy in the afterlife. The great nations which terrorized the earth have been permanently and totally removed from the world of the living. The graves of satellite nations surround that of Egypt itself in those inaccessible regions (v. 23).

Other once powerful nations lie quietly in Sheol far removed from the land of the living where once they spread terror. Elam rests in shame there (vv. 24-25). Meshech and Tubal were once powerful kingdoms located south and south-east of the Black Sea. Other warlike powers descended into Sheol with their military equipment. But Meshech and Tubal met with an even more humiliating end. They rest among those who had been stripped of their arms. Ezekiel does not specify the particular crimes that justified this more severe humiliation of Tubal and Meshech (vv. 26-27).

Apparently Pharaoh would experience still a worse fate. He would lie among those slain by the sword, but not, apparently, with the mighty ones mentioned in the preceding verses (v. 28). He would lie among the leaders of Edom, the princes of the north (Babylonian satellite kings) and the Zidonians (Phoenicians). These all lie uncircumcised, i.e., they have experienced the ignominious death of those slain in battle and left unburied (vv. 29-30). Pharaoh would take some measure of comfort in the fact that others have shared Egypt's fate (v. 31).

All the mighty powers that terrorize the land of the living will ultimately be brought to nought. Ultimately God's power prevails on earth. The fall of Pharaoh and his host would be another indication of this grand truth (v. 32).

A fitting conclusion to this section dealing with Egypt is found on the final page of Breasted's monumental *History of Ancient Egypt*:

The fall of Egypt and the close of her characteristic history, were already an irrevocable fact before the relentless Cambyses knocked at the doors of Pelusium. The Saitic state was a creation of rulers who looked into the future, who belonged to it, and had little or no connection with the past. They were as essentially non Egyptian as the Ptolemies who followed the Persians. The Persian conquest in 525 B.C., which deprived Psamtik III, the son Amasis of his throne and kingdom, was but a change of rulers, a purely external fact. And if a feeble burst of national feeling enabled this or that Egyptian to thrust off the Persian yoke for a brief period, the movement may be likened to the convulsive contractions which sometimes lend momentary motion to limbs from which conscious life has long departed. With the fall of Psamtik III, Egypt belonged to a new world, toward the development of which she had contributed much, but in which she could no longer play an active part. Her great work was done, and unable, like Nineveh and Babylon, to disappear from the scene, she lived on her artificial life for a time under the Persians and the Ptolemies, ever sinking, till she became merely the granary of Rome, to be visited as a land of ancient marvels by wealthy Greeks and Romans, who

have left their names scratched here and there upon her hoary monuments, just as the modern tourists, admiring the same marvels, still continue to do.¹⁴

Special Study

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S INVASION OF EGYPT

The Old Testament prophets devote more verses to Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt than to that king's conquest of Jerusalem.¹⁵ However, whereas Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem is recorded in various documents dating to the sixth century, his invasion of Egypt has been ignored by the ancient historians. Consequently, most Biblical critics before 1900, and a few since that date, have pointed to the prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt as an example of error in prophetic anticipation. In the first edition of the illustrious *Cambridge Ancient History*, H. R. Hall categorically asserted:

We have no warrant to suppose that the Babylonian king . . . ever carried out great warlike operations against Amasis [Pharaoh of Egypt], far less that he conquered or even entered Egypt either personally or by proxy.¹⁶

The first Biblical prophecy of the fall of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar is found in Jeremiah 46. Here Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned by name (v. 13) as is also the Pharaoh he would defeat, Pharaoh Neco (609-593 B.C.). Four Egyptian cities are mentioned here: Migdol, Noph (Memphis) and Tahpanhes in northern Egypt, and No (Thebes) in southern Egypt.

Some twenty years after the destruction of Jerusalem Jeremiah again alludes to the invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 43:12, 13). This oracle emphasizes the destruction

14. Cited by Wilbur Smith, *EBP*, p. 118.

15. *Op. cit.*, p. 108.

16. *Cambridge Ancient History*, III, 1925, p. 299.

of the gods of Egypt. Two Egyptian cities are specifically mentioned—Tahpanhes and Beth-shemesh (also called On or Heliopolis).

In his third prophecy against Egypt, dated somewhere between 587 and 585 B.C. Ezekiel names Nebuchadnezzar as the agent of God's judgment on the land of the Nile. The destruction of the idols of Egypt is specifically mentioned (Ezk. 30:1-19). In another Egypt oracle dated to 571 B.C. Ezekiel again names Nebuchadnezzar as the invader of Egypt.

The evidence that Nebuchadnezzar did in fact invade Egypt is threefold. First, Josephus¹⁷ relates that in the fifth year after the destruction of Jerusalem (582 B.C.) Nebuchadnezzar fell upon Egypt, slew their king and set up another in his place. Some of the Jewish refugees in Egypt were taken captive back to Babylon. The second piece of evidence is in the form of a small fragment of a Babylonian chronicle first published by Pinches. It shows that Nebuchadnezzar launched an attack against Egypt in his thirty-seventh year, 567 B.C. This text can be found in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* edited by James Pritchard, p. 308. The third piece of evidence was pointed out by Driver. A statue in the Louvre represents Nes-Hor, governor of Southern Egypt under Pharaoh Hophra (589-664 B.C.). The inscription thereon seems to state that an army of Asiatics and northern peoples which apparently had invaded Egypt intended to advance up the Nile valley into Ethiopia. However, this invasion of *southern* Egypt was averted by the favor of the gods. So states Nes-hor.¹⁸

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why does Ezekiel devote such a large section of his book to the overthrow of Egypt?
2. Chronologically, what is the relationship of the Egypt oracles to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

17. *Antiquities of the Jews*, X.9.7.

18. Cited in Smith, *EBP*, p. 122.

3. What metaphors are used in this section to describe Pharaoh?
4. What evidence is there here of the self-deification of Pharaoh?
5. In what way had Egypt been *a staff of reed* to the house of Israel?
6. How long would Egypt be politically desolate?
7. What evidence is there that Nebuchadnezzar actually invaded Egypt? that he took Egyptians captive?
8. How did Ezekiel describe Egypt after its restoration?
9. Why did God decree that Nebuchadnezzar should conquer Egypt?
10. What would become of the gods of Egypt in the day of national judgment? How was this fulfilled?
11. How did Ezekiel use Assyria as a warning lesson to Egypt?
12. How does Ezekiel picture the mighty nations in Sheol? How far can this be pressed for valid doctrine regarding the afterlife?
13. What did Ezekiel mean by dying the death of the uncircumcised?

Chapter Fifteen

PREPARATION FOR RESTORATION

33:1 — 35:15

Ezekiel's predictions of the destruction of Jerusalem had become a tragic reality. No more does the prophet sound forth the threatening blast against the inhabitants of Judah, for Judah no longer existed. It was time for consolation. Hope had to be re-kindled. A remnant had to be prepared for the restoration and rebirth of the nation. Ezekiel opens this section of the book with an oracle underscoring individual responsibility and the power and potential of repentance (chap. 33). Then the prophet predicts the removal of the corrupt leadership of the nation (chap. 34) and the national enemies of Judah (chap. 35). By so doing he sets the stage for his later prophecies of restoration.

I. THE RENEWAL OF EZEKIEL'S COMMISSION

33:1-33

A. The Prophet as a Watchman 33:1-9

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, speak to the children of My people, and say to them: When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their midst, and set him as their watchman; (3) if he sees the sword come against the land, and he blows the horn, and warns the people; (4) then whoever hears the sound of the horn, and does not take warning, if the sword come and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head; (5) he heard the sound of the horn but did not take warning, so his blood shall be upon him; for if he had taken warning he would have delivered his soul. (6) But if the watchman sees the sword come and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword come and take a person from them, he is

taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the hand of the watchman. (7) And as for you, son of man, I have set you as a watchman to the house of Israel. Therefore, when you hear from My mouth a word, then you shall warn them from Me. (8) When I say to the wicked: O wicked man, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked of his way, that wicked one shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will seek from your hand. (9) But if you warn the wicked one of his way to turn from it, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your own soul.

COMMENTS

Following the interlude in which Ezekiel spoke to foreign nations, the prophet is again instructed to devote his attention to *the children of your people*. When God in His sovereign will determines to bring *a sword*, i.e., war, upon a land, normally that land would try to protect itself as best it could. A responsible person was appointed as watchman charged with the task of sounding the alarm as the enemy approached (v. 2). Normally the watchman would warn his neighbors by means of a horn (v. 3; cf. Amos 3:6). Those who failed to heed the warning blast were responsible for their own death; for if they had taken refuge or had fled the doomed land, they would have saved their lives (vv. 4-5). No blame can be attached to the watchman in such a case. He did his job. But if the watchman sees the danger and fails to sound the alarm, he is responsible for the death of those who were slain. Even if those who died were worthy of death because of their iniquity, still the watchman would be held accountable by God. That unfaithful watchman would someday pay for his negligence (v. 6).

The principle applies to a spiritual watchman such as Ezekiel. The fundamental responsibility of an Old Testament prophet was to convey to God's people any threatening word which he might have heard from the mouth of God (v. 7). If he fails to warn the wicked man of the consequences of his way, the blood

of that wicked man will be upon the hands of the prophet (v. 8). The prophet can only clear himself before God by the faithful discharge of his duty of sounding the alarm. Whether or not the sinner heeds the prophet's call to repentance, the watchman has saved his own life (v. 9).

B. The Possibilities of Repentance 33:10-20

TRANSLATION

(10) And as for you, son of man, say unto the house of Israel, Thus you have said: Our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we waste away in them; how then can we live? (11) Say unto them, As I live (oracle of the Lord GOD) surely I do not delight in the death of the wicked one, but rather when the wicked one turns from his way and lives. Turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel? (12) Now as for you, son of man, say unto the children of your people: The righteousness of the righteous man shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression, and as for the wickedness of the wicked man he shall not be made to stumble by it in the day he turns from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous man be able to live thereby in the day of his sin. (13) When I say to the righteous man that he shall surely live; if he trust in his righteousness and commits iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered, but he shall die in his iniquity which he has done. (14) And when I say to the wicked man: You shall surely die, and he turns from his sin and does what is just and right; (15) if the wicked man returns what has been taken in pledge, if he restores what has been seized by robbery, walks in the statutes of life, so that he does not do iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. (16) None of his sins which he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is just and right; he shall surely live. (17) Yet the children of My people say: The way of the Lord is not equal; but as for them, their way is not equal. (18) When the righteous man turns from his

righteousness, and commits iniquity, he shall die in them. (19) And when the wicked man turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live on account of them. (20) But you say, The way of the Lord is not equal. I will judge each man according to his ways, O house of Israel.

COMMENTS

Despair engulfed the exilic community after the fall of Jerusalem. For the first time the captives faced up to the enormity of their sin. There could be no other explanation of the disastrous overthrow of their holy city and shrine. "How can we live?" they asked in desperation (v. 10). The Jewish nation seemed doomed to extinction. Life more abundant and life eternal seemed remote for such sinners.

God had good news for those captives, as He always does for those who honestly face up to the sin problem in their lives. He underscores this good news by an oath (*as I live!*). God is not vindictive. He does not desire to see His enemies die in their sins. Divine chastisement is designed to move wicked people to repentance so that they might escape the ultimate consequences of their sin. *Why will you die?* The prophet responds to the despairing question of the preceding verse with a question of his own. The death of the wicked can be averted by repentance. Ezekiel urges the hearers to turn from their evil ways, for that is always the key to life (v. 11).

Verses 12-20 set forth a great truth, that a man's past does not of itself determine future relations with the Lord. A backslider who formerly lived by the righteous law of God will not live, i.e., escape punishment, when he casts his lot with the wicked. By the same token, a penitent sinner *will not stumble*, i.e., suffer punishment or recrimination, because of his past life (v. 12).

God's promises to the righteous are conditional. The righteous man must continue to trust in God, not in his own goodness. Should he deliberately commit iniquity he would die for that

iniquity (v. 13). Neither are the threats made to the wicked absolute. God has decreed that death—physical, spiritual, eternal—is the penalty for wickedness. But if the wicked man turns from sin to pursue a righteous and lawful life, that death threat is cancelled (v. 14). The repentance envisioned here is more than contrition for sin. The penitent person must (1) restore articles which had been pawned to him and which he had illegally retained; (2) restore that which had been taken by violence from another; and (3) *walk in the statutes of life*, i.e., those laws of God which lead to life more abundant and ultimately life eternal (v. 15). If the former sinner manifests this genuine repentance God would not hold his past against him and he would live (v. 16).

Some Jews argued against the proposition being set forth by Ezekiel. They argued that Ezekiel's teaching would make out God to be inconsistent in His rulership of the world. *The way of the Lord is not equal*, they said. But to this reasoning the prophet replies that it is not God who makes the change, but man (v. 17). Righteous men do in fact turn from righteousness and pay the consequences (v. 18). Wicked men sometimes do repent and reap the reward (v. 19). God deals with men as they are in the present, not as they were in the past (v. 20).

C. The Fall of Jerusalem and Further Prophecies

33:21-29

TRANSLATION

(21) And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, the tenth month, the fifth day of the month, the fugitive from Jerusalem came, saying, the city has been smitten! (22) Now the hand of the LORD was upon me in the evening, before the fugitive came; and He had opened my mouth until he came unto me in the morning; and my mouth was opened, and I was no more dumb. (23) Then the word of the LORD came, saying,

(24) Son of man, those who are living in these waste places in the land of Israel are saying, Abraham was one man, but he inherited the land; but we are many; the land has been given to us for a possession. (25) Therefore say unto them, Thus says the Lord GOD: You eat along with blood, and you lift up your eyes unto your idols, and you shed blood; and shall you possess the land? (26) You stand upon your sword, and you do abominations, and each of you defiles the wife of his neighbor; and shall you possess the land? (27) Thus you shall say unto them: Thus says the Lord GOD: As I live, surely the ones who are in the waste places shall fall by the sword, and the ones who are upon the open field I have given to the beasts to be devoured, and the ones who are in the fortresses and in the caves shall die of the pestilence. (28) And I will make the land desolate and waste, and the pride of her strength shall cease; and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate so that no one will pass through. (29) And they will know that I am the LORD when I make the land a desolation and a waste, because of all their abominations which they have done.

COMMENTS

In the twelfth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin a fugitive from Jerusalem arrived in Babylon with the sad news that Jerusalem had fallen (v. 21). The city fell in the fourth month of the eleventh year of the captivity. i.e., Tammuz 587 B.C. (Jer. 39:2). It would appear that some eighteen months elapsed between the event and the report of it among the captives.¹ On the evening before the arrival of the messenger, the silence imposed upon the prophet was removed as predicted in 24:26f. Ezekiel was now vindicated as a true prophet. He was now authorized to open his mouth in a new series of utterances designed to

1. Some scholars believe that a different system of counting years was employed by the Jews in Babylon. The difference between tenth month of the twelfth year in the Babylonian system, and the fourth month of the eleventh year in the Judean system would actually be only six months.

prepare the captives for the future restoration (v. 22).

Again Ezekiel received revelation from the Lord (v. 23), and it pertained to those pitiful survivors who remained among the ruins of Judah under the governorship of Gedaliah. Once the initial shock of seeing their homeland ravished had passed, that ragtag band began to imagine that they were the favored of the Lord. They apparently believed that they would form the nucleus of a new nation. They consoled themselves by the thought that originally Canaan had been given to a solitary individual, the patriarch Abraham. But how much greater their claim to that land! They were many, and they were actually occupying that land. They would be able to recoup their losses and rebuild that land in no time (v. 24).

Even the fall of Jerusalem did not cure the Jews of their rebellious conduct. The hopes of those few survivors to rebuild Judah was doomed to failure so long as they persisted in the very crimes which caused God to destroy their city in the first place. They openly violated the dietary regulations of the Mosaic Law by eating meat from which the blood had not been properly drained (cf. Lev. 3:17; 17:10). Furthermore, they lifted up their eyes in prayer to idols and persisted in child sacrifice (v. 25). They stood upon the sword—lived by violence—and worked abomination, i.e., participated in immoral pagan practices. Apparently adultery was quite common among these people (v. 26).

Further disaster awaited those ungodly survivors who inhabited the ruins of Judah. They would yet face the sword of divine judgment as wielded by the Babylonians or their agents. Beasts of the field would devour those who might escape the sword. Those holed up in caves and other natural strongholds would face the *pestilence* which resulted from overcrowding, and lack of food and sanitation (v. 27).

Those sinful survivors of Jerusalem's fall would not be the ones to rebuild Judah. God would make that land so desolate that no one would even want to make a trip through it. Then the stubborn *pride of her power*, i.e., pride in her position as a favored nation, would cease (v. 28). Then they would recognize

that the God from whom they expected deliverance had actually brought desolation to their land because of their idolatrous abominations (v. 29).

D. The Attitude of the Exiles Toward Ezekiel

33:30-33

TRANSLATION

(30) And as for you, son of man, the children of your people who talk about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word which comes forth from the LORD; (31) and come unto you as the people come, and sit before you as My people, and hear your words, but do not do them—for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their covetousness; (32) and behold you are to them a love song of one who has a beautiful voice and who can play an instrument well; so they hear your words, but they do them not— (33) when this comes to pass (behold it shall come) then shall they know that a prophet has been in their midst.

COMMENTS

When the news of Jerusalem's fall reached Babylon, Ezekiel and his prophecies became the topic of general conversation. Now for the first time in his ministry the exiles were anxious to hear the word of the Lord from the lips of God's accredited prophet (v. 30). But while they were now eager to *hear* Ezekiel's word, they still had not surrendered their hearts to follow the commandments of the Lord. With their mouths they were very complimentary to the prophet; but their hearts were full of covetousness, i.e., their own selfish concerns. To those unspiritual souls Ezekiel was like a musical entertainer—the crooner of love songs. They enjoyed listening to him, but were unmoved

by his passionate exhortations (v. 34). But when *all* his predictions came to pass—and they surely would come to pass—they would know that a true prophet had been among them (v. 33).

II. REPLACEMENT OF CORRUPT LEADERS

34:1-31

Israel's past sin and punishment stemmed largely from corrupt and selfish leadership. The first step in Ezekiel's program of reconstruction for the nation was the replacement of those worthless leaders by a new breed of rulers. God would place at the head of His restored people a scion of the house of David. Under His rule God's people would enjoy peace, safety and prosperity.

A. The Evil Shepherds of the Past 34:1-10

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, to the shepherds: Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe unto the shepherds of Israel who were feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? (3) You eat the fat, and with the wool you cloth yourselves, you slaughter the fattlings; but you do not feed the flock. (4) The weak you have not made strong, nor the sick have you healed, nor have you bound up the broken, nor have you brought back those which strayed away, nor have you sought those that are lost; but with force and rigor you have ruled them. (5) So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and became food for every beast of the field, and were scattered. (6) My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill, and over the face of the land My sheep were scattered, and none did

search and seek. (7) Therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: (8) As I live (oracle of the Lord GOD) surely in as much as My sheep became a prey, and My sheep became food to every beast of the field because they had no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My sheep, but the shepherds fed themselves, and did not feed My sheep, (9) therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD. (10) Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require My sheep at their hand, and I will cause them to cease from feeding the sheep; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; and I will deliver My sheep from their mouth, that they may not be food for them.

COMMENTS

The *shepherds* against whom Ezekiel is told to prophesy were the kings, princes and other leaders of the now defunct nation of Judah. These men stand under a divine *woe* because they had been concerned only about their own welfare and not that of the sheep which had been committed to their guardianship (v. 2). They lived sumptuously at the expense of the flock. But still they did not feed, i.e., care for the needs of, the masses (v. 3). The needs of the weak, sick, straying, and lost sheep—the poor and defenseless among the population—had been ignored. They had been ruled with force, not with consideration and justice (v. 4). Unprotected by their national rulers, God's people became a prey to surrounding nations. Attacked by these beasts of prey the sheep scattered in all directions (v. 5). They wandered through strange hills and valleys all over the face of the land in their efforts to escape the invaders. None of their leaders made any efforts to regroup the flock or avert the flight. The flock was simply abandoned (v. 6).

Concerning those worthless leaders God had a word (v. 7). God refers to the national leaders as *My shepherds* because they were answerable to Him. God's people had suffered immensely because of these greedy shepherds (v. 8). Therefore, God bound

Himself by an oath (*as I live*) that He was implacably opposed to those leaders. He would hold these undershepherds responsible for all losses sustained by the flock. He would deprive them of the privilege of leadership. No more would they be able to further their personal aims and ambitions at the expense of the flock. These "shepherds" virtually had become beasts of prey, and God would finally liberate His people from their leadership (v. 10). From one point of view at least the Babylonian exile was a liberating experience.

B. The Divine Shepherd 34:11-22

TRANSLATION

(11) For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, Here am I, and I will search for My sheep, and seek them out. (12) As a shepherd seeks out his flock in the day he is in the midst of his flock that are separated, thus I will seek out My sheep; and I will deliver them from all the places to which they have been scattered in the day of clouds and thick darkness. (13) And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the lands; and I will bring them unto their land; and I will feed them upon the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the habitable portions of the land. (14) In a good pasture I will feed them, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be; there shall they lie down in a good fold, and in a lush pasture shall they graze upon the mountains of Israel. (15) I will feed My sheep, and I will make them to lie down (oracle of the Lord GOD). (16) That which is lost I will seek, and that which has strayed I will bring back, the broken I will bind up, and the sick I will strengthen; and the fat and the strong I will destroy, I will feed them in justice. (17) As for you, O My sheep, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am about to judge between stock and stock, between ram and he-goats. (18) Is it a small matter to you to have fed upon the good pasture, but you must trample the rest of your pastures with your feet? and have drunk of the settled

water, but you must stir up the rest with your feet. (19) And as for My sheep, they eat that which you have trampled with your feet, and they drink that which you have stirred up with your feet. (20) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD unto them: Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat cattle and lean cattle. (21) Because you push with side and shoulder, and with your horns you shove about all the weak, till you have scattered them abroad; (22) therefore I will save My sheep, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle.

COMMENTS

God's people would not be left without a shepherd. The hirelings having been removed from office, the Good Shepherd Himself would take over direct responsibility. He would begin His task by searching out His sheep. His sheep are those who hear and respond to His word (John 10:27). So the searching process was that of proclaiming the prophetic word among the exiles (v. 11). What a beautiful picture! The Lord God takes the initiative in reclaiming His own. Wherever they have been scattered the Faithful Shepherd would find them. The *day of clouds and thick darkness*, i.e., calamity, is past. The age of re-gathering and restoration had begun (v. 12).

First will come the gathering of the dispersed sheep into an identifiable and dedicated band. Then comes restoration to Canaan, the Promised Land. There God would feed His flock *upon the mountains and by the streams*. Israel would occupy all the land which was capable of supporting population (v. 13). Lush pasture and secure fold awaited the flock of God in Canaan (v. 14). The flock, torn and driven about by beasts of prey (adversary nations), would at last lie down under the watchful care of the Good Shepherd (v. 15).

Unlike the faithless shepherds of the pre-exilic era, the Good Shepherd would devote special attention to the weak and vulnerable members of the flock. Those which were lost through foolish straying would be retrieved. Those sheep hurt and sick

as a result of the neglect of their shepherds and the attacks of adversaries would be nursed back to health. But on the other hand, those which were *fat and strong*—the wealthy land owners—would be destroyed. Previous shepherds had shown favoritism to these powerful persons, but God would *feed them in justice*. He would care for them, but they would receive no more than is due them. Thus, as a class within the flock the *fat and the strong* would be eliminated (v. 16).

God would *judge* between members of the flock, between the oppressed poor and their rich oppressors. The latter are referred to here as *the rams and the he-goats*, those which ruthlessly shove the others aside during grazing time (v. 17). These leaders among the flock by force had appropriated all the good pasture and clear water for themselves. But they had done yet more. They had spoiled the rest of the pasture and muddied the rest of the water with their feet (v. 18) thus depriving the weak among the flock of adequate sustenance (v. 19). But all that would change. God repeats in verse 20 His intention to judge between fat and lean cattle—the prosperous and the poor among the people (v. 20). By the exercise of brute force the fat and strong animals had scattered the others. That is to say, the fat cattle had been responsible for the dispersion of Israel (v. 21). But God would save His flock from the bullying of such tyrants. Class distinctions would disappear from the flock as the Good Shepherd *judges between cattle*, i.e., treats all the flock with absolute equity.

C. The Future Shepherd 34:23-31

TRANSLATION

(23) And I will raise up over them one shepherd, and he shall feed them, even My servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. (24) And I the LORD will be their God, and My servant David prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it. (25) And I will make a covenant of peace for them.

and I will cause the evil beasts to cease from the land; and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. (26) And I will make them and the areas surrounding My hill a blessing; and I will cause the rain to come in its season; there shall be showers of blessing. (27) And the tree of the field shall give its fruit, and the land shall give its increase, and they shall be safe upon their land, and they shall know that I am the LORD when I have broken the bars of their yoke, and I have delivered them from the hand of those who made them bondmen. (28) And they shall not again be a prey to the nations, nor shall the wild beasts of the earth devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid. (29) And I will raise up unto them a famous plantation, and they shall not again be consumed by hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the nations any more. (30) And they shall know that I the LORD their God am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people (oracle of the Lord GOD). (31) And you My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, are Adam, and I am your God (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

After the return from exile and the period of direct divine supervision of the flock, God would set up a shepherd over His people. This Shepherd must be the long-awaited Messiah, a ruler of the house of David. The Davidic dynasty would be restored. The responsibility of feeding and tending the flock of God would be committed to Him (v. 23). Yahweh would still be their God; but His servant David would be *prince among them* (v. 24). What a marvelous foregleam of the New Testament doctrine of the Father and the Son (v. 24).

A new covenant is a prominent feature of the Messianic age (cf. Jer. 31:31). Here it is called a *covenant of peace*. Under the supervision of the Messianic David the flock would be safe. *Evil beasts*, i.e., bad rulers, would not be part of His domain. Even those most dangerous areas — *the wilderness and woods* — would

be free from the ravenous beasts (v. 25).

The entire region around God's *hill* (Zion) would be blessed of God as well as those who inhabit those regions. Showers of blessing would descend upon them thus assuring abundant harvest (v. 26). The inhabitants of that blessed and secure land would all know by personal experience that the Lord had delivered them from captivity — *the bars of their yoke*. No longer would they be slaves to the enemies of God (v. 27). The Messianic flock would never fall victim to *the beast of the earth*, nor would adversary nations be able to carry them off as prey. In their divinely provided security they would manifest a boldness uncharacteristic of sheep (v. 28).

Because of the amazing fertility of the land, Israel would be known far and wide. Famine so common in Bible days would be a thing of the past. The inhabitants of God's land would never have to suffer the humiliation of having to look to other nations for material assistance (v. 29). Israel would realize that God was with them and that they were in fact God's special people (v. 30). God's flock is more than mere sheep; they are *Adam*, i.e., a special creation of God (v. 31). The entire passage relates to the new Israel of God—God's present-day chosen people (Gal. 6:16). The spiritual blessings which God in this Messianic age showers down upon His people are here portrayed in terms of agricultural prosperity.

III. REMOVAL OF NATIONAL ENEMIES 35:1-15

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, set your face against mount Seir, and prophesy against it, (3) and say unto it: Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O mount Seir, and I will stretch out My hand against you, and I will make you an utter desolation. (4) I will lay waste your cities, and you shall be desolate; and you shall know that I am the Lord. (5) Because you have had an ancient hatred, and you have given over the children of Israel to the power of the sword, in the time of their calamity, in the time of

their iniquity of the end. (6) Therefore, as I live (oracle of the Lord GOD), surely I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you; surely you hate blood, and blood shall pursue you. (7) And I will make mount Seir an utter desolation, and I will cut off from it travelers.² (8) And I will fill his mountains with his slain; in your hills, your valleys and your streams those slain by the sword shall fall. (9) I will make you desolations forever, and you shall not inhabit your cities; and you shall know that I am the LORD. (10) Because you have said; these two nations and these two lands shall be mine, and I will possess it; while the LORD was there. (11) Therefore, as I live (oracle of the Lord GOD), I will do according to your anger, and according to your jealousy which you have done out of your hatred against them; and I will make Myself known among them when I shall judge you. (12) And you shall know that I the LORD have heard all of your blasphemies which you have said against the mountains of Israel, saying, They are desolate; they have been given to us to devour. (13) And you have magnified yourself against Me with your mouth, and you have multiplied your words against Me; I have heard it. (14) Thus says the Lord GOD: When the whole earth rejoices, I will make you a desolation. (15) Because you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel when it was desolate so will I do to you; you shall become a desolation, O mount Seir, and all of Edom, even all of it; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

The first obstruction to restoration has now been dealt with, that being the problem of corrupt leadership. Now Ezekiel deals with the second obstruction to Israel's golden age. All nations which oppressed God's people must be judged and destroyed. Mt. Seir,³ i.e., Edom, the ancient archenemy of Israel is singled

2. Literally, *he that passes through and he that returns*.

3. The original home of Edom was the mountainous country of Seir east of the Arabah. Here Mt. Seir is used of the entire territory occupied by the Edomites.

out for special condemnation here (vv. 1-2). However, Edom is symbolic of every nation which had oppressed Israel.⁴ Only when all the enemies of the Lord are destroyed is the deliverance of God's people complete.

In this oracle God immediately declares Himself to be in an adversary relationship to Edom. He would stretch out His hand against Edom, i.e., smite that country. That outstretched hand would mean the undoing and ultimate desolation of Edom (v. 3). The once proud cities of Edom would be laid waste. So thorough would the calamity be that the Edomites would detect in it the operation of God (v. 4). This divine judgment is in recompense for the ancient hatred of the Edomites toward the people of God. This bitter animosity most recently had been manifested in the aid which the Edomites had rendered to the Babylonian conquerors of Jerusalem. Captured Israelites were handed over to the invaders for execution. Thus the Edomites no less than the Chaldeans participated in *the time of their* (Judah's) *calamity, in the time of the iniquity of the end*, i.e., the iniquity which completed Judah's full measure of guilt and brought about their destruction (v. 5).

God had prepared Edom *unto blood*, i.e., Edom would die a bloody death. Twice the prophet emphasizes that blood would *pursue* Edom. It is as though the blood of slain Israelites was demanding retribution, and that because Edom *had hated* his own blood, i.e., Israel—those to whom Edom had blood-ties⁵ (v. 6). Those slain in the anticipated attack would be so numerous that Mt. Seir (Edom) would be desolate. No man would survive to traverse that land (v. 7). The dead bodies would be everywhere—hills, valleys, and streams (v. 8). Edom would remain desolate forever. Such as might escape to neighboring lands would gradually realize that the hand of the great God of Israel had been against them.

Not only had Edom betrayed his brother nation in the time of

4. In other passages Edom also figures as the symbol of all Israel's enemies (E.g., Isa. 63).

5. Esau, ancestor of the Edomites, was the twin brother of Jacob, the ancestor of Israel (Gen. 25:25).

calamity (v. 5), he had also claimed the right to occupy the territory once occupied by Judah and Israel. But even though the two apostate nations had been ejected from the territory which had been assigned to them, yet the Lord was still there. True, His divine and holy presence had been seen earlier in a vision to depart from the land (cf. 11:23). But He was still there in the sense that the land was His, and He alone had the right to determine who would occupy it (v. 10). Therefore Edom must be recompensed for his anger and envy toward Israel. By punishing Edom God would make Himself known among Israel, i.e., He would show Himself still to be their protector and guardian (v. 11).

The omniscient God of Israel heard, i.e., was aware of, the *blasphemies* spoken by the children of Edom against the *mountains of Israel*. They were saying that since those mountains were now desolate, i.e., uninhabited, they had been given (by God?) to Edom (v. 12). This attitude on the part of Edom constituted an affront to God because He owned the territory which Israel had formerly occupied. To plan seizure of that territory was sinful pride which lifts itself up against God. God had heard Edom's proud boasts (v. 13).

The whole earth would rejoice when Edom became desolate (v. 14). Edom gloated when Israel's inheritance—God's gift to His people—was destroyed. Therefore, the punishment would correspond to the transgression. Edom would be made desolate. With the destruction of Edom, the enemy of God's people, the whole earth would realize that Yahweh is just and mighty in the defense of His honor and His people (v. 15).

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why does Ezekiel repeat the material about the watchman and his responsibilities at this point?
2. Why does Ezekiel underscore the potential of repentance in 33:10-20?
3. In what way does Ezekiel envision a sinner manifesting his repentance?

4. In what sense are God's promises to the righteous conditional?
5. Why did some Jews feel that the ways of God were not equal?
6. How long after the actual event did a fugitive arrive in Babylon with the news that Jerusalem had fallen?
7. In what sense was the silence imposed on Ezekiel now lifted?
8. What attitude characterized the pitiful remnant that remained in Judah after the catastrophe of 587 B.C.?
9. What evidence is there that the survivors of the destruction of Jerusalem really had not changed?
10. What was the attitude of the exiles toward Ezekiel?
11. Who were the *shepherds* condemned by Ezekiel? How had they failed in their duty?
12. In what way would those shepherds immediately be replaced?
13. In the more distant future who would God provide for the leadership of His people?
14. Why is the future covenant referred to as a *covenant of peace*?
15. In what way is God's flock like Adam?
16. Why is Edom singled out for special condemnation in chapter 35?

Chapter Sixteen

TRANSFORMATION AND RESTORATION

36:1 — 37:28

Thus far Ezekiel has expressed his hope for the future in terms of (1) the establishment of new leadership for the people of God; and (2) the punishment of those who previously had opposed His people. He now proceeds to speak of (3) the restoration of the land of Israel (chap. 36); and (4) the rebirth of the nation (chap. 37).

I. THE RESTORATION OF THE LAND

The prophecy against Mt. Seir (chap. 35) is followed by a prophecy unto the mountains of Israel. Here Ezekiel speaks of the material and spiritual aspects of the restoration of Israel. Chapter 36 may be the brightest chapter in the entire book. Four units of thought can be observed here: (1) the redemption of the land (vv. 1-7); (2) the repopulation of the land (vv. 8-15); (3) the purification of the land (vv. 16-21); and (4) the return to the land (vv. 22-38).

A. The Redemption of the Land 36:1-7

TRANSLATION

(1) And as for you, son of man, prophesy unto the mountains of Israel, and say, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD. (2) Thus says the Lord GOD: Because the enemy has said against you: Aha! even the ancient high places are our possession; (3) therefore, prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: because, even because they have made you desolate and swallowed you up on every side that you might be a possession to the rest of the nations, and you are the object of conversation by talkers, and the evil report of people; (4) therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD: Thus says

the Lord GOD to the mountains and to the hills, to the streams and to the valleys, and to the desolate wastes, and to the cities which have been forsaken which have become a prey and a derision to the rest of the nations which are round about; (5) therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Surely in the fire of My jealousy I have spoken against the rest of the nations and against Edom, that have appointed My land as a possession for themselves with the joy of all their heart, with disdain of soul, in order that its open country should be for spoil; (6) therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains and to the hills, to the streams and to the valleys; Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I in My jealousy and in My fury I have spoken because you have borne the reproach of the nations; (7) therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I have lifted up My hand, surely the nations which are round about you, they shall bear their reproach.

COMMENTS

The enemies who had cast a covetous eye on the ancient hilly terrain of Canaan completely had underestimated the power and intention of the God of Israel (v. 2). He had wonderful plans for His people. On the other hand, the enemies of Israel would have to pay for their crimes against Israel. Three crimes had been committed against the land of Israel: (1) they (the Babylonians) had made the land desolate; (2) *the rest of the nations*, i.e., the neighbors of Israel, had cast covetous eyes upon that vacant land; and (3) they had spoken of the defeated Jews with contempt (v. 3). But God had good news for those forsaken cities and desolate wastes which neighboring nations were attempting to seize even while they spoke so contemptuously about them (v. 4). God was jealous for His people, and the *fire* of that jealousy was burning against those lands—especially Edom—which had desired to possess Canaan for themselves (v. 5).

Because the land of Judah had borne the shame of invasion

and derision by neighbors, God had spoken in His jealous fury against those nations (v. 6). God had *lifted up* His hand in a formal oath that those nations would eventually bear their own shame. They would experience the humiliation which they had inflicted upon the Judeans (v. 7).

B. The Repopulation of the Land 36:8-15

TRANSLATION

(8) But as for you, O mountains of Israel, you shall put forth your branches, and your fruit you shall bear for My people Israel; for they are near to come. (9) For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown; (10) and I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, even all of it; and the cities shall be inhabited, and the waste places shall be built up; (11) and I will multiply men upon you and cattle, and they shall increase and be fruitful; and will cause you to be inhabited as in former times, and I will make it better than your beginnings; and you shall know that I am the LORD. (12) And I will cause men to walk upon you, even My people Israel, and they shall possess you, and you shall be an inheritance for them; and you shall no more bereave them of their children. (13) Thus says the Lord GOD: Because they are saying to you: You are a devourer of men, and you have been a bereaver of your nations; (14) therefore you shall not devour men any more, and your nations you shall not again bereave (oracle of the Lord GOD); (15) nor will I allow the shame of the nations to be heard against you any more; nor shall you bear the reproach of peoples any more; nor shall you bereave your nations any more (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

The fertile hills of Canaan would yet yield their fruit to Israel, not to strangers. The people of God were *at hand to come*,

i.e., the end of the exile was not far off (v. 8). The divine *I am against you* which God uttered against Mt. Seir (35:3) is reversed as regards the mountains of Israel. God is not only *for* the mountains of Israel, He is about to *turn* unto them, i.e., take an active interest in them. As a result those hills and valleys would once again be cultivated (v. 9). Men would be multiplied in the land as former citizens of both kingdoms united to rebuild their ruined land (v. 10). Beast as well as man would increase until their numbers were equivalent to their former strength in pre-exilic times. Yet God would bless them beyond anything they had experienced in bygone days (v. 11). The feet of God's people would yet walk over the mountains of Canaan. They would again possess those hills as their national inheritance. No more would those hills rob God's people of their children through war, pestilence and famine that in former days had occurred there (v. 12).

One of the derogatory allegations hurled at the land of Canaan was that the land *devoured* its inhabitants. The original inhabitants, the Canaanites, had been destroyed; now Israel had undergone a similar fate.¹ It seemed that every nation which had occupied that land had been bereaved (v. 13). But once Israel returned to that land things would be different. God's people would neither be devoured nor bereaved (v. 14). No more would they have to endure the derision of the nations because of what occurred to them in that land. The land of Canaan would no more be a stumblingblock to the people who lived in it. They would dwell safely and securely in that land (v. 15). These promises, of course, are conditional. As long as the returnees were faithful to God He would bless them in these ways. History records that even after their return to the land, the Jewish people failed to live up to their commitment to the Lord.

1. Cf. Numbers 13:32 where the spies reported that Canaan was *a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof*.

C. The Purification of the Land 36:16-21

TRANSLATION

(16) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (17) Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt upon their land, they defiled it by their way and by their deeds; like the uncleanness of a menstruous woman was their way before Me. (18) And I poured out My fury upon them because of the blood which they poured out upon the land, and because they had defiled it with their idols. (19) And I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through lands according to their way and according to their deeds I judged them. (20) When they came unto the nations to which they came, they profaned My holy name; men said of them: These are the people of the LORD, and from His land they have gone forth. (21) But I had pity upon My holy name which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they had come.

COMMENTS

In order to set forth clearly the magnificent goodness and grace of God in bringing Israel back to her land, Ezekiel reviews the circumstances which brought about her dispersion among the nations. Israel, the wife of God, had defiled the land by her general course of conduct and by her specific deeds. The divine Husband temporarily avoided the impure wife just as any ancient Israelite male was required to avoid intimacy with his wife during her monthly period (v. 17). God poured out His wrath upon His people because of their inexcusable impurity manifested especially in bloodshed and idolatry (v. 18). The wayward people were judged according to their deeds and were sentenced to exile among the nations (v. 19).

In those foreign lands Israel unwittingly *profaned* the name of the Lord. The nations did not realize that Israel's punishment was just retribution for moral and religious shortcomings. They

saw the condition of Yahweh's people and they concluded that the God of Israel was unable to protect His own devotees (v. 20). According to pagan logic, the gods of Babylon had to be superior to Yahweh since the Babylonians had made the land of Israel desolate and dispersed the people of the Lord. Thus the divine name had suffered indignity without cause. God took pity upon His holy name, His reputation, which was being unjustly attacked. God does not take kindly to slanderous accusations concerning His name (v. 21).

D. The Return to the Land 36:22-38

TRANSLATION

(22) Therefore, say unto the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am not doing this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name which you have defiled among the nations to which you came. (23) And I will sanctify My great name which has been profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD (oracle of the Lord GOD) when I am sanctified in you before their eyes. (24) For I shall take you from the nations, and I will gather you from all the lands, and I will bring you unto your own land. (25) And I will sprinkle upon you clean water, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. (26) And I will give to you a new heart, and a new spirit will I place within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a new heart. (27) And My Spirit I will put within you, and I will bring it about that you will walk in My statutes, and that you will keep and do My ordinances. (28) And you shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be My people, and I will be your God. (29) And I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call unto the grain, and will increase it, and will not bring famine upon you. (30) And I will increase the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, in order that you may no longer receive the reproach of famine

among the nations. (31) Then you shall remember your evil ways, and your deeds which were not good; and you shall loathe yourselves in your sight on account of your iniquities and your abominations. (32) Not for your sake will I do this (oracle of the Lord GOD), be it known to you; be ashamed and confounded because of your ways, O house of Israel. (33) Thus says the Lord GOD: In the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause cities to be inhabited, and the waste places to be built up. (34) And the desolate land shall be tilled instead of remaining a desolation in the sight of all who pass by. (35) And they shall say: This land which was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited. (36) And the nations that remain round about you shall know that I the LORD have built the ruined places, and planted the places that were desolate; I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it. (37) Thus says the Lord GOD: I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. (38) As a holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her appointed times, so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

Israel did not deserve or merit salvation from exile and restoration to their homeland. But it was necessary as part of God's long-range plan, to re-establish the divine reputation. Since His name was inseparably connected with the fortunes of Israel, positive divine action on behalf of His people was imperative (v. 22). By restoring Israel to the land of Canaan God would *sanctify* His name, i.e., set it apart for awe and reverence. The restoration of Israel would prove that the Babylonian captivity was not due to God's weakness. The nations would come to know the God of Israel as truly the great I AM, Yahweh, when they witnessed the sudden reversal of the fortunes of His devoted followers (vv. 23-24).

Those who would participate in the great ingathering would enjoy wonderful spiritual blessings. They would be cleansed of their uncleanness. The forgiveness of sin is here compared to the ritual purification by water (v. 25). As a result of this cleansing they would receive a *new heart*—a tender and responsive heart of flesh to replace the *stony heart* which had so long been impervious to divine pleas and warnings. They would also receive an indwelling Spirit (v. 26), the Holy Spirit of God. This indwelling Spirit would enable God's people to walk the path of obedience (v. 26).

Nine glorious consequences follow upon the spiritual regeneration of Israel—God's people:

1. God's people would dwell *in the land* which God had given to the Patriarchs.

2. The redeemed nation would belong to God as His special possession.

3. The Lord would be their God in the special sense in which He is the God of all who love and obey Him (v. 28).

4. They would enjoy some measure of security in this new status. By the power of the indwelling Spirit, God would save them from *uncleanness*, i.e., He would help them to overcome their tendency to lapse into sin.

5. God would summon, as if miraculously, the grain, and He would restore the fertility of the land. Fruit trees as well as grain fields would yield their abundant harvests. Famine which periodically had plagued the Canaan of old would be a thing of the past (cf. 34:26-29). No more would non-believers be able to bring reproach on God's people on this account (vv. 29-30).

6. The redeemed people of God would totally loathe and abhor their former life of sin and rebellion (cf. 6:9). They would make a complete break with their past life of rebellion (v. 31).

7. These people would realize that they had not merited or deserved the blessing which they had received from the hand of God. Their salvation would be a pure act of divine grace. It is, therefore, appropriate that they be ashamed of their past conduct which, if dealt with by God in absolute justice, would have

demanded complete and final rejection (v. 32).

8. The day of cleansing would be marked by the repopulation of the desolate land of Canaan (v. 33). Even those areas thought by passers-by to be beyond reclamation would be productive again (v. 34). The transformation in the land would cause amazement on the part of those outside the nation. The once ugly and barren land suddenly would become as beautiful as the garden of Eden; the ruined and defenseless cities would be filled and fortified (v. 35). The other nations would recognize the hand of God in all this. God through His prophets had announced beforehand what He would do. He who cannot lie always performs His word. Thus it is that through the fulfillment of prophecy non-believers come to see the works of God in history (v. 36).

9. The redeemed of the Lord, a small band at first, would pray for an increase in numbers. One of the principal concerns of those who know the Lord as savior is that others might share in the blessings of salvation. God here promises to hear that prayer and answer it (v. 37). As the city of Jerusalem swarmed with sacrificial animals before one of the appointed national festivals, so would the waste areas reclaimed by God's people swarm with men. The fulfillment of this promise would strengthen the faith of God's people in their God (v. 38).

The promises of the repopulation of Canaan began to be fulfilled in the return of the Jews to Canaan in 538 B.C. But earthly Canaan was but a type of that better country promised to and anticipated by the people of God from the time of Abraham (Heb. 11:9, 10, 16). The return to Canaan after Babylonian exile was at the same time a fulfillment of a promise and the down payment of a promise. True Israelites, through faith in Christ, have left the bondage of the world and have come into spiritual Canaan (Heb. 12:22). Properly understood Ezekiel 36:22-38 points to the spiritual realities of this present Gospel age.

II. THE REBIRTH OF THE NATION 37:1-28

Ezekiel had been promising God's people a bright future with new leadership and a new Canaan. However, these promises were met with as much skepticism as his earlier message announcing the 587 B.C. overthrow of Jerusalem. The destruction of their Temple meant the shattering of their faith. They were absolutely convinced that their dead and disjointed nation could never live again. By means of a vision (vv. 1-14) and a symbolic action and an oracle (vv. 15-28) Ezekiel responded to their despondency. In the vision Ezekiel learns that God's Spirit had the power to turn what looked like a host of skeletons into an effective army. In the oracle and accompanying symbolic act Ezekiel points out that the old divisions between Israel and Judah would disappear in the day of restoration.

A. The Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones 37:1-14

TRANSLATION

(1) The hand of the LORD was upon me, and the LORD brought me out in the Spirit, and set me down in the midst of the valley, and it was full of bones; (2) and He caused me to pass by them round about, and, behold, there were very many upon the surface of the valley; and, behold, they were very dry. (3) And He said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live again? And I said, O Lord GOD, You know. (4) And He said unto me, Prophesy over these bones, and say unto them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. (5) Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, Behold, I am about to cause spirit to enter into you, and you shall live. (6) And I will put sinews upon you, and I will bring upon you flesh, and I will cover you with flesh, and put spirit in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD. (7) So I prophesied as I was commanded, and as I prophesied there was a sound, and, behold, a shaking, and bones came together, bone to its bone. (8) And I saw, and,

behold, sinews and flesh came upon them, and flesh covered them above; but no spirit was in them. (9) And he said unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O spirit, and breath on these slain ones that they may live. (10) So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the spirit, came on them, and they lived, and they stood on their feet, an exceeding great host. (11) And he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they are saying, Our bones are dry, our hope has perished, we are cut off. (12) Therefore, prophesy and say unto them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am about to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O My people; and I will bring you unto the land of Israel. (13) And you shall know that I am the LORD when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O My people. (14) And I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; and you shall know that I the LORD have spoken, and done it (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

Thanks to the Negro spiritual, Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones is perhaps the best known passage in the book. The prophet felt *the hand of the Lord*, i.e., God's power overwhelmed him. He was carried *in spirit*, i.e., mentally, to the middle of a *valley*, perhaps the same valley where Ezekiel earlier saw a vision (cf. 3:22). The floor of that valley was littered with the bones of dead men (v. 1). The Lord caused His prophet to move about in that valley. As he did so Ezekiel was impressed with two facts: (1) the bones were numerous; and (2) they were very dry, having lain exposed to the elements for many long years (v. 2).

In order to heighten the prophet's interest and give him a foregleam of what was about to transpire, God asked Ezekiel a question: *Can these bones live?* From the human standpoint

nothing seemed more remote. But Ezekiel would not underestimate the power of God. If He so willed those mouldering bones could live (v. 3). Then Ezekiel was told to prophesy to those bones, and bid them to hear God's word (v. 4). God would resurrect those skeletons by means of a process which He describes in reverse order. Life-giving spirit would be imparted to those corpses (v. 5). Perhaps this is mentioned first so as to underscore the point that God is the source of life for His people. Of course *sinew*, *flesh* and *skin* must first cover those skeletons. This miraculous and mass resurrection would once again underscore the deity of the only God who would dare to make such a prediction (v. 6).

Ezekiel did as he was told. As he prophesied he heard a *sound*. Suddenly a commotion—a shaking—erupted all over the valley as the bones began to unite (v. 7). Then over those naked skeletons flesh began to appear. But still there was no life in the corpses (v. 8).

Again Ezekiel was told to prophesy, this time to the *spirit* or breath. The breath of life which once had animated those corpses is thought of as having been scattered in all directions. Ezekiel through this mighty prophetic prayer summoned the life-giving spirit to return from wherever it may be² (v. 9). The prophet again did as he was told, and the breath of life returned to the corpses and they lived. A great host all over that valley rose to their feet (v. 10).

There can be no doubt as to the meaning of this vision. The dry and disjointed bones are a sad symbol of the entire people of Israel. The Northern Kingdom of Israel and now the Southern Kingdom of Judah as well had been destroyed and left desolate. The scattered survivors of the two kingdoms could in no sense be considered a nation any longer. *Our bones are dried up*, they cried. The hope of ever again existing as a nation had been lost. They compare themselves to limbs severed from the body—*cut off* never again to be united in a living organism

2. Another possible interpretation: The wind from the four corners of the earth is but a symbol of the universal life-giving spirit of God.

(v. 11). Nationally they were dead and disjointed with no prospect of anything better.

God had a positive word for those discouraged exiles. The *graves* (i.e., the foreign lands) where God's people were languishing in captivity would be opened. Israel would be resurrected from those metaphorical graves and restored to Canaan (v. 12). This stupendous miracle of national resurrection would cause the people's faith in the Lord to be firmly established (v. 13). Only the impartation of God's life-giving Spirit could effect such a revival; only the action of God could bring them back to their own land. The God of Israel not only has the prescience to predict the future, He has the power to perform His word (v. 14).

B. The Oracle of the Two Sticks 37:15-28

TRANSLATION

(15) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (16) Now as for you, son of man, take for yourself a stick, and write upon it: For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions; then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel his companions; (17) And bring them near one to the other into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. (18) And when the children of your people say to you: Will you not declare to us what you mean by these things? (19) say unto them: Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am about to take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and tribes of Israel his companions, and I will put them upon the stick of Judah, and I will make them to be one stick; and they shall be one in My hand. (20) And the sticks upon which you have written shall be in your hand before their eyes. (21) And say unto them: Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am about to take the children of Israel from among the nations where they went, and I will gather them from round about; and I will bring them into their land. (22) And I

will make them one nation in the land, upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to all of them; and they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they be divided anymore into two kingdoms. (23) They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their abominations and with all their transgressions; and I will save them out of all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and I will cleanse them, and they shall be My people, and I shall be their God. (24) And My servant David shall be king over them, and there shall be one shepherd to all of them; and they shall walk in My ordinances, and they shall keep My statutes, and do them. (25) And they shall dwell upon the land which I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, they and their sons and their grandsons forever; and David My servant shall be prince forever. (26) And I will make a covenant of peace with them—it shall be an everlasting covenant, with them; and I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. (27) And My dwelling place shall be over them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (28) And the nations shall know that I the LORD sanctified Israel, when My sanctuary shall be in their midst forever.

COMMENTS

Revived Israel would be a unified nation. The schism which occurred in 931 B.C. between the northern tribes and Judah would be a thing of the past. To symbolically portray this reunion of the tribes, Ezekiel was told to take two sticks—emblems of the royal scepters—and to label each. The first stick represented *Judah* and those of the children of Israel who had allied themselves with Judah. The tribe of Benjamin, though related to the northern tribes, chose to remain loyal to the Davidic dynasty in 931 B.C. The second stick represented the Northern Kingdom which is here as frequently in the Old Testament called *Ephraim* after the largest and most influential tribe of the north. *All the house of Israel* refers to the other nine

tribes who joined Ephraim in constituting the Northern Kingdom (v. 16).

The prophet was to take the newly inscribed sticks and hold them end to end to make it appear that they were one stick (v. 17). Such an action was designed to provoke interrogation and provide a preaching point (v. 18). When asked about the sticks Ezekiel was to explain the parable thusly. All the tribes which had joined Ephraim in the secession of 931 B.C. would be joined with Judah to form a single kingdom. This reunification would be a divine act brought about by the hand of God (v. 19).

Holding the sticks together in his hand (v. 20), Ezekiel was to amplify this reunification theme. Israelites as well as Jews would be gathered up from captive lands and brought to Canaan (v. 21). There they would form one nation with the tribe of Judah. All citizens of that kingdom would pay homage to one king (v. 22). All would be dedicated to the Lord. Heathen practices absorbed from the pagan environment of captivity would be purged from these people. God would then rescue them out of those pagan lands where they were currently dwelling. These cleansed and redeemed people would then enter into a new relationship with the Lord. He would be their God—the object of their devotion and worship—and they would be His people—the object of His concern and blessing (v. 23).

The king who would rule that united kingdom is now identified. He would be *My servant David*, not David in the flesh of course, but a scion of David's house (cf. 34:23). This king would be their spiritual as well as their political ruler, for He would be their *shepherd*. Under the tender leadership of this shepherd-king God's people would faithfully carry out the commandments and ordinances of the Lord (v. 24).

To Jacob, the ancestor of Israel, God had promised a land. The physical terrain of Canaan was but a preview of that land. The patriarchs knew this. Abraham looked for a city whose maker and builder was God (Heb. 11:10). The redeemed children of Israel and Judah would dwell in that land forever. What land is that? The territory, the kingdom, the nation over which the glorious Prince of the house of David would rule (v. 25).

Other blessings of the coming age are spelled out in the closing verses of chapter 37.

1. The citizens of that future kingdom would be under a new covenant—a covenant of peace which would be everlasting. No covenant other than that one inaugurated by the death and ratified by the resurrection of Jesus Christ could possibly be intended. Through Christ peace with God becomes a reality and peace with man a potentiality.

2. These believers would enjoy security under that new covenant for God would *establish* (lit., give) them.

3. God would multiply them in that Holy Land. The Book of Acts records the thrilling fulfillment of this blessed promise.

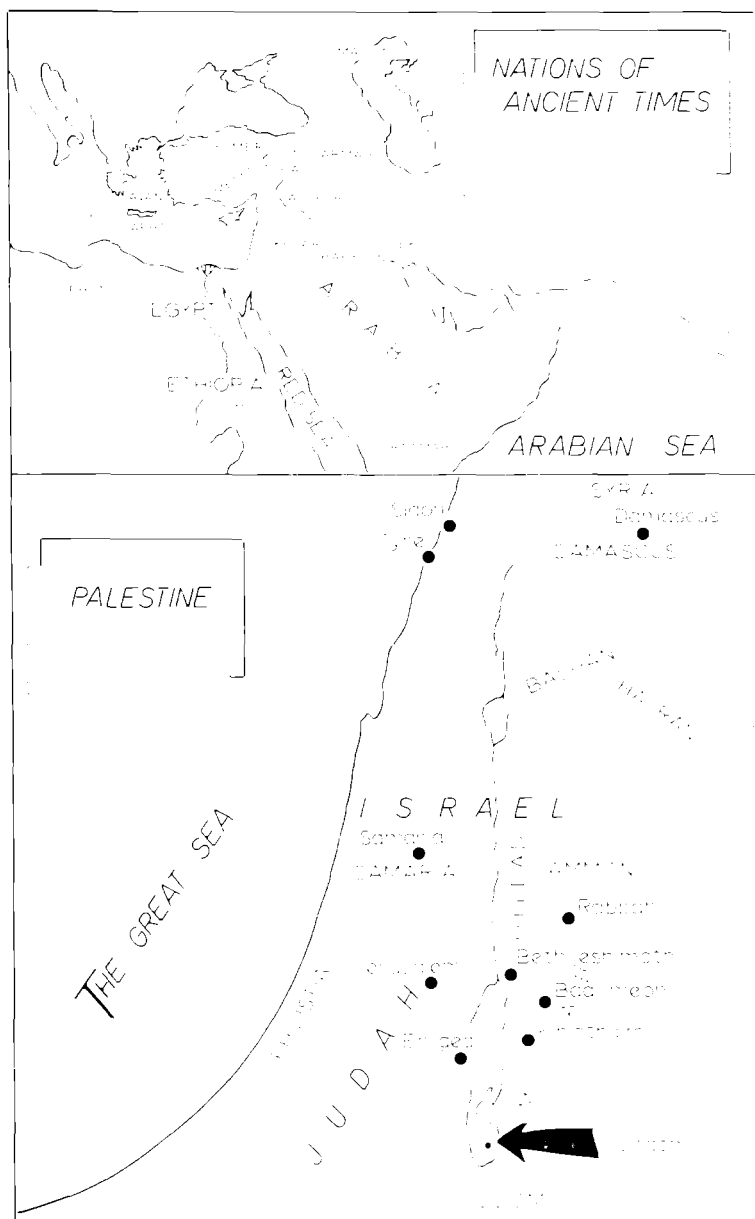
4. The sanctuary of God would be in the midst of His people forever (v. 26). The physical Temple erected by Zerubbabel after the return from exile was but a preview of the true sanctuary in which Jesus ministers (Heb. 8:2). This promise receives its highest realization first in the Incarnation (John 1:14), next in God's inhabitation of the church through the Spirit (II Cor. 6:16), and finally in His tabernacling with redeemed men in the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:3, 22). Just as the old Temple towered over the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so in the future age God's dwelling place would be *over* His people. This figure sets forth the idea of God's protective grace.

5. The people of God would enjoy intimate communion with their Maker in that day (v. 27). Once again the promise only attains complete realization in the relationship of Christian believers to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ (II Cor. 6:16).

6. This glorious transformation of Israel's condition would have a profound effect upon the heathen world round about. They would see the sanctuary of God (see promise 4 above) in the midst of Israel and they would recognize His presence and power among them. They would recognize in the lives of the redeemed the power of God to sanctify people, and having recognized this, they would seek admittance to the congregation and fellowship of God's spiritual Israel, the church of Christ.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In what way would they be disappointed who cast covetous eyes on the desolate land of Israel?
2. What three crimes had been committed against the land of Israel?
3. What does it mean when God lifts up His hand with regard to any matter?
4. Some claimed that the land of Canaan devoured its inhabitants. What did they mean by this?
5. In what way did Israel unwittingly profane the name of God in captivity?
6. Were all the glowing promises regarding the restoration to Canaan fulfilled literally and continually?
7. What did the restoration of Israel to Canaan prove about God?
8. What connection is there between the repentance of Israel and restoration to their land?
9. What does Ezekiel say which forms the background for the New Testament doctrine of the indwelling of God's Spirit?
10. How would God save His people from their uncleanness?
11. Once in Canaan, what attitude would the Jews have toward their former life of sin?
12. When were the promises of restoration fulfilled?
13. What did the valley of dry bones symbolize?
14. How is the spiritual depression of the Babylonian exiles indicated in chapter 37?
15. What did the resurrection of the dry bones symbolize?
16. Explain the parable of the two sticks.
17. What does Ezekiel say about the ruler of the united tribes?
18. How was the prophecy of a sanctuary for God's people fulfilled?



Chapter Seventeen

FINAL DELIVERANCE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

38:1 — 39:29

Chapters 38-39 deal with the efforts of some arch-enemy of God's people to invade and devastate the land of Israel. The tranquil scene with which the previous chapter closed would not go unchallenged. The new Israel of God would undergo testing as did the nation Israel of Old Testament times. These chapters are apocalyptic in nature. The language is highly symbolical and at times deliberately shadowy and even cryptic.¹ The time frame is the final age — the age of the Messiah — as is indicated by the recurring phrase *the end of days*. The author of the Book of Revelation seems to allude to this same event, the last battle between the powers of evil and the church of God. He placed this battle immediately before the final judgment and the emergence of the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 20:8).

These two chapters consist of seven oracles, each introduced with the formula, *Thus says the Lord God*.² For the purpose of this discussion the material can be divided into four major units: (1) the invasion by Gog (38:1-13); (2) the overthrow of Gog (38:14-23); (3) the destruction of Gog (39:1-20); and (4) the results of Gog's destruction (39:21-24). To this is appended a note of consolation for the exiles in Babylon (39:25-29).

I. THE INVASION BY GOG 38:1-13

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Son of man, set your face toward Gog from the land of Magog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, (3) and say: Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal; (4) and I will turn

1. Taylor, *TOTC*, p. 243.

2. 38:3-9; 10-13, 14-16, 17-23; 39:1-16, 17-24, 25-29.

you about, and put hooks in your jaws and bring you and your army out—horses and horsemen, all of them clothed gorgeously, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them handling the sword: (5) Persia, Cush and Put with them, all of them with shield and helmet; (6) Gomer, and all her bands; the house of Togarmah in the uttermost parts of the north, all his bands; even many people with you. (7) Be prepared, and prepare yourself, you and all your congregation who have congregated about you, and for whom you are a guard. (8) After many days you shall be mustered for service, in the latter years you shall come against the land that is brought back from the sword, that is gathered out of many peoples, against the mountains of Israel, which have been a continual waste; but it has been brought forth from peoples, and they dwell safely all of them. (9) And you shall go up, you shall come like a storm, you shall be like a cloud to cover the land, you and all of your bands, and many people with you. (10) Thus says the Lord GOD: It shall come to pass in that day, that things shall come up upon your heart, and you will devise an evil plot. (11) And you will say, I will go up against the land of unwalled villages, I will come upon those who are quiet, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, having neither bars nor gates; (12) to take spoil and seize prey; to turn your hand against the waste places which are now inhabited, and against the people that are gathered from the nations, that have acquired cattle and goods, that dwell in the middle of the earth. (13) Sheba and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all its powerful ones, shall say to you: Have you come to take spoil? have you assembled a congregation to seize prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take cattle and goods, to take great spoil?

COMMENTS

Ezekiel is to address an oracle to Gog. Who is Gog? From this text all that can be deduced is that (1) he is from the land of Magog; and (2) he was prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal.

Scholars have wrestled with the etymology of the name Gog. Among the more interesting suggestions are the following: (1) *Gog* is derived from the Sumerian *gug* which means darkness. Gog would then be a "personification of all that is dark and evil."³ (2) *Gog* is the exact equivalent of the Assyrian name *Gugu* who was king of Lydia in Asia Minor from 685-652 B.C.⁴ (3) *Gog* is a name artificially constructed from *Magog*, the land over which this anonymous ruler is said to have ruled.⁵

In truth there probably never will be general acceptance of any etymology for the name Gog. But more important is this question: Who is it that is given the name Gog? Almost every character of note in the Hellenistic period has been nominated.⁶ The position taken here is that Gog should not be identified with any figure of history, but rather should be regarded as an apocalyptic figure of the end-time.

Gog is said to be *from the land of Magog*. Magog, along with Meshech and Tubal, is mentioned in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 as being among the sons of Japheth. Many scholars follow Josephus (*Ant.* I.vi.1) in identifying the Magogites as the ruthless Scythians. These warriors were infamous in the ancient world for their practice of pausing to drink the blood of the first enemy soldier killed in battle.

A more positive identification can be made for Meshech and Tubal, two other lands said to be ruled by Gog. In Assyrian literature these peoples were known as *Mushki* and *Tabal*.⁷ They inhabited the region of central and eastern Anatolia near the headwaters of the Tigris. The *Mushki* entered the Near East in the twelfth century B.C. During the time of Sargon II the

3. Rowley, *RA*, p. 32.

4. Pfeiffer, *IOT*, p. 562.

5. Keil, *BCOT*, II, 159.

6. Alexander the Great (Winckler); Antiochus the Great (Grotius); Antiochus Epiphanes (Seinecke); Antiochus Eupator (Berry); Mithridates VI king of Pontus (Schmidt).

7. Texts mentioning one or both of these people are found in Luckenbill, *ARAB*, I, 74, 138-44; II, 4, 12, 21-23, 46-48, 61.

Mushki were ruled by the famous King Mita, Midas of classical and mythical fame.⁸

The identification of Rosh is more problematical. A country called *Rashu* is mentioned in one Assyrian text which mentions *Mushki* and *Tabal*.⁹ This identification is likely. On the other hand, some scholars believe that Rosh is a general designation for all northern territories.

Ezekiel is using the thought-forms of his day as vehicles for this eschatological prophecy. Throughout Old Testament history prophets warned of an attack upon God's people from the north (cf. Jer. 4:5—6:26). What Ezekiel says here is that God's people would face one last dreadful onslaught by the forces of evil out of the north, the traditional region of Israel's enemies.

The evil designs of Gog against God's people cannot succeed because the Lord is against him (v. 3). Like a wild beast captured and led about by hooks in the jaws, Gog would be forcefully turned back. His handsome and well-equipped troops (v. 4) would be comprised of people of many nations (vv. 5-6). Ezekiel enumerates five allies of Gog:

1. Persia. The Persians were an Indo-European people who entered the Iranian plateau late in the second millennium B.C. They were located east of the Persian Gulf.

2. Cush. The Cushites were a Hamitic nation (Gen. 10:6-8; I Chron. 1:8-10) residing south of Egypt. Cush is equivalent to Ethiopia.

3. Put. The war-like inhabitants of Put were a Hamitic people (Gen. 10:6; I Chron. 1:8). They are mentioned elsewhere as allies of Egypt (Nah. 3:9; Jer. 46:9; Ezek. 30:5) and warriors of Tyre (Ezek. 27:10). Put was certainly an African nation, but its location is disputed. Probably Put is Libya in North Africa.¹⁰

8. Herodotus I, 14 has Midas as king of the Phrygians. Mita (Midas) must have been a dynastic title preserved by the Phrygians from the *Mushki* who apparently earlier had occupied parts of Asia Minor.

9. Luckenbill, *ARAB*, II, 48.

10. Kitchen, *NBD*, p. 1066.

4. Gomer. Gomer was a Japhethic people (Gen. 10:2, 3) probably to be identified with the ancient Gimirrai (Cimmerians)¹¹ who invaded the Fertile Crescent from their Ukrainian homeland some time before the eighth century B.C.

5. The house of Togarmah. These Japhethic peoples (Gen. 10:3; 1 Chron. 1:6) were mentioned earlier by Ezekiel as trading partners with Tyre (Ezek. 27:14). In the fourteenth century Tegarama is described as lying between Carchemish and Harran on a main trade route through southwest Armenia. Some commentators refer to them as Armenians.

In verse 7 God exhorts Gog to prepare himself for the invasion of Israel and to assume the guardianship or command of the various people who had assembled about him (v. 7).

Verse 8 serves to underscore the time-frame of the entire prophecy. The attack will take place (1) *after many days*. This phrase suggests that for a long period of time Gog and his confederates would be dormant. But at the appropriate time they would be *mustered for service*, i.e., they would reappear on the stage of history. (2) The attack would transpire *in the latter years*, a phrase which may point to the eschaton—the final end-time period. (3) The attack would occur after the restoration of the people of God.

Verse 8 also serves to underscore the enormity of Gog's crime. He would attack a people which had been rescued from the sword of national death by being gathered out of all peoples where they had been held captive. Furthermore, the attack would be against a land which had already suffered immeasurably having been waste a long time. And finally, the attack would be against a land which enjoyed security and peace (v. 8). Yet like a terrible storm cloud the awesome armies of Gog would come up against the land of Canaan (v. 9).

In verse 10 Ezekiel shifts back in time to the point where Gog first hatched the plot to attack Israel. *In that day* when Israel was dwelling safely in Canaan Gog would *devise an evil plan* against the people of God (v. 10). The peace and security of

11. This identification is made on the basis of statements made by Herodotus (I.6, 15, 103; IV. 1, 11, 12).

God's people is such that they would not have made any preparation to meet such an onslaught. The defenseless, unwallled villages would be an open invitation to tyrants like Gog to invade the land (v. 11).

Even before the attack, Gog could count the spoil and captives he would take. He would *turn* his *hand*, i.e., take strong measures, in this campaign. Yet those who are the objects of his wrath—God's people—certainly had done nothing to raise the ire of Gog. He came from the distant north; they lived in the center (lit., *navel*) of the earth.¹² Certainly a people so far removed from Magog could pose no threat. The attack of Gog would be an act of naked aggression.

In his evil scheme Gog is encouraged by neighboring merchant nations—Sheba, Dedan, Tarshish (cf. 27:12, 15, 22). They hoped to enrich themselves by purchasing and reselling the plunder of Israel (v. 13).

II. THE OVERTHROW OF GOG 38:14-23

TRANSLATION

(14) Therefore, son of man, prophesy, and say to Gog: Thus says the Lord GOD: In that day when My people Israel dwell safely, shall you not know it? (15) And you shall come from your place, from the uttermost parts of the north, you and many people with you, all of them riding on horses, a great congregation and a mighty army. (16) And you shall go up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the end of days that I will bring you against My land in order that the nations might know Me, when I shall be sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog. (17) Thus says the Lord GOD: Are you he of whom I spoke in former days by the hand of My servants the prophets of Israel who prophesied in those days for (many) years, that I would bring you against them? (18) And it shall come to pass in that day, when Gog comes against the land

12. All the international highways converged in Canaan. The phrase is also used in Jud. 9:37.

of Israel (oracle of the Lord GOD), that My wrath shall rise up in My nostrils. (19) For in My jealousy, in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking upon the land of Israel. (20) Fish of the sea, birds of the heavens, beasts of the field, and every creeping thing that creeps upon the ground, and every man who is upon the face of the earth shall shake at My presence, and the mountains shall be ripped open, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground. (21) And I will call against him throughout all My mountains a sword (oracle of the Lord GOD); every man's sword shall be against his brother. (22) And I will enter into judgment with him with pestilence, and with blood; an overflowing shower, great hailstones, fire and brimstone I will rain upon him and upon his bands, and upon the many peoples who are with him. (23) Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and make Myself known before the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

COMMENTS

The plan of Gog would utterly fail. He would take note of the unpretentious and peaceful people and think that he would have no difficulty in overwhelming them. With his vast armies coming from the north (v. 15) he would arise suddenly, ominously against Israel like a storm cloud. Little do the heathen realize that they are unwittingly carrying out the plans of God. He had brought them in the sense that he had permitted them to make this attack.¹³ Through the destruction of this vast throng God would prove conclusively to all that He is king of the universe. He would be *sanctified* i.e., honored as holy, through the destruction of Gog's forces (v. 16).

What proof is there that the invasion of Gog was part of

13. Here, as throughout the Old Testament, the active or causative will of God must be distinguished from the permissive will. All things which happen do so because God either causes them to happen, or allows them to happen. Thus is removed the moral difficulty of having God lead these barbarians into a crime for which He must punish them.

God's foreordained scheme of self-vindication? The fact that long before it occurred the servants of the Lord predicted such an invasion. The prophecy here in Ezekiel is certainly in view, and possibly passages in Zephaniah (chap. 1) and Jeremiah (4:5ff.) as well (v. 17). The fate of Gog as well as the fact of the invasion is announced by Ezekiel. The furious wrath of God would be manifested against Gog (v. 18). Divine *jealousy* or zeal was aroused whenever man outraged His immutable Lord. He would cause a great shaking i.e., an earthquake, in the land (v. 19) which would cause consternation and confusion in man and beast alike. Mountains and massive walls would crumble (v. 20). In the panic caused by this awesome display of divine power the enemy soldiers would lash out at and destroy one another (v. 21).¹⁴

In this judgment against Gog, God would employ pestilence and bloodshed. A violent, overflowing storm of hailstones, fire and brimstone (cf. 13:11, 13) would finally bring about the demise of Gog (v. 22). This stroke against Gog and consequent rescue of Israel would cause citizens of many nations to recognize the majesty and power of the Lord (v. 23).

III. THE DESTRUCTION OF GOG 39:1-20

In the first main division of chapter 39 Ezekiel emphasizes the certainty of the overthrow of Gog by repeating the substance of what he has already said about that defeat (vv. 1-8). He then stresses the completeness of the destruction (vv. 9-20).

A. The Certainty of Gog's Destruction 39:1-8

TRANSLATION

(1) And as for you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say. Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Gog,

14. Cf. Judges 7:22; 1 Samuel 14:20.

prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal; (2) and I will turn you about, and lead you on, and bring you up from the uttermost parts of the north; and I will bring you against the mountains of Israel; (3) and I will smite your bow from your left hand, and I will cause your arrows to fall from your right hand. (4) Upon the mountains of Israel you will fall, you and all your bands and peoples that are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to beasts of the field, to be devoured. (5) Upon the face of the ground you shall fall; for I have spoken (oracle of the Lord GOD). (6) And I will send fire against Magog, and against the inhabitants of the isles who dwell safely; and they shall know that I am the LORD. (7) And My holy name I will make known in the midst of My people Israel; I will not defile My holy name again; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. (8) Behold, it comes, and it shall come to pass (oracle of the Lord GOD); that is the day of which I have spoken.

COMMENTS

Chapter 39 gives an even more vivid description of the overthrow of Gog. The chapter begins with a declaration of divine hostility directed toward Gog (v. 1; cf. 38:3). God would *turn Gog about*, i.e., frustrate his purpose. God would lead him to his destruction upon the mountains of Israel (v. 2). Gog's skillful archers would be of no value in the battle which would transpire there (v. 3).

Gog and all his confederates would fall on the mountains of Israel. Their corpses would be left unburied, a prey to beast and bird alike (v. 4). By no means would Gog be able to avert this calamity, for this destruction had been decreed by the Lord (v. 5). Even the lands from which the invaders came would experience divine judgment, for God would send *a fire* against those lands. The fire here as frequently in the Old Testament probably symbolizes warfare (v. 6). No more would the heathen profanely mock the impotence of Israel's God. The divine

presence in the midst of Israel would be obvious to all when the Lord made known His name, i.e., His character, person, presence, in this mighty judgment upon Gog (v. 7).

The destruction of Gog was a foregone conclusion; it was as good as accomplished. The Lord cannot lie, and He had announced it (v. 8).

B. The Completeness of the Destruction 39:9-20

TRANSLATION

(9) And the inhabitants of the cities of Israel shall go out, and they shall burn the weapons and make fuel of them, even the shields, bucklers, bows, arrows, hand staves, and spears; and they shall make fires of them seven years. (10) And they shall not take wood from the field, nor shall they cut down any out of the woods, for they shall make fires of the weapons; and they shall take spoil of those who spoiled them, and they shall plunder those who plundered them (oracle of the Lord GOD). (11) And it shall come to pass in that day I will give to Gog a place there for burial in Israel, the valley of those who pass through on the east of the sea; and it shall stop those who pass through; and they shall bury there Gog and all his multitude; and they shall call it the valley of Hamon-gog. (12) In order to cleanse the land, the house of Israel shall bury there seven months. (13) Yea, all the people of the land shall bury there, and it shall acquire for them a reputation, in the day when I am glorified (oracle of the Lord GOD). (14) And they shall set apart men of continual employment who shall pass through the land burying with those who pass through those who remain upon the face of the ground to cleanse it; at the end of the seven months they shall search. (15) When they that pass through have passed through the land and see the human bones, then a sign shall be erected beside it until the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamon-gog. (16) And Hamonah shall be the name of a city. Thus they shall cleanse the land. (17) And as for you,

son of man, thus says the Lord GOD: Say to the birds of every sort, and to every beast of the field: Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to My feast which I am preparing for you, even a great feast, upon the mountains of Israel, that you may eat meat and drink blood. (18) The flesh of the mighty you shall eat, and the blood of the princes of the earth you shall drink; rams, lambs, goats, bullocks, fatlings of Bashan are all of them. (19) And you shall eat fat until you are full, and you shall drink blood until you are intoxicated because of My feast which I have prepared for you. (20) And you shall be filled at My table with horses and horsemen, with mighty men, and with all men of war, (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

In stressing the completeness of the destruction of Gog Ezekiel flashes three somewhat gruesome pictures before his readers.

1. He points out the immense quantity of spoil which God's people would obtain from the fallen foe. So vast would be the multitude of the enemies slain that the wood of their weapons would serve God's people as fuel for seven years (v. 9). During that period it would not be necessary for men to resort to their usual sources of fire wood. The tables would be turned in that day. God's people would take spoil from those powerful enemies who had previously plundered Israel (v. 10).

2. Ezekiel describes the length of time which it would take Israel to bury the dead and cleanse the land from defilement. In verse 11 God seems to take pity on the fallen multitude of Gog in that He provides a burial place for them. That spot is identified as *the valley of them that pass by*. This may be taken as a reference to the valley through which one might pass from the west to the east side of the Dead Sea. The multitude of bodies there would block that thoroughfare. The valley would receive the name Hamon-gog, i.e., the multitude of Gog (v. 11). For seven months the house of Israel would transport dead bodies

to this remote burial spot. An unburied corpse was a defilement of the land (Deut. 21:23) which had to be removed (v. 12). The whole population would take part in this mass burial. They would be famous for this noble and horrendous effort. They would share the glory of their God in that day of victory (v. 13).

After the seven-month period a permanent burial committee would be appointed. They would scour the land looking for unburied bones (v. 14). Travelers would aid the committee by marking any spot where they noticed bones (v. 15). Near that valley of Hamon-gog a city would be built to commemorate the victory over Gog. That city would be called Hamonah, *multitude* (v. 16).

3. Ezekiel depicts the horrible carnage which would result from the overthrow of Gog. The slaughter of the multitude is regarded as a sacrificial feast to which the birds and beasts are the invited guests. The flesh and blood of the fallen men of Gog would serve as the sacramental elements (v. 17). The victims of this sacrificial feast are described as *rams, lambs, goats* and the like (v. 18) which are figures for the mighty warriors of Gog (v. 20). The birds and beasts of prey would eat of God's sacrificial feast, God's *table* (v. 19).

IV. THE RESULTS OF GOG'S DESTRUCTION

39:21-24

TRANSLATION

(21) And I will set My glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see My judgment that I have executed, and My hand that I have set against them. (22) So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God, from that day and forward. (23) And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity because of their iniquity, because they acted treacherously against Me, and I hid My face from them, and I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and all of

them fell by the sword. (24) According to their uncleanness and their transgressions I dealt with them, and I hid My face from them.

COMMENTS

The overthrow of Gog would be regarded as a divine act revealing God's *glory, judgment, hand* (v. 21). Israel's faith would thereby be confirmed (v. 22). The nations at last would be convinced that Israel's captivity experience was not due to any lack of power on God's part. Rather the Lord had allowed them to suffer because *they broke faith with Me*. God hid His face from them, refusing to aid them against their enemies. As a result *all of them*,¹⁵ i.e., a great number of them, fell by the sword (v. 23). Perversity on the part of the people, not powerlessness on the part of God was responsible for their abandonment by the Lord (v. 24).

V. CONSOLATION FOR THE EXILES 39:25-29

TRANSLATION

(25) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will reverse the captivity of Jacob, and have compassion on all the house of Israel; and I will be zealous for My holy name. (26) And they shall bear all of their shame, and all their treachery which they have committed against Me, when they dwell upon their land safely, and none shall terrify them; (27) when I have brought them back from the peoples, and gathered them out of the lands of their enemies, and I have been sanctified in them in the eyes of many nations. (28) And they shall know that I am the

15. An example of Biblical hyperbole. Ezekiel has already made clear that the house of Israel went into captivity. He was himself one who had survived the slaughter of the sword.

Lord their God, when I have caused them to go captive unto the nations, and then have gathered them unto their own land; and I will not leave any of them any more there; (29) nor will I hide any more My face from them; for I have poured out My spirit upon the house of Israel (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

The captivity was a time when God was hiding His face from His people. Using verses 23-24 as a transition, Ezekiel brings the focus back to his own time for the final movement of thought in this section. It was needful that the exiles in their distress see at the close of this far-reaching prophecy the first step in the long course of events leading to its fulfillment, because that step was one of special interest and comfort to them; but even this promise is mingled with predictions which still look on to the then distant future.

Previously Ezekiel had spoken of the promised restoration and the glory of Yahweh abiding with His people in their own land. In chapters 38-39 he has indicated that these promises would not go unnoticed nor unchallenged by other nations. Yahweh's presence would not preclude aggression against the Canaan of God. The difference: Yahweh would now be *with* them rather than withdrawing from them as He had done in 587 B.C.

God's new positive relationship to His people would begin shortly. God would *bring back the captivity of Jacob*, i.e., reverse the fortunes of His people. The *whole house of Israel*, i.e., all the tribes, would experience the compassion of the Lord. God would be jealous or zealous for His name or reputation, and His reputation would be most enhanced by the prosperity of His worshipers (v. 25).

God was about to bring His people back from the lands of their enemies. This favorable treatment of Israel would cause God's name to be revered by many peoples (v. 27). In their homeland God's people would enjoy peace and security. Their

sense of gratitude toward the Lord would make them keenly ashamed of their own former waywardness (v. 26). Gentiles would come to see that the Lord God reveals Himself in history; that He brought about the captivity of His people, and engineered their restoration to their homeland as well. Not one of His true people would be left in foreign lands (v. 28). No more would God hide His face from them, i.e., they would enjoy fellowship with God. This glorious state of affairs would exist in the age of the Holy Spirit when God has poured out His Spirit upon the house of Israel (v. 29). Already God had promised to pour out His Spirit on His people (Ezek. 36:27; 37:14). Joel was the first prophet to make such a prediction (Joel 2:28), and after the time of Ezekiel that same promise was taken up by Zechariah (Zech. 12:10).

Special Note

THE INTERPRETATION OF EZEKIEL 38—39

In chapters 38-39 Ezekiel is predicting an unparalleled invasion by a dreadful foe. It is generally conceded by commentators that these chapters contain an apocalyptic element. In apocalyptic literature the setting is usually the end of the age. This kind of literature is full of symbols, especially numerical symbols. Great catastrophes befalling God's people and dramatic rescues by divine agencies characterize this type of writing. Most of the characters are painted much larger-than-life in these word pictures. Deliberate vagueness and purposeful incongruities are further identifying marks of apocalyptic. One can note at least three incongruities in the Gog-Magog chapters: (1) In 38:4 the Lord brings Gog forth, but in 38:10 Gog himself devises the plan of attack; (2) in 38:18-22 Gog is overthrown by earthquake and storm, but in 39:1-2 Gog is still very much active; (3) in 39:4 Gog and company are devoured by birds and animals, while in 39:11-16 the bodies of the fallen host are buried; but again in 39:17-20 the carcasses of the fallen enemy are picked clean by

birds and beasts. As in apocalyptic literature in general, “the final catastrophe is looked at from various angles, without any attempt to trace a logical order in the sequence of events.”⁹ The purpose of apocalyptic writing such as this is the “unveiling” of the future, not in the sense of chronicling every event prior to its occurrence, but in the sense of showing God’s lordship over the future. It serves the function of letting the faithful know that God knows where history is heading and that He is ultimately in control of the situation. Thus apocalyptic literature guides and strengthens God’s people in dark days of uncertainty.

Having recognized the apocalyptic elements within these two chapters, commentators are still divided as to the fulfillment of the prediction here made. Four major categories of conclusions have been formulated.

A. The Historical Views

Some commentators hold that the invasion of Gog was an actual event, future from the standpoint of Ezekiel, but ancient history from the present-day vantage point. Gog has been identified with every outstanding general from the time of Ezekiel to the time of Christ and even beyond. Among those suggested are Cambyzes king of Persia, Alexander the Great, Antiochus the Great, Antiochus Epiphanes, Antiochus Eupator, and Mithridates king of Pontus. Within this general category of approach perhaps the strongest case can be made for equating Gog with Antiochus Epiphanes.

Antiochus Epiphanes was a bitter opponent of the Jews in the second century before Christ. The center of his kingdom was in north Syria, Antioch on the Orontes river being his capital. To the east his territory extended beyond the Tigris. To the north his reign extended over Meshech and Tubal, districts of Anatolia. In his excellent commentary on the Book of Revelation, William

9. Cooke in *ICC* cited by Blackwood, *EPH*, p. 228.

Hendriksen argues that Magog in the present prophecy represents Syria, and Gog, Antiochus. He comments as follows on the relationship between the Gog invasion of Ezekiel and that recorded in the Book of Revelation: “. . . The Book of Revelation uses this period of affliction and woe as a symbol of the final attack of satan and his hordes upon the church.”¹⁰ That Ezekiel's description of the defeat of Gog (Antiochus) would be an appropriate type of the final overthrow of the enemies of God can be seen in the following parallels pointed out by Hendriksen:

1. The *last* great oppression of the people of God under the Old Testament era was sufficiently severe to typify the *final* attack of anti-Christian forces upon the church in the New Testament age.

2. The armies of Gog and Magog were very numerous and came from wide-ranging territories. This would be most appropriate to symbolize the *world-wide* opposition to the church in the days just preceding the second coming.

3. The persecution under Antiochus was very brief but very severe. The tribulation through which God's people will pass toward the end of the present dispensation will apparently also be of short duration but extremely severe (cf. Rev. 11:11).

4. Defeat of Gog and Magog was unexpected and complete. It was clearly the work of God. So also will be the sudden overthrow of the eschatological Gog and Magog of the Book of Revelation.

This position identifying the invasion forces of Ezekiel 38-39 with the hosts of Antiochus Epiphanes is not as easily overturned as some commentators seem to think. It will not do, for example, to argue that the time frame for the Ezekiel passage is the *latter years* or *latter days* (38:8, 16) for these expressions are clearly used in the Book of Daniel to include events which transpired after the Babylonian captivity.¹¹ Nor will it do to argue

10. Hendriksen, *MTC*, p. 233.

11. See Daniel 2:28 and 10:4. Similar expressions clearly referring to the closing days of the Old Testament era: *time of the end* (Dan. 8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9); *end of years* (Dan. 11:6).

that the apocalyptic character of these chapters necessitates a prophecy dealing with the end-time. Clearly Daniel uses highly symbolic (apocalyptic?) language to describe certain events in the intertestamental period (Dan. 8), as does Zechariah as well (Zech. 9:11-17). Furthermore, the ruthless assault of Antiochus against Israel and the divine protection of God's people in the midst of that assault is a major theme in the prophecies of Ezekiel's contemporary Daniel (Dan. 8:9-27; 11:21-35). Why should it then be thought strange that Ezekiel would devote two chapters to describing in highly idealized language this same invasion?

B. The Literal Futuristic View

Some commentators believe that the invasion of Gog and Magog has not yet occurred. Ezekiel is describing the final invasion of the land of Israel by a ruthless coalition following the Millennium. C. I. Scofield popularized this view. He writes:

That the primary reference is to the northern, (European) powers, headed up by Russia, all agree . . . 'Gog' is the prince, 'Magog,' his land. The reference to Meshech and Tubal (Moscow and Tobolsk) is a clear mark of identification. Russia and the northern powers have been the latest persecutors of dispersed Israel, and it is congruous both with divine justice and with the covenants . . . that destruction should fall at the climax of the last mad attempt to exterminate the remnant of Israel in Jerusalem. The whole prophecy belongs to the yet future 'day of Jehovah' . . . and to the battle of Armageddon . . . , but includes also the final revolt of the nations at the close of the kingdom-age¹²

A disciple of Scofield, John F. Walvoord cites two reasons for believing that a Russian invasion of Israel is being prophesied. First, he points out that three times in chapters 38-39 the invading armies are said to come from the extreme north (38:6,

12. *SRB*, comments on Ezekiel 38.

15; 39:2). Then Walvoord points to the fact that Gog is said to be "the prince of Rosh." The nineteenth century lexicographer Wilhelm Gesenius is cited as the authority for equating Russia with Rosh.¹³

The geographical argument offered by Walvoord is weak. Jeremiah frequently speaks of armies coming from "the uttermost parts of the earth" by which he means no more than Babylonia.¹⁴ In some sense Mt. Zion itself is said to be situated in the uttermost part of the north (Ps. 48:2).

The etymological argument offered by Walvoord linking Russia with Rosh is also weak. For one thing, the precise translation of the Hebrew term *rosh* here is uncertain. Several modern versions render the word as an adjective modifying the word *prince*.¹⁵ Even conceding that Rosh is a proper name¹⁶ here (as in ASV and NASB) that by no means proves that Rosh is to be identified with Russia. For one thing, hard etymological evidence for this identification is lacking. Rosh is here connected with Meshech and Tubal now generally accepted as being regions in eastern Anatolia. Gesenius was making an intelligent guess at the identification of Rosh in his lexicon, but he was writing at a time when Assyrian texts mentioning these places were not available. His etymologies are now generally disregarded. Even the dispensational writer Feinberg rejects the Rosh = Russia identification.¹⁷ A cylinder text of the Assyrian king Sargon mentions a land of Râshi on the Elamite border. The same text speaks of Tabalum (Ezekiel's Tubal) and the land of Mushki (Ezekiel's Meshech).¹⁸ Could this Rashi be Ezekiel's Rosh? In any case, the evidence seems to point to Rosh being a region of Anatolia far north of Israel, but far south of Russia.

Patrick Fairbairn does perhaps the best work in setting forth

13. Walvoord, *NP*, pp. 106-108.

14. See Jeremiah 6:22; 25:32; 31:8; 50:41.

15. KJV, RSV, and NASB margin have *chief prince of Meshech*.

16. The Greek Old Testament supports Rosh as a proper name.

17. Feinberg, *PE*, p. 220.

18. Luckenbill, *ARAB*, II, 48.

the arguments against any literal interpretation of Ezekiel 38-39. He enumerates six arguments which are here summarized:

1. It is impossible to identify Gog and Magog with any historical person or place.

2. It is improbable that such a conglomerate army as is here explained would ever form a military coalition.

3. The size of the invading force is disproportionate to that of Israel or any spoil which they might have derived from Israel.

4. The mind cannot imagine a situation in which it would take seven months to bury slain soldiers, much less the utilization of discarded weapons for seven years as fuel. Fairbairn conservatively estimates that the corpses would have to number over 300 million. How would any living thing survive the pestilential vapors arising from such a mass of corpses?

5. The gross carnality of the scene is inconsistent with Messianic times.

6. This prophecy was the same which had been spoken in old times by the prophets (38:17). However, no prophecies concerning Gog and Magog are recorded elsewhere. However, prophecies of a final assault against God's people and the miraculous overthrow of the invaders is a constant burden of prophecy.¹⁹

C. Future Idealistic View

Since there are no clearly identifiable historical events to which the prophecy can be attached, it is possible that this invasion is yet future. The commentators holding to the future idealistic view would distinguish between what is of primary and what is of secondary significance in the two chapters. The primary significance is that the ruthless enemies of God's people will attack with the avowed intention of utterly destroying them. God will rescue His people by divine agencies. The secondary or

19. Fairbairn, *EE*, pp. 204-205.

“representative” elements in the two chapters are the place names, the weapons used, the chronological statements and the like. In other words, Ezekiel 38-39 teaches that God’s people will face implacable enemies; the leader of the enemy will not necessarily have the name Gog, nor will he fight with bows and arrows.²⁰ By his use of the same names, and a short summary of the same description, the Apostle John has shown that he regarded Ezekiel’s vision as typical, and its fulfillment as in his time still future. Thus the commentators holding the future idealistic view see in Ezekiel 38-39 the final climatic struggle between the forces of good and evil. With the help of God, His people will ultimately be victorious in this struggle.

D. The Prophetic Parable View

The parabolic view of Ezekiel 38-39 is very popular among conservatives as well as liberals. These chapters illustrate a great truth, but refer to no specific event in time and space. Israel can have assurance from these chapters that once restored the power of God would protect her from the worst foe. At the same time, the church can gain strength from this passage in that here is a promise of God’s deliverance from the most severe attacks. Gardiner sets forth this view when he states that

... there are several clear indications that he did not confine his view in this prophecy to any literal event, but intended to set forth under the figure of Gog and his armies all the opposition of the world to the kingdom of God, and to foretell, like his contemporary Daniel, the final and complete triumph of the latter in the distant future.²¹

Blackwood adds these words:

If the passage is apocalyptic, the identity of Gog becomes meaningless. He represents every force of evil that is marshalled

20. Hall, *WBC*, p. 470.

21. Gardiner, *OTC*, p. 352.

against God. It is immaterial whether or not Ezekiel had in mind a historical prototype.²²

From the more liberal camp Allen writes:

The chapters should be treated as an elaborate piece of symbolism, an attempt to portray some of the ultimate problems of human life with the help of figures and incidents borrowed from the repertoire of mythology.²³

Thus according to this view, Ezekiel 38-39 speaks of concepts, not events; the clash of ideologies rather than armies. Those who seek to identify Gog with some ancient tyrant, and those who seek here specific predictions of some imminent attack upon the Zionist state of Israel are equally wide of the mark. This apocalypse "deals with every threat to faith in every time and every nation."²⁴

In criticism of the parabolic view three points need to be made. (1) Many of those holding this view fail to take the oracle as a serious teaching of the Word of God. However, within these two chapters there are seven distinct claims to inspiration. This is a divine revelation and not Ezekiel's speculations. (2) The parabolic view does not unite the interpretation of these chapters with a real return of God's people to their land. Yet history records the fulfillment of many items in the background and setting of this prophecy. (3) Those holding this view do a rather poor job of correlating the predictions of Ezekiel with the Gog-Magog prophecy of Revelation 20:9.

Ezekiel's prophesies regarding the invasion of Gog are enigmatic and difficult. Honest and capable expositors will continue to have differences of opinion regarding the specific fulfillment of the prediction. The present writer believes that Ezekiel is speaking about a specific event which has not yet transpired. That he employs hyperbole, symbolism and apocalyptic imagery is readily admitted. That the passage has an *application* to any

22. Blackwood, *EPH*, p. 227.

23. Allen, *IB*, pp. 272-274.

24. Blackwood, *EPH*, p. 228.

situation in which God's people are under trial may also be readily admitted. But that which Ezekiel had in mind was an eschatological event—the final showdown between God's people and their enemies.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In what time-frame should one place the invasion by Gog?
2. What various suggestions have been made about the identity of Gog and Magog?
3. What connection is there between the invasion by Gog and the numerous threats in the Old Testament of an invasion by an enemy from the north?
4. With what events does John in Revelation associate the invasion of Gog?
5. How would God's ultimate plan be advanced through the invasion of Gog?
6. By what means would God destroy Gog?
7. By what figures does Ezekiel underscore the completeness of Gog's destruction?
8. What is the connection between the promise of restoration in 39:25-29 and the preceding material promising the overthrow of Gog?
9. What are the characteristics of apocalyptic literature?
10. Why do some scholars feel that the Gog invasion was fulfilled in the persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes?
11. What are some indications that Ezekiel did not intend for chapters 38-39 to be taken literally?
12. What evidence is there here which is supposed to point to a modern day Russian invasion of Zionist Israel? How would you refute this evidence?
13. What weaknesses are there in the parabolic view of Ezekiel 38-39?

Chapter Eighteen

GOD'S FUTURE TEMPLE

40:1 — 43:12

The Book of Ezekiel ends as it began, with a vision. In chapters 1-3 Ezekiel sees a vision illustrating how God had visited His people in Exile; these last chapters depict God dwelling in the midst of His people who have been re-established in their own land. Earlier in vision Ezekiel had seen the Temple of God profaned and he had seen the consequent departure of the divine Glory (8:1-11:25). In these chapters God again dwells in the midst of His Temple (43:5). Thus chapters 40-48 are not a superfluous appendix to the Book of Ezekiel, but rather the climax of his prophetic thought.

From the vantage point of a high mountain (probably Mt. Zion) Ezekiel saw in vision the holy city. An angelic figure conducted him through the Temple area. Everything was measured with a measuring rod. The details are tedious, especially to the western mind. These chapters describe (1) the future temple (40:1 — 43:12); (2) the future worship (43:13 — 46:24); and (3) the future land (chaps. 47-48).

Because chapters 40-48 form a veritable continental divide in Biblical interpretation, the first section of the present chapter will survey the various approaches which have been taken to these chapters. This introductory section will be followed by a description of that new Temple envisioned by Ezekiel. In this angelic guided tour of the Zion-to-be the student must not allow himself to become bogged down in tedious detail and unfamiliar units of measure (cubits, reeds, etc.). The student should ever keep in mind that the subject of the closing chapters of Ezekiel is the restitution of the kingdom of God. This theme is unfolded in a vision in which are displayed in concrete detail a rebuilt Temple, reformed priesthood, reorganized services, restored monarchy, reapportioned territory, and a renewed people.

I. THE INTERPRETATION OF EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE

The problem of the interpretation of Ezekiel 40-48 is one of the most difficult in Biblical hermeneutics. Three main

approaches to these chapters have been taken by scholars: (1) the literal prophetic; (2) the literal futuristic; and (3) the symbolic Christian.

A. The Literal Prophetic View

According to those who hold to the literal prophetic view of the Temple, Ezekiel is here giving the blueprints for the Temple which God intended for His people to build upon their return to the Holy Land. Philip Mauro is perhaps the most forceful proponent of this view. He argues:

God's plan had always been to give His people the exact pattern of the sanctuary they were to build for His name . . . And now again a house was about to be built for the Name of the Lord in Jerusalem. Therefore . . . we should expect to find at this period a revelation from heaven of the pattern to be followed in the building of that house. And just here we *do* find the revelation from God of the complete pattern and appointments of a temple, with directions to the prophet to show the same to the house of Israel.¹

It is sometimes argued against this view that too many details are omitted if Ezekiel intended these chapters to be a set of blueprints. This is certainly true, but it is no less true of the Tabernacle specifications given to Moses at Sinai. Plumptre, however, points to a more telling indictment of the literal prophetic view of the Temple vision. He points out that

there is no trace in the after history of Israel of any attempt to carry Ezekiel's ideal into execution. No reference is made to it by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who were the chief teachers of the people at the time of the rebuilding of the temple. There is no record of its having been in the thoughts of Zerubbabel, the Prince of Judah, and Joshua the high priest, as they set about that work. No description of the second temple

1. Mauro, *HI*, p. 119.

or its ritual in Josephus or the rabbinical writings at all tallies with what we find in these chapters.²

In rebuttal to this line of argument, Mauro points out that

. . . there is no evidence now available as to the plan of the temple built in the days of Ezra. Herod the Great had so transformed it in the days of Christ . . . as to destroy all trace of the original design. That question, however, which we cannot now answer, does not affect the question of the purpose for which the pattern was revealed to Ezekiel.³

B. The Literal Futuristic View

Much support in recent years has been given to the Dispensational view, or what might be dubbed the literal futuristic view of the Temple. According to this view, God still has physical Israel very much in His plans. All prophecies pertaining to a glorious future for Israel are to be literally fulfilled in a millennial dispensation which is to follow this present age. The Jews will one day rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem following the specifications given by Ezekiel. The Old Covenant blood sacrifices, festivals and rituals will be restored. The sacrificial offerings will be sacramental rather than propitiatory on the order of communion in the church age. Among those holding this position regarding Ezekiel's Temple, the statement of G.L. Archer is typical:

Much caution should be exercised in pressing details, but in the broad outline it may be reasonably deduced that in a coming age all the promises conveyed by the angel to Ezekiel will be fulfilled in the glorious earthly kingdom with which the drama of redemption is destined to close.⁴

2. Cited by Whitelaw, *PC*, p. xi.

3. Mauro, *HI*, p. 121.

4. Archer, *SOTI*, 363.

Erich Sauer adds this thought:

We stand here really before an inescapable alternative: *Either* the prophet himself was mistaken in his expectation of a coming temple service, and his prophecy in the sense in which he meant it will never be fulfilled; *or* God, in the time of the Messiah, will fulfill literally these prophecies of the temple according to their intended literal meaning. There is no other choice possible.⁵

According to Dispensational principles of interpretations, all prophecies pertaining to physical Israel which have not been carnally or materially fulfilled are to be assigned to the Millennial age. The Millennium becomes a convenient dumping ground for every prophecy which offers any difficulty or which demands any spiritual discernment. The unhappy result of this procedure is that many prophecies which were fulfilled at the first coming of Christ, or are being fulfilled even now, are relegated to some distant future. This postponement system is popular because it is safe and easy. It is safe because no one can conclusively refute it until the Millennium arrives. It is easy because it requires little spiritual discernment.

The Dispensational view fails to come to grips in any meaningful way with certain basic New Testament principles. The first principle is that the once-for-allness of the sacrifice of Christ nullified all animal sacrifices forever (Heb. 10:18). In the light of the argument of Hebrews (7:18, 19; 9:6-10; 10:1-9) that the Old Testament sacrificial system was abolished by Christ's death, it would be impossible to place Ezekiel's Temple in any dispensation subsequent to Calvary, at least if these sacrifices are to be interpreted literally. The Dispensational retort that the animal sacrifices of the Millennial Temple will be sacramental—a memorial to the sacrifice of Christ—is weak. All five offerings of the Levitical system are mentioned, and it is a gratuitous assumption that these sacrifices serve some different function in Ezekiel's Temple than in the Old Testament Levitical system.

5. Sauer, *FEE*, p. 181.

Still another New Testament principle to which the Dispensationalists fail to do justice is that the heirs of the kingdom are not national Jews (Matt. 21:43), but true Jews (Rom. 2:28-29), who along with converted Gentiles constitute the new Israel of God (Gal. 6:16; I Pet. 2:9, 10). These temple visions present difficulties of interpretation, as is generally recognized; but whatever they may or may not mean, they certainly afford no support for the doctrine of a political future for the earthly Israel in the period just before and just after "the rapture."

The Dispensational view also fails to come to grips with the facticity of God's present-age Temple, the church of Jesus Christ. That Temple is real, it is literal; but it is not physical (I Pet. 2:5; II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:13-22).

C. The Symbolic Christian View

Many of the older commentators held that the entire vision of these final chapters was fulfilled symbolically in the Gospel age and the Christian church. Much of the symbolism of these chapters has been borrowed by the apostle John in Revelation as he pictures the new Jerusalem, the church in the kingdom of God (Rev. 21:9—22:5). As John repaints the picture he removes all traces of Judaism. Beasley-Murray sets forth this view as follows:

The conclusion of Ezekiel's prophecy, therefore, is to be regarded as a true prediction of the kingdom of God given under the forms with which the prophet was familiar, viz., those of his own (Jewish) dispensation. Their essential truth will be embodied in the new age under forms suitable to the new (Christian) dispensation. How this is to be done is outlined for us in the book of Revelation 21:1—22:5.⁶

6. Beasley-Murray, *NBC*, p. 664.

To this may be added the appropriate comments of Young:

It is obvious that the prophet never intended these descriptions to be taken literally. It is clear that he is using figurative or symbolic language. Every attempt to follow out his directions literally leads to difficulty.⁷

Ezekiel himself may have anticipated that his plans would be carried out to the letter. The real question, however, is not what Ezekiel may have had in *his* mind, but what the Holy Spirit who is the ultimate author of this Temple vision intended to convey through these chapters. A literal interpretation of the New Testament teaching regarding Christ's present-day Temple (the church) would surely suggest if not demand that one view these chapters as preparatory for the establishment of this spiritual, but nonetheless real, worship edifice. The hermeneutical principle involved is this: fullness of promised blessing is here expressed in terms of restorative completeness. The vision, then, must be viewed as strictly *symbolical*, the symbols employed being the Mosaic ordinances. This is not spiritualization, but realization. In II Corinthians 6:16 Paul is not merely borrowing Old Testament language (Lev. 26:12; Ex. 29:45; Ezk. 37:27); he is proclaiming fulfillment. The material and physical fulfillment of some prophecies does not demand the material and physical fulfillment of all prophecy.

All things considered, the symbolic Christian view of chapters 40-48 seems by far the best alternative. The vision then pertains to the church of Christ upon earth and perhaps in heaven as well. The prophets of the Old Testament often employed dark speeches and figurative language. They spoke in shadowy forms of the Old Covenant. But they spoke of Christ. Here Ezekiel, in his own unique way is preaching Christ. The Temple vision is an elaborate representation of the Messianic age. If it be objected that these promises were made to *physical* Israel, it need only be pointed out that all these promises were conditional (43:9-11). Israel of the flesh did not fulfill the conditions laid down.

7. Young, *OTI*, pp. 264-65.

Hence, these promises (along with all the others) have been forfeited irretrievably; and they find their “yea” and their “amen” in Christ (II Cor. 1:20).⁸

Regardless of the interpretation to which one might be inclined, certain great truths are expressed in these chapters: (1) Worship will be central in the new age. (2) God would dwell in the midst of His people. (3) Blessings would flow forth from the presence of God to bring life to the most barren regions of the earth. (4) Responsibilities as well as privileges would belong to God’s people in that age to come.

I. THE VISION OF THE TEMPLE 40:1 — 43:12

A. The Angelic Agent 40:1-4

TRANSLATION

(1) In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, in the beginning of the year, in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was smitten, on that very day the hand of the LORD came upon me, and He brought me thither. (2) In the visions of God He brought me unto the land of Israel, and set me down on a very high mountain, upon which was something like the frame of a city on the south. (3) And He brought me there, and behold a man. His appearance was as the appearance of bronze, with a line of flax in his hand; and he was standing in the gate. (4) And the man said unto me, Son of man, look with your eyes, and hear with your ears, and consider all which I am about to show you, for you have been brought here in order that I might show them to you; declare all which you see to the house of Israel.

COMMENTS

The Temple vision is dated to 573 B.C. (*twenty-fifth year of our captivity*), fourteen years after the destruction of Jerusalem.

8. Mauro, *HI*, p. 114.

The phrase *beginning of the year* probably means the first month of the year. As so often during his ministry Ezekiel again experienced the overwhelming power (*hand*) of the Lord (v. 1). Again the prophet was transported in the visionary experience to the land of Palestine, and to the top of a high mountain in that land. This probably refers to Mt. Zion. There Ezekiel could see what appeared to be the outline of a city on the southern end⁹ of that mountain.

There on Mt. Zion Ezekiel met *a man*. The description of this man makes it clear that he is a supernatural personage. His appearance was *like bronze* (cf. 1:4; Dan. 10:6). He carried a *line of flax* for measuring long distances, and a *measuring reed* as well (cf. Rev. 21:10-15). This angelic agent acts as both guide and interpreter for the prophet in these chapters. He is reminiscent of the scribe who appeared in 9:1-11 (cf. Zech. 2:1). The man was standing in the gate—the east gate of the outer court. This is the spot from which Ezekiel's visionary tour would commence (v. 3). Ezekiel was told to pay special heed to what he sees and hears, for later he would be expected to declare these truths to the house of Israel (v. 4).

B. Description of the Outer Court and Its Gateways

40:5-27

TRANSLATION¹⁰

(5) And behold, a wall on the outside of the house round about, and in the man's hand a measuring reed six cubits long, of a cubit and a handbreadth each: so he measured the thickness of the building, one reed; and the height, one reed. (6) Then came he unto the gate which looks toward the east, and went up the steps thereof: and he measured the threshold of the gate, one

9. The LXX reads *opposite me* instead of *on the south* and for this reason some scholars prefer to identify the mountain as the Mt. of Olives rather than Mt. Zion.

10. At this point the American Standard Version of 1901 has been followed with only slight modification.

reed broad; and the other threshold, one reed broad. (7) And every lodge was one reed long, and one reed broad; and the space between the lodges was five cubits; and the threshold of the gate by the porch of the gate toward the house was one reed. (8) He measured also the porch of the gate toward the house, one reed. (9) Then measured he the porch of the gate, eight cubits; and the posts thereof, two cubits; and the porch of the gate was toward the house. (10) And the lodges of the gate eastward were three on this side, and three on that side; the three were of one measure: and the posts had one measure on this side and on that side. (11) And he measured the breadth of the opening of the gate, ten cubits; and the length of the gate, thirteen cubits; (12) and a border before the lodges, one cubit on this side, and a border, one cubit on that side; and the lodges, six cubits on this side, and six cubits on that side. (13) And he measured the gate from the roof of the one lodge to the roof of the other, a breadth of twenty-five cubits; door against door. (14) He made also posts, sixty cubits; and the court reached unto the posts, round about the gate. (15) And from the forefront of the gate at the entrance unto the forefront of the inner porch of the gate were fifty cubits. (16) And there were closed windows to the lodges, and to their posts within the gate round about, and likewise to the arches; and windows were round about inward; and upon each post were palm-trees. (17) Then he brought me into the outer court; and, lo, there were chambers and a pavement, made for the court round about: thirty chambers were upon the pavement. (18) And the pavement was by the side of the gates, answerable unto the length of the gates, even the lower pavement. (19) Then he measured the breadth from the forefront of the lower gate unto the forefront of the inner court without, a hundred cubits, both on the east and on the north. (20) And the gate of the outer court whose prospect is toward the north, he measured the length thereof and the breadth thereof. (21) And the lodges thereof were three on this side, and three on that side: and the posts thereof and the arches thereof were after the measure of the first gate: the length thereof was fifty cubits, and

the breadth twenty-five cubits. (22) And the windows thereof, and the arches thereof, and the palm-trees thereof, were after the measure of the gate whose prospect is toward the east; and they went up unto it by seven steps; and the arches thereof were before them. (23) And there was a gate to the inner court over against the other gate, both on the north and on the east; and he measured from gate to gate a hundred cubits. (24) And he led me toward the south; and, behold, a gate toward the south: and he measured the posts thereof and the arches thereof according to these measures. (25) And there were windows in it and in the arches thereof round about, like those windows: the length was fifty cubits, and the breadth twenty-five cubits. (26) And there were seven steps to go up to it, and the arches thereof were before them; and it had palm-trees, one on this side, and another on that side, upon the posts thereof. (27) And there was a gate to the inner court toward the south: and he measured from gate to gate toward the south a hundred cubits.

COMMENTS

The measurements of the Temple area are given in cubits. The cubit varied in length from time to time. Apparently here the long cubit, equal to about 20.5 inches, is being used.¹¹ The measuring reed carried by the angelic agent would be ten feet and three inches long. The accompanying diagram is essential to understanding the text.

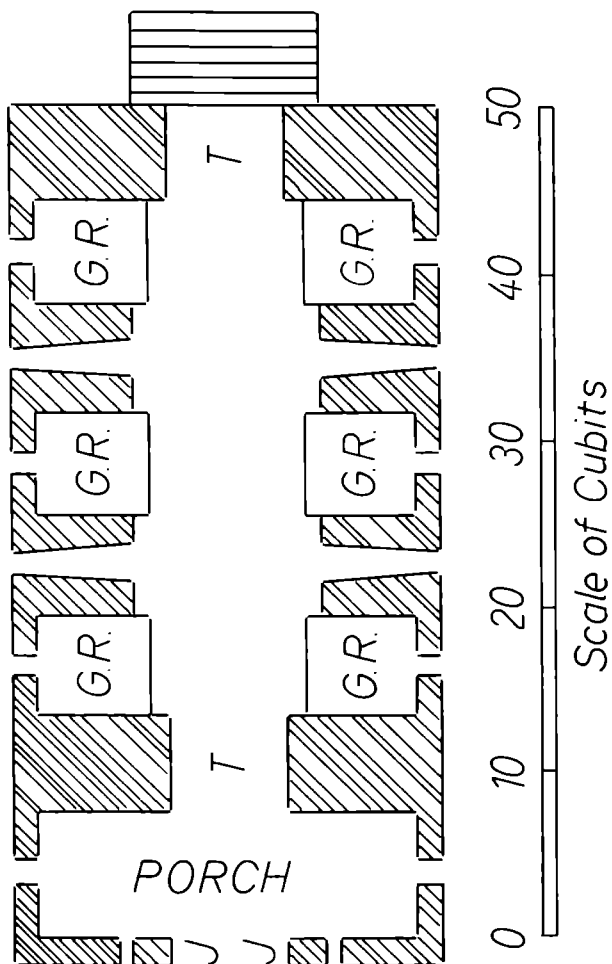
1. A wall surrounded the courtyard. This wall was one reed thick and one reed high (v. 5).

2. The court could be entered by three identical gateways in the north, east and south sides of the wall (vv. 6, 20-27).

3. The gateways were approached by seven steps (vv. 22, 26).

4. The gateway consisted of a corridor with three square recessed chambers or guardrooms on either side (vv. 7-10).

11. The customary cubit was about eighteen inches. See D. J. Wiseman "Weights and Measures," *NBD*, pp. 1321f.



A TYPICAL GATEHOUSE

Key

- G.R. Guard rooms
- J.J. Side posts or jambs
- T. Thresholds

5. A barrier of some kind—probably a low wall—separated the guardrooms from the corridor (v. 12).

6. The corridor opened into a large porch (8 by 20 cubits) which in turn opened on to the outer court of the Temple.

7. The posts within the gate were decorated with palm trees (v. 16; cf. I Kings 6:29-35).

8. Immediately inside the wall of the outer court was a paved area, called the *lower pavement* (vv. 17, 18).

9. Thirty chambers were built on this pavement around the perimeter of the wall on the north, south and east (v. 17). Probably these rooms were intended for the use of Levites who were serving in the Temple.

C. The Inner Court and Its Gateways 40:28-47

TRANSLATION

(28) Then he brought me to the inner court by the south gate: and he measured the south gate according to these measures; (29) and the lodges thereof, and the arches thereof, according to these measures: and there were windows in it and the arches thereof round about; it was fifty cubits long, and twenty-five cubits broad. (30) And there were arches round about, twenty-five cubits long and five cubits broad. (31) And the arches thereof were toward the outer court; and palm trees were upon the posts thereof: and the ascent to it had eight steps. (32) And he brought me into the inner court toward the east: and he measured the gate according to these measures; (33) and the lodges thereof and the posts thereof, and the arches thereof, according to these measures: and there were windows therein and in the arches thereof round about; it was fifty cubits long, and twenty-five cubits broad. (34) And the arches thereof were toward the outer court; and palm-trees were upon the posts thereof, on this side, and on that side: and the ascent to it had eight steps. (35) And he brought me to the north gate: and he measured it according to these measures; (36) the lodges thereof,

the posts thereof, and the arches thereof: and there were windows therein round about; the length was fifty cubits, and the breadth twenty-five cubits. (37) And the posts thereof were toward the outer court; and palm-trees were upon the posts thereof, on this side, and on that side: and the ascent to it had eight steps. (38) And a chamber with the door thereof was by the posts at the gates; there they washed the burnt offering. (39) And in the porch of the gate were two tables on this side, and two tables on that side, to slay thereon the burnt-offering and the sin-offering and the trespass-offering. (40) And on the one side without, as one goes up to the entry of the gate toward the north, were two tables; and on the other side, which belonged to the porch of the gate, were two tables. (41) Four tables were on this side, and four tables on that side, by the side of the gate: eight tables where upon they slew the sacrifices. (42) And there were four tables for the burnt-offering, of hewn stone, a cubit and a half long, and a cubit and a half broad, and one cubit high; whereupon they laid the instruments wherewith they slew the burnt-offering and the sacrifice. (43) And the hooks, a handbreadth long, were fastened within round about; and upon the tables was the flesh of the oblation. (44) And without the inner gate were chambers for the singers in the inner court, which was at the side of the north gate; and their prospect was toward the north. (45) And he said unto me, This chamber, whose prospect is toward the south, is for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the house; (46) and the chamber whose prospect is toward the north is for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the altar: these are the sons of Zadok, who from among the sons of Levi come near to the LORD to minister unto Him. (47) And he measured the court, a hundred cubits long, and a hundred cubits broad, foursquare; and the altar was before the house.

COMMENTS

1. Although no mention is made of it, one must assume that a wall surrounded the inner court.

2. One entered the inner court through three gateways which were of similar construction to the gates leading to the outer courtyard except in two respects: (1) The vestibule of these interior gateways was on the front rather than the back side as one approached from without; and (2) *eight* steps led up to the inner court (vv. 31, 34, 37).

4. Inside the north gateway was a special chamber where the burnt offerings were to be washed (v. 38). The intestines and legs of the burnt offering had to be washed before being brought to the altar (Lev. 1:9).

5. Eight tables on which sacrifices were slaughtered were situated in the northern gateway.¹² Four were within the porch or vestibule (v. 39), and four beyond the porch and within the gateway (vv. 40-41).

6. Four smaller tables of hewn stone were also found in the north gateway. These tables held the sacrificial instruments, i.e., knives and receptacles for collecting the blood (v. 42).

7. Within the north gateway *slabs* or hooks were fixed to pillars to allow the animal carcasses to be suspended while being flayed. The sacrificial meat once cut from the carcass was placed on tables previously mentioned (v. 43).

8. On the north and south sides of the inner court were the chambers of the *sharim*, singers. Choirs of Levites provided musical accompaniment during sacrificial ceremonies (v. 44). The interpreting angel explains that in this future Temple these chambers would be occupied by the descendants of Zadok. Zadok was high priest in the days of Solomon. He was a descendant of Phinehas the son of Aaron to whom God had given the covenant of an everlasting priesthood (Num. 25:13). Those priests who ministered within the house (i.e., offering incense) occupied one of the priestly chambers (v. 45); those who served at the altar of sacrifice in the courtyard, lived together in another chamber (v. 46).

9. The inner courtyard was a square of one hundred cubits (v. 47).

12. Fisch (*SBB*, pp. 275-76) thinks verse 41 refers to eight *additional* tables for a total of sixteen sacrificial tables.

D. The Sacred House 40:48—41:26

TRANSLATION

(48) Then he brought me to the porch of the house, and measured each post of the porch, five cubits on this side, and five cubits on that side, and the breadth of the gate was three cubits on this side, and three cubits on that side. (49) The length of the porch was twenty cubits, and the breadth eleven cubits; even by the steps whereby they went up to it: and there were pillars by the posts, one on this side, and another on that side. (1) And he brought me to the temple, and measured the posts, six cubits broad on the one side, and six cubits broad on the other side, which was the breadth of the tabernacle. (2) And the breadth of the entrance was ten cubits; and the sides of the entrance were five cubits on the one side, and five cubits on the other side: and he measured the length thereof, forty cubits, and the breadth, twenty cubits. (3) Then went he inward, and measured each post of the entrance, two cubits; and the entrance, six cubits; and the breadth of the entrance, seven cubits. (4) And he measured the length thereof, twenty cubits, and the breadth, twenty cubits, before the temple: and he said unto me, This is the most holy place. (5) Then he measured the wall of the house, six cubits; and the breadth of every side-chamber, four cubits, round about the house on every side. (6) And the side-chambers were in three stories, one over another, and thirty in order; and they entered into the wall which belonged to the house for the side-chambers round about, that they might have hold therein, and not have hold in the wall of the house. (7) And the side-chambers were broader as they encompassed the house higher and higher; for the encompassing of the house went higher and higher round about the house: therefore the breadth of the house continued upward; and so one went up from the lowest chamber to the highest by the middle chamber. (8) I saw also that the house had a raised basement round about: the foundations of the side-chambers were a full reed of six great cubits. (9) The thickness of the wall, which was for the side-chambers

on the outside, was five cubits: and that which was left was the place of the side-chambers, that belonged to the house. (10) And between the chambers was a breadth of twenty cubits round about the house on every side. (11) And the doors of the side-chambers were toward the place that was left, one door toward the north, and another door toward the south: and the breadth of the place that was left was five cubits round about. (12) And the building that was before the separate place at the side toward the west was seventy cubits broad; and the wall of the building was five cubits thick round about, and the length thereof ninety cubits. (13) So he measured the house, a hundred cubits long; and the separate place, and the building, with the walls thereof, a hundred cubits long; (14) also the breadth of the face of the house, and of the separate place toward the east, a hundred cubits. (15) And he measured the length of the building before the separate place which was at the back thereof, and the galleries thereof on the one side and on the other side, a hundred cubits; and the inner temple, and the porches of the court; (16) the thresholds, and the closed windows, and the galleries round about on their three stories, over against the threshold, ceiled with wood round about, and from the ground up to the windows, (now the windows were covered) (17) to the space above the door, even unto the inner house, and without, and by all the wall round about within and without, by measure. (18) And it was made with cherubim and palm-trees; and a palm-tree was between cherub and cherub, and every cherub had two faces; (19) so that there was the face of a man toward the palm-tree on the one side, and the face of a young lion toward the palm-tree on the other side: thus was it made through all the house round about. (20) From the ground unto above the door were cherubim and palm-trees made: thus was the wall of the temple. (21) As for the temple, the floorposts were squared; and as for the face of the sanctuary, the appearance thereof was as the appearance of the temple. (22) The altar was of wood, three cubits high, and the length thereof two cubits; and the corners thereof, and the walls thereof, were of wood: and he said unto me, This is the table that is before the

LORD. (23) And the temple and the sanctuary had two doors. (24) And the doors had two leaves apiece, two turning leaves; two leaves for the one door, and two leaves for the other. (25) And there were made on them, on the doors of the temple, cherubim and palm-trees, like as were made upon the walls; and there was a threshold of wood upon the face of the porch without. (26) And there were closed windows and palm-trees on the one side and on the other side, on the sides of the porch: thus were the side-chambers of the house, and the thresholds.

COMMENTS

1. *The porch of the house (40:48-49).* Ten steps led up to the porch or vestibule of the house (v. 49) on the east front of the Temple. Pillars are mentioned in connection with the porch. They correspond to the famous pillars, Jachin and Boaz, which decorated the porch of Solomon's Temple (v. 49; cf. I Kings 7:21). The gate to the Temple proper was supported by two massive posts (v. 48).

2. *The holy place of the house (41:1-2).* Walking westward through the porch Ezekiel came to the entrance of the holy place which is called the *tabernacle* or tent (v. 1) "because the posts were shaped like an arch at the top like a tent."¹³ The holy place—that area between the porch and the holy of holies—was forty cubits long and twenty cubits wide (v. 2).

3. *The holy of holies (41:3-4).* Only the angel entered the holy of holies (v. 3). The entrance to the holy of holies was but seven cubits wide. The entrance ways became progressively more narrow as the prophet moved from the less to the more sacred precincts of the building (v. 2; cf. 40:48). The holy of holies was twenty cubits square (v. 4).

4. *The side chambers (41:5-12).* Attached to the wall of the Temple on three sides were side-chambers in three stories. The chambers of the second story were slightly larger than those on

13. Fisch, *SBB*, p. 279.

the ground floor, while those of the third story were still larger. This was possible because of rebatements in the wall (v. 7). There were thirty-three side-chambers in all. Along the back or west wall there were three large chambers, one on each of the three levels. There were fifteen along the south wall, and fifteen along the north wall, five chambers on each tier. The wall of the Temple was six cubits thick at the base; but at two points it diminished as it ascended. These rebatements served as supports for the beams of the second and third stories (v. 6). The uppermost story was reached by a spiral staircase from the ground floor which passed through the middle tier (v. 7). A thick wall surrounded the chambers on the outside. Thus, the chambers were constructed *between* two massive walls (v. 9). Between these side-chambers and the chambers of the priests mentioned in 40:44-46 was a space of twenty cubits called in KJV the *separate place* and in the RSV the *temple yard* (v. 10). The side-chambers were entered from without through two doors, one in the north wall, the other in the south wall. These probably were located at the mid-point of the wall. Connecting doors made passage from one chamber to another possible (v. 11).

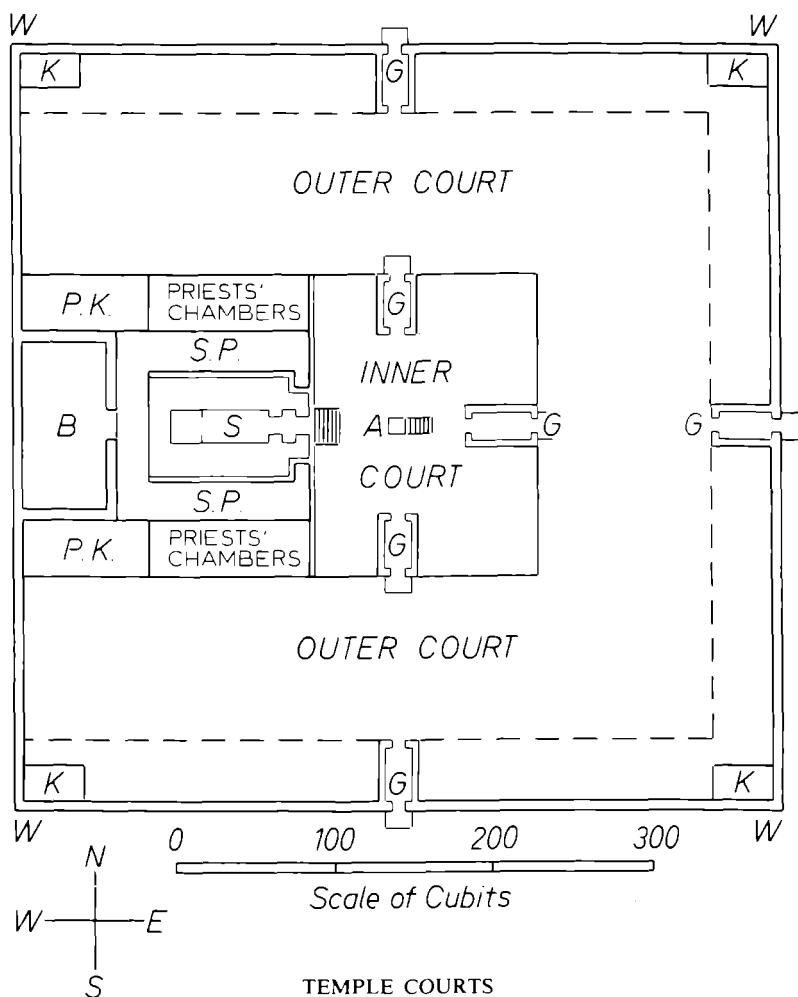
5. *The hinder building (41:12)*. At the rear of the Temple was a large separate building (70 by 90 cubits) which probably served as a storage area.

6. *The total dimensions of the house (41:13-15a)*. The total length of the Temple from east to west, from the wall of the porch to the back western wall, was one hundred cubits¹⁴ (v. 13a). The pavement and building at the rear of the Temple extended westward another one hundred cubits¹⁵ (v. 13b). The front of the Temple along with its yard was one hundred cubits (v. 14).¹⁶ The overall breadth of the building at the rear of the

14. Jamb 5 (40:48) + vestibule 12 (40:49) + jamb 6 (41:1) + holy place 40 (41:2) + jamb 2 (41:3) + holy of holies 20 (41:4) + wall 6 (41:5) + side-chambers 4 (41:5) + outer wall 5 (41:9) = 100.

15. Yard 20 (41:10) + building 70 (41:12) + two walls of building 10 (41:12) = 100.

16. The Temple yard to the north and south 40; the paved areas to north and south 10; the two outer walls of side-chambers 10; the two side-chambers 8, the north and south walls of the house 12 and the interior of the house 20 = 100.



Key

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| A. Altar | P.K. Priests' Kitchens |
| B. Building mentioned in 41:12 | S. Sanctuary |
| G. Gatehouse | S.P. The Separate Place |
| K. Kitchens | W. Surrounding Wall |

Temple was also one hundred cubits (v. 15).¹⁷ Galleries or balconies were built along the outside of the wall (v. 15).

7. *The interior of the Temple (41:15b-26)*. The holy place, holy of holies and the porches of the court all had jambs, narrow windows and balconies (v. 15b). The stone walls were covered with paneling from floor to ceiling (vv. 16-17). As in Solomon's Temple (I Kings 6:29), the wooden panels were decorated with carved figures of cherubim and palm-trees (v. 18) from floor to ceiling (v. 20). These cherubim had two faces—that of a man and that of a lion—which were turned in opposite directions. Each palm-tree was between the human face of one cherub and the lion's face of another cherub (v. 19). The jambs or doorposts of the Temple were square rather than round (v. 21).

Verse 22 describes one of the pieces of furniture of the holy place. Opinions differ as to whether the altar of incense is being described metaphorically as a *table*,¹⁸ or the table of showbread is being described metaphorically as an altar.¹⁹

The holy place and the holy of holies each had a double door (v. 23) and each door had two leaves which could be folded back independently (v. 24). It would be possible for a door to be opened only a quarter of the full width of the entrance. The doors, like the walls, were decorated with cherubim and palm-trees (v. 25).

Beams²⁰ extended before the porch making a kind of overhang (v. 25).

E. The Priest's Chambers in the Temple Yard 42:1-14

TRANSLATION

(1) Then he brought me forth into the outer court, the way toward the north: and he brought me into the chamber that was

17. Interior breadth of the room, 90; two side walls, 10 = 100.

18. Fisch, *SBB*, p. 285.

19. Taylor, *TOTC*, p. 263.

20. Meaning of the Hebrew word is uncertain. RSV renders it *canopy*; KJV *planks*.

over against the separate place, and which was over against the building toward the north. (2) Before the length of a hundred cubits was the north door, and the breadth was fifty cubits. (3) Over against the twenty cubits which belonged to the inner court, and over against the pavement which belonged to the outer court, was gallery against gallery in the third story. (4) And before the chambers was a walk of ten cubits' breadth inward, a way of one cubit; and their doors were toward the north. (5) Now the upper chambers were shorter; for the galleries took away from these, more than from the lower and the middlemost, in the building. (6) For they were in three stories, and they had not pillars as the pillars of the courts: therefore the uppermost was straitened more than the lowest and the middlemost from the ground. (7) And the wall that was without by the side of the chambers, toward the outer court before the chambers, the length thereof was fifty cubits. (8) For the length of the chambers that were in the outer court was fifty cubits: and, lo, before the temple were a hundred cubits. (9) And from under these chambers was the entry on the east side, as one goes into them from the outer court. (10) In the thickness of the wall of the court toward the east, before the separate place, and before the building, there were chambers. (11) And the way before them was like the appearance of the way of the chambers which were toward the north; according to their length so was their breadth: and all their egresses were both according to their fashions, and according to their doors. (12) And according to the doors of the chambers that were toward the south was a door at the head of the way, even the way directly before the wall toward the east, as one enters into them. (13) Then said he unto me, The north chambers and the south chambers, which are before the separate place, they are the holy chambers, where the priests that are near unto the LORD shall eat the most holy things, and the meal-offering, and the sin-offering, and the trespass-offering; for the place is holy. (14) When the priests enter in, then shall they not go out of the holy place into the outer court, but there they shall lay their garments wherein they minister; for they are holy: and they shall put on other

garments, and shall approach to that which pertains to the people.

COMMENTS

Across the Temple yard directly opposite the side-chambers of the Temple were the priests' chambers. These chambers were briefly mentioned in 41:10. The priests' chambers consisted of two blocks or complexes of chambers separated from one another by a passageway ten cubits wide. Closest to the Temple was a rather large one-story building (100 by 50 cubits) which was divided into smaller chambers. These chambers were used for dining rooms and for storing the offerings given to the priests. They also served as a vestry (vv. 13-14). Across the passageway was a three-storied complex of chambers fifty cubits long. For aesthetic reasons a dividing wall extended another fifty cubits so that this second complex of chambers would balance in appearance the first block of priestly chambers. Apparently these priestly chambers could be entered from the outer court and from the passage between the two complexes of chambers.

F. Total Dimensions of the Temple Area 42:15-20

TRANSLATION

(15) Now when he had made an end of measuring the inner house, he brought me forth by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east, and measured it round about. (16) He measured on the east side with the measuring reed five hundred reeds, with the measuring reed round about. (17) He measured on the north side five hundred reeds with the measuring reed round about. (18) He measured on the south side five hundred

reeds with the measuring reed. (19) He turned about to the west side, and measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed. (20) He measured it on the four sides: it had a wall round about, the length five hundred, and the breadth five hundred, to make a separation between that which was holy and that which was common.

COMMENTS

The measurements of the *inner house* including its courts and associated buildings is now complete. The angel returned to the eastern gate, the point at which the measuring had begun. He now measures the entire area surrounding the wall (v. 15). Apparently another wall surrounded the entire Temple complex as it has previously been described. This third wall formed a square of five hundred *reeds*. Since a reed is thought to have been about six cubits, this outer area would have been a three thousand cubit square. The size of Solomon's Temple was only five hundred cubits square.

G. The Return of the Divine Glory 43:1-12

TRANSLATION

(1) Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looks toward the east: (2) and behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shined with his glory. (3) And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city; and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. (4) And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. (5) And the Spirit took me up, and

brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house. (6) And I heard one speaking unto me out of the house; and a man stood by me. (7) And he said unto me, Son of man, this is the place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever; and the house of Israel shall no more defile My holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, and by the dead bodies of their kings in their high places; (8) in their setting of their threshold by My threshold, and their door-post beside My door-post, and there was but the wall between Me and them; and they have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed: wherefore I have consumed them in My anger. (9) Now let them put away their whoredom, and the dead bodies of their kings, far from Me; and I will dwell in the midst of them for ever. (10) As for you, son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern. (11) And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, make known unto them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the entrances 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. (12) This is the law of the house: upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house.

COMMENTS

After he had witnessed the measuring of the outer wall, the interpreting angel brought Ezekiel back to the east gate of the Temple where he was privileged to witness an awe-inspiring scene (v. 1). Nineteen years earlier Ezekiel had seen the glory of God leaving the Temple by that east gate (10:18-22; 11:22-24). Now the prophet sees the glory of God returning to sanctify the new structure as His holy dwelling. The roar of the cherubim in

their flight sounded like the roar of many waters. The splendor of the divine presence illuminated the earth (v. 2). On two previous occasions Ezekiel had seen this vision of the throne-chariot—once at his call by the river Chebar (chap. 1), and again when he saw in vision the destruction of Jerusalem (chaps. 8-11). The prophet attributes the destruction of Jerusalem to himself in verse 3 because he had prophesied it. Ezekiel was awe-stricken at the sight of the divine glory entering that eastern gate (v. 4).

After viewing the divine throne-chariot Ezekiel was whisked away into the inner court by *the Spirit* (cf. 2:2; 8:3). From that vantage point Ezekiel could see that the glory of God completely filled the Temple (v. 5). *A man*—probably the interpreting angel of the previous chapters—stood beside Ezekiel there. The voice of God could be heard from within the sanctuary (v. 6).

The voice from the Temple spoke of the significance of that new Temple. The former Temple had served as God's footstool; His throne was in heaven (Isa. 60:13; Ps. 132:7; Lam. 2:1; I Chron. 28:2). The new Temple would be the throne room of God as well as His footstool. There He would dwell with His people forever.

In the new Temple age the Israel of God would no longer defile God's holy name by their disgusting *harlotry*, i.e., idolatry. In days gone by kings were buried in close proximity to the Temple, and their graves apparently became pagan high places where idolatrous rites were performed (v. 7). In the pre-exilic Jerusalem the royal palace abutted the Temple; only a wall separated the holy sanctuary from the royal palace. The abominations (idolatrous practices) of the palace defiled the Temple. This was the reason God had consumed them (v. 8).

The sanctity of the new Temple would be safe-guarded by a large area of outer and inner courts wherein the priests and other sacred personnel would dwell. Furthermore, in that new age the people of God would be dominated by a new spirit, one which abhorred idolatry. God can and will dwell forever in the midst of such a purified and regenerated people (v. 9).

A new commission is given to Ezekiel in verse 10. He is commanded to describe the Temple of his vision to his fellow exiles in all its particulars. This vision would, among other things, serve to remind those exiles of the loss of their former sanctuary. Their hearts would be filled with contrition as they contemplated the reasons why God allowed their former Temple to be destroyed. Ezekiel is to urge the exiles to note carefully every measurement of the structure. Thus they would learn the standard of God's holiness which is clearly set forth in the structure and design of the Temple.

If the people appeared to be moved to repentance by Ezekiel's Temple preaching he was to give them all the details concerning the new structure: *the form of the house*, i.e., the general appearance of the new Temple; *the fashion of it*, i.e., the various sections, chambers and cells; the gates and entrances; *the ordinances of it*, i.e., the function and use of the various parts of the Temple complex; *the forms of it*, i.e., the cherubim and palms which decorate it; and *all the laws* which regulated the use of that facility. All of this was to be written down publicly. The Jews were expected *to keep the whole form* of that Temple, i.e., remember the shape and design of the structure; and to implement the ordinances pertaining to those sacred precincts (v. 11).

One other detail is added about the future Temple in verse 12. Whereas Solomon's Temple occupied the slope of a hill, the future Temple was to crown the summit. In comparison to the rest of Jerusalem which was considered holy, the Temple area would be considered *most holy* (v. 12).

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In what way are chapters 40-48 to be regarded as the climax of all which Ezekiel had been saying?
2. Who conducted Ezekiel through his visionary tour of the Zion-to-be?

3. What three basic approaches to Ezekiel's Temple have been taken? What are the strong points and weak points of each approach?
4. What basic lessons can be gleaned from these chapters regardless of the system of interpretation which is followed?
5. How long after the destruction of Jerusalem did Ezekiel receive this final vision?
6. Who were the Zadokites? Why is the priesthood restricted to the sons of Zadok in the new Temple?
7. If the Temple is to be interpreted symbolically, why does Ezekiel go into such tedious detail about its structure and operation?
8. What were the outer dimensions of the new Temple?
9. What did Ezekiel see returning to Jerusalem in this vision? What explanation did Ezekiel hear the divine voice make concerning that visionary Temple?
10. How does God describe the people who live in the new Temple age?
11. What was Ezekiel told to do with the information which he received in the Temple vision?

Chapter Nineteen

NEW WORSHIP IN A NEW LAND

43:13 — 48:35

Ezekiel's lengthy symbolic portrayal of the Messianic age continues in chapters 43-48. The emphasis here is on the worship which will be such a prominent part of that new age, and on the glories of the Promised Land wherein that worship will be conducted.

I. THE VISION OF THE FUTURE WORSHIP

43:13 — 46:24

In this section Ezekiel focuses his attention on (1) the center of worship: the altar (43:13-27); (2) the ministers of worship: the priests (44:1—45:8); (3) the regulations concerning worship (45:9—46:24).

A. The Center of Worship: The Altar 43:13-27

Ezekiel first describes the altar (43:13-17), and then speaks at length about the dedication of that sacred spot (43:18-27).

1. The measurements of the altar (43:13-17)

TRANSLATION

(13) And these are the measures of the altar by cubits: (the cubit is a cubit and a handbreadth:) the bottom shall be a cubit, and the breadth a cubit, and the border thereof by the edge thereof round about a span; and this shall be the base of the altar. (14) And from the bottom upon the ground to the lower ledge shall be two cubits, and the breadth one cubit; and from the lesser ledge to the greater ledge shall be four cubits, and the

breadth a cubit. (15) And the upper altar shall be four cubits; and from the altar hearth and upward there shall be four horns. (16) And the altar hearth shall be twelve cubits long by twelve broad, square in the four sides thereof. (17) And the ledge shall be fourteen cubits long by fourteen broad in the four sides thereof; and the border about it shall be half a cubit round about; and the steps thereof shall look toward the east.

COMMENTS

The altar was mentioned previously in 40:47. It was located in the center of the inner court directly in front of the Temple entrance. The Hebrew terms used in verses 13-17 are obscure, and there is no unanimity among scholars about the dimensions and design of this structure. The following conclusions about the altar seem apparent:

1. The measurements of the altar are specified as being by the longer cubit.

2. The altar was built in three square stages, each with a side two cubits shorter than the stage below it. The sides of the three stages were twelve, fourteen and sixteen cubits long respectively.

3. The lowest stage of the altar was set upon a foundation platform. This foundation platform was set in the pavement of the court, its upper surface being apparently level with the surrounding pavement. A rim or border distinguished this foundation platform from the surrounding pavement.

4. The total height of the altar proper was ten cubits. The *horns* which projected upward another cubit were regarded as the most sacred part of the altar. Here the blood was smeared in the various sacrifices.

5. The hearth area where the sacrifices would be placed measured twelve by twelve cubits or 144 square cubits.

6. The approach to the altar was on the east side. Steps were forbidden in early altars (Ex. 20:24-26). The increased size of later altars made them a necessity.

2. The dedication of the altar (43:18-27)

TRANSLATION

(18) And he said unto me, Son of man, thus saith the Lord GOD: These are the ordinances of the altar in the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon. (19) You shall give to the priests the Levites that are of the seed of Zadok who are near unto Me, to minister unto Me, (oracle of the Lord GOD), a young bullock for a sin-offering. (20) And you shall take of the blood thereof, and put it on the four horns of it, and on the four corners of the ledge, and upon the border round about: and thus shall you cleanse it and make atonement for it. (21) You shall also take the bullock of the sin-offering, and it shall be burnt in the appointed place of the house, without the sanctuary. (22) And on the second day you shall offer a he-goat without blemish for a sin-offering; and they shall cleanse the altar, as they did cleanse it with the bullock. (23) When you have made an end of cleansing it, you shall offer a young bullock without blemish, and a ram out of the flock without blemish. (24) And you shall bring them near before the LORD, and the priests shall cast salt upon them, and they shall offer them up for a burnt-offering unto the LORD. (25) Seven days you shall prepare every day a goat for a sin-offering: they shall also prepare a young bullock and a ram out of the flock, without blemish. (26) Seven days shall they make atonement for the altar and purify it; so shall they consecrate it. (27) And when they have accomplished the days it shall be that upon the eighth day, and forward, the priests shall make your burnt-offerings upon the altar, and your peace-offerings; and I will accept you, (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

In the Old Testament worship system the altar was used two ways: (1) burnt offerings were offered on it; and (2) blood was

smeared on it (v. 18). The altar would need to be consecrated in order to make it suitable for these two important functions.

Ezekiel is told to assign the various consecration functions to the Levitical priests¹ who were descendants of Zadok.² Non-Zadokites were debarred from priestly ministry for reasons which will be stated in the following chapter (44:10).

On the first day of the dedicatory rites, Ezekiel was to give to the Zadokites a bullock to be used as a *sin-offering* (v. 19). The blood of that sacrificial beast was to be smeared on the four horns and also on the four corners of the (greater) ledge and the rim or border which surrounded the greater ledge. This shed blood would cleanse the altar and make atonement for it (v. 20). The remainder of the sacrificial bullock was to be burned in another, unspecified spot within the wall of the Temple mount (v. 21).

A he-goat was to be sacrificed on the second day of the dedicatory rites. The blood of the he-goat was to be sprinkled on the altar in the same manner as was done with the blood of the bullock. Thus the altar would be purified a second time (v. 22). Whole burnt offerings of a bullock and a ram were then to be offered on the purified altar. The whole burnt offering symbolized complete consecration in the Mosaic dispensation. Salt was to be sprinkled upon these burned offerings³ by the priests (v. 23). This preservative may symbolize the everlasting covenant between God and His people.⁴ These three sacrifices—the goat, bullock and ram—were to be repeated six more times during the dedicatory week (v. 25). By this means the new altar would be set apart for its sacred function⁵ (v. 26). After these rites have been performed then the regular sacrificial service could begin. Burnt-offerings and peace-offerings⁶ had as their primary aim

1. All priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests.

2. Zadok was the first high priest in Solomon's Temple.

3. Cf. Lev. 2:13; Mark 9:49.

4. Fisch, *SBB*, p. 300.

5. The altar of the Tabernacle was consecrated by anointing (Ex. 30:28; 40:10) as well as with sacrificial blood (Lev. 8:14ff.). The altar in Solomon's Temple was consecrated by a seven-day feast of burnt-offerings and peace-offerings (II Chron. 7:1-9).

6. The peace-offering symbolized fellowship with God.

acceptance by God. The devout and obedient worshipers of the new Temple era would find that acceptance with God (v. 27).

B. The Ministers of Worship: The Priests 44:1—45:8

After briefly discussing the relationship of the prince to the sanctuary (44:1-3), Ezekiel speaks of the qualifications of the temple ministers (44:4-14), the regulations for the Zadokite priests (44:15-27); the provision for the Zadokite priests (44:28-31), and finally the allocation of land which was theirs (45:1-8).

1. The prince and the sanctuary (44:1-3)

TRANSLATION

(1) Then he brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary, which looks toward the east; and it was shut. (2) And the LORD said unto me, This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, neither shall any man enter in by it; for the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered in by it; therefore it shall be shut. (3) As for the prince, he shall sit therein as prince to eat bread before the LORD; he shall enter by the way of the porch of the gate, and shall go out by the way of the same.

COMMENTS

The angel now brought Ezekiel back from the inner court to the outer eastern gate which only shortly before he had entered (43:1). He found that gate shut now that the glory of God had reentered the Temple (v. 1). Never again would that gate be open, for God's glory would never again depart from His Temple. No man would be permitted to enter the gate through which the divine presence had come (v. 2). However, the future

leader of God's people—the prince—would be permitted to partake of sacrificial meals within the eastern gate complex. But not even he would be allowed to enter by that sealed gate. He would enter the gate complex from the rear or west end *by the way of the porch of the gate*.

2. *The qualifications of the temple ministers (44:4-14)*

TRANSLATION

(4) Then he brought me by the way of the north gate before the house; and I looked, and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD: and I fell upon my face. (5) And the LORD said unto me, Son of man, mark well, and behold with your eyes, and hear with your ears all that I say unto you concerning all the ordinances of the house of the LORD, and all the laws thereof; and mark well the entrance of the house, with every egress of the sanctuary. (6) And you shall say to the rebellious, even to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: O house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations, (7) in that you have brought in foreigners uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary, to profane it, even My house, when you offer My bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken My covenant, to add unto all your abominations. (8) And you have not kept the charge of My holy things; but you have set keepers of My charge in My sanctuary for yourselves. (9) Thus says the Lord GOD, No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into My sanctuary, of any foreigners that are among the children of Israel. (10) But the Levites that went far from me, when Israel went astray, that went astray from me after their idols, they shall bear their iniquity. (11) Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house, and ministering in the house: they shall slay the burnt-offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister unto them. (12) Because they ministered unto them

before their idols, and became a stumblingblock of iniquity unto the house of Israel; therefore have I lifted up My hand against them, saith the Lord GOD, and they shall bear their iniquity. (13) And they shall not come near unto Me, to execute the office of priest unto Me, nor to come near to any of My holy things, unto the things that are most holy; but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed. (14) Yet will I make them keepers of the charge of the house, for all the service thereof, and for all that shall be done therein.

COMMENTS

From the outer court the prophet was led by his angelic guide around through the northern gate (the eastern gate was to be kept perpetually closed) to the inner court. There the prophet again observed the glory of God filling the house (v. 4). At this juncture God spoke to him again, this time concerning the qualifications of those who might approach Him in His holy Temple. Ezekiel was bidden to make careful note of these ordinances, particularly those laws governing the approaches to the house (v. 5).

In the former Temple aliens had been permitted to discharge priestly functions. This was an abomination (v. 6) which must not persist in the age of the new Temple. Those *uncircumcised in heart and flesh* profaned the holiness of that sacred shrine. God's *bread*, i.e., sacrifices of fat and blood, was not to be offered by those who did not wear in the flesh the badge of the covenant. To allow them to do so was to violate the covenant and commit abomination (v. 7). Apparently the use of foreign Temple servants such as the Carites (II Kings 11:4) is here being proscribed. It may have been that in times when the priesthood was at low ebb some priestly duties actually had been assigned to these foreigners. In so doing, God's people had been more concerned about what was convenient to them rather than what conformed to the instructions of God (v. 8).

The menial Temple work formerly done by aliens must in the future be performed by the Levites (v. 9). The duties of the Levites in Ezekiel's Temple were threefold: (1) they were to have charge of the Temple gates, i.e., they were to police the crowds who entered for worship; (2) they were to minister *in the house*, i.e., courtyard, by slaying the sacrificial animals;⁷ and (3) they were to stand before the worshipers to minister to them by helping them in their ritual responsibilities (v. 11).

The demotion of the Levites in the new Temple was a punishment for previous transgression on their part. They had gone far away from God and had involved themselves in idolatry (v. 10). They had ministered to the people at idolatrous shrines and thus had become stumblingblocks to the people of God. God had taken an oath (*lifted up My hand*) against the Levites that they would bear the consequences of their iniquity in the new Temple age (v. 12).

In effect, the penalty against the once wayward Levites was reduction in status to that of lay servants in the Temple. They would not be allowed to come near the Lord, i.e., enter the inner courtyard, nor to minister at the sacrificial service, nor come near any holy thing in the Temple (v. 13). They would be *keepers of the charge of the house*, i.e., they would be restricted to functions in the outer court (v. 14).

3. *The regulations for the Zadokite priests (44:15-27)*

TRANSLATION

(15) But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near to Me to minister unto Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer unto Me the fat and the blood, (oracle of the Lord GOD): (16) they shall enter into My sanctuary, and they shall come near to My table, to minister unto Me, and they shall keep My charge. (17) And it shall be

7. The slaughtering of the animal for sacrifice was not a priestly function and could be performed by a layman.

that, when they enter in at the gates of the inner court they shall be clothed with linen garments; and no wool shall come upon them, while they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within. (18) They shall have linen tires upon their heads, and shall have linen breeches upon their loins; they shall not gird themselves with any thing that causes sweat. (19) And when they go forth into the outer court, even into the outer court to the people, they shall put off their garments wherein they minister, and lay them in the holy chambers; and they shall put on other garments, that they sanctify not the people with their garments. (20) Neither shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long; they shall only cut off the hair of their heads. (21) Neither shall any of the priests drink wine, when they enter into the inner court. (22) Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her that is put away; but they shall take virgins of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow that is the widow of a priest. (23) And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the common, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. (24) And in a controversy they shall stand to judge; according to My ordinances shall they judge it: and they shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts; and they shall hallow My sabbaths. (25) And they shall go in to no dead person to defile themselves; but for father, or for mother, or for son, or for daughter, for brother, or for sister that has had no husband, they may defile themselves. (26) And after he is cleansed, they shall reckon unto him seven days. (27) And in the day that he goes into the sanctuary, into the inner court, to minister in the sanctuary, he shall offer his sin-offering (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

Only the sons of Zadok⁸ would be allowed to minister before and within the sanctuary proper. They alone had remained

8. The genealogy of Zadok is found in I Chronicles 6:50-53. Zadok was a priest in David's day alongside Abiathar (II Sam. 8:17; 15:24ff.). He became the high priest under Solomon.

faithful when the rest of the nation had gone into idolatry. The Zadokites would be permitted to *come near* to God to minister unto Him; to *stand before* God to offer the sacrificial portions of animals and the blood (v. 15); to enter into the sanctuary itself and minister there; to approach the table of showbread. Whereas the Levites were to keep the *charge of the house* (v. 14), the Zadokites were to *keep My charge* (v. 16).

In the new Temple the Zadokite priests were to serve clothed only in linen. They would not be permitted to wear the partly woolen garments worn by priests in the former Temple. Linen is light and clean in appearance. The heavier wool would cause perspiration which in turn would result in ritual defilement (v. 18). The holy linen garments were to be removed and stored in the holy chambers before the priests joined the lay people in the outer court. Holiness was communicated by direct contact (cf. Ex. 29:37; Lev. 6:20). If the priests should mingle with the lay people in those holy garments, they too would be *sanctified* (v. 19). Holy and profane were never to meet in the new age.

The priests were to be examples of holiness and separateness to the people of God. They were not permitted to shave their heads nor let their hair grow long for those customs were associated with heathen practice (v. 20; cf. Lev. 21:5, 10). As in the Law of Moses, priests were not allowed to drink wine before performing their sacrificial ministry in the inner court (v. 21). Rigid marriage restrictions prohibited a priest from marrying anyone but an Israelite virgin⁹ or the widow of a fellow priest (v. 22). These strict marriage regulations were perhaps designed to preserve the purity of the priestly families.

Verses 23 and 24 outline some of the responsibilities of the priests. They were teachers,¹⁰ and as such they were responsible for constantly reminding the people of the difference between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean (v. 23). In civil law cases the priests acted as judges.¹¹ In this capacity they were to render each verdict in accordance with the Law of God.

9. In the law of Moses this regulation applied only to the High Priest (Lev. 21:13f.).

10. Cf. Deut. 33:10; Mal. 2:7.

11. Cf. Deut. 17:8ff.; 19:17; 21:5.

However, the primary function of the priests was strictly to observe the regulations concerning the sacrifices which were to be offered on special festivals and sabbaths (v. 24).

As in the Law of Moses, the priests of the new Temple age were to avoid contact with dead bodies. Exceptions were made in the case of close relatives (v. 25). Contact with a corpse defiled priests and rendered them temporarily unfit to perform their priestly function. A seven day separation and ritual washing was necessary to cleanse a priest defiled by death in the Law of Moses. Ezekiel's regulations call for another seven day period after the cleansing (v. 26). Upon resuming his ministry in the inner court the priest was to offer a sin-offering for his defilement (v. 27). These additional regulations are intended to heighten the sanctity of this Temple.

4. The provision for the Zadokite priests (44:28-31)

TRANSLATION

(28) And they shall have an inheritance: I am their inheritance; and you shall give them no possession in Israel; I am their possession. (29) They shall eat the meal-offering, and the sin-offering, and the trespass-offering; and every devoted thing in Israel shall be theirs. (30) And the first of all the first-fruits of every thing, and every oblation of every thing, of all your oblations, shall be for the priest: you shall also give unto the priests the first of your dough, to cause a blessing to rest on your house. (31) The priests shall not eat of any thing that dies of itself, or is torn, whether it be bird or beast.

COMMENTS

Whereas other tribes received their inheritance in land tracts, the priesthood itself was the inheritance of the Zadokites. Spiritual privilege is greater blessing than material possession.

The priests received a portion of the meal-, sin-, and guilt-offerings for their daily maintenance. Every *devoted thing* (*cherem*)—any property consecrated to God—belonged to the priests (v. 29). The *first fruits* of the land—a token portion of the crop—belonged to them.¹² The *heave-offering* was the priest's portion of first-born clean animals which were killed and sacrificed to God. The first cakes baked with the grain from the threshingfloor were also to be given to the priests (cf. Num. 15:20). Those who were faithful in presenting these offerings to the priests would receive a special blessing (v. 30; cf. Mal. 3:10).

Appended to the list of that which priests could eat is a prohibition. No Israelite could eat any animal which died a natural death or which had been killed by wild beasts (cf. Ex. 22:30; Lev. 7:24; Deut. 14:21). It is not clear why the regulation is repeated here in connection with the priests (v. 31).

5. *The apportionment of the sacred portion of the land* (45:1-8)

TRANSLATION

(1) Moreover, when you shall divide by lot the land for inheritance, you shall offer an oblation unto the LORD, a holy portion of the land; the length shall be the length of twenty-five thousand reeds, and the breadth shall be ten thousand: it shall be holy in all the border thereof round about. (2) Of this there shall be for the holy place five hundred in length, square round about; and fifty cubits for the suburbs thereof round about. (3) And of this measure you shall measure a length of twenty-five thousand, and a breadth of ten thousand; and in it shall be the sanctuary, which is most holy. (4) It is a holy portion of the land; it shall be for the priests, the ministers of the sanctuary, that come near to minister unto the LORD; and it shall be a place

12. Cf. Deut. 8:8 and Num. 18:13.

for their houses, and a holy place for the sanctuary. (5) And twenty-five thousand in length, and ten thousand in breadth, shall be unto the Levites, the ministers of the house, for a possession unto themselves, for twenty chambers. (6) And you shall appoint the possession of the city five thousand broad, and twenty-five thousand long, side by side with the oblation of the holy portion: it shall be for the whole house of Israel. (7) And whatsoever is for the prince shall be on the one side and on the other side of the holy oblation and of the possession of the city, in front of the holy oblation and in front of the possession of the city, on the west side westward, and on the east side eastward; and in length answerable unto one of the portions, from the west border unto the east border. (8) In the land it shall be to him for a possession in Israel: and My princes shall no more oppress My people; but they shall give the land to the house of Israel according to their tribes.

COMMENTS

Ezekiel anticipates an apportionment of the Holy Land among the tribes of Israel. The central portion of that land was to belong to the Lord. This rectangular area twenty-five thousand by ten thousand reeds¹³ was to be reserved for the priests and the new Temple (v. 4). This portion of the land is viewed as more holy than the rest of the land (v. 1). In the center of this priestly portion of ground was a square (500 x 500 reeds) where the Temple would be located. It was separated from the area where the priests dwelled by fifty cubits of open space (vv. 2-3).¹⁴

The Levites would occupy a portion of land equal in extent to and adjoining that of the priests. Scholars differ as to whether this area was north or south of the priests' portion. At the extreme end of the Levites' portion twenty chambers¹⁵ were to

13. Actually the unit of measurement is missing in the Hebrew text. Some scholars think the unit is the cubit.

14. It is not clear whether verse 3 refers to an additional portion of 25,000 x 10,000 reeds, or whether this is the same portion mentioned in verse 1.

15. The RSV follows the Greek Old Testament and reads *for cities to live in*.

be built apparently to house the gate-keepers so that they would be near the Temple (v. 5).¹⁶

The city of Jerusalem was allocated a rectangular portion of land (25,000 x 5,000 reeds) adjacent to the portion of the priests on the south. This section of the land could be inhabited by any Israelite without regard to tribe (v. 6). The total territory of the holy portion—the territory allocated to the holy city, to the priests, Levites and Temple—comprised an area 25,000 reeds square.

On either side of the holy portion (lit., *holy offering*¹⁷) which has been described in the previous verses were the territories of the prince (v. 7). The portion of the prince was equal to that assigned to entire tribes, except that within his territory was the 25,000 reed square holy portion (cf. 48:21). The princes of the future would not confiscate the land of their subjects; they would respect the tribal boundaries. These princes would be God-fearing men, and they would have adequate territories to support their own needs. Therefore, they would have neither the inclination nor the need to wrong the people of God (v. 8).

C. The Regulations Concerning Worship 45:9—46:24

At this point in his vision of the new Temple Ezekiel sets forth the regulations pertaining to (1) the rights and duties of the prince (vv. 9-17); (2) the festival offerings (45:18-25); (3) the offerings on the sabbath and new moon (46:1-7); (4) the entrance and exit of the worshipers (46:8-10); (5) the offerings of the prince on behalf of the people (46:11-15); (6) the inheritance of the prince (46:16-18); and (7) the preparation of the sacrificial meals (46:19-24).

16. In verse 5 the Levites are again called *ministers of the house* in contrast to the priests who were *ministers unto the Lord*.

17. The Hebrew word translated *offering* is *teruma*. This word is frequently translated *heave-offering*. A more accurate translation is *levy* or compulsory contribution. See Taylor, *TOTC*, p. 273.

1. The rights and duties of the prince (45:9-17)

TRANSLATION

(9) Thus says the Lord GOD: Let it suffice you, O prince of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute justice and righteousness; take away your exactions from My people, (oracle of the Lord GOD). (10) You shall have just balances, and a just ephah, and a just bath. (11) The ephah and the bath shall be of one measure, that the bath may contain the tenth part of a homer, and the ephah the tenth part of a homer: the measure thereof shall be after the homer. (12) And the shekel shall be twenty gerahs; twenty shekels, twenty-five shekels, fifteen shekels, shall be your maneh. (13) This is the oblation that you shall offer: the sixth part of an ephah from a homer of wheat; and you shall give the sixth part of an ephah from a homer of barley; (14) and the set portion of oil, of the bath of oil, the tenth part of a bath out of the cor, which is ten baths, even a homer; (for ten baths are a homer;) (15) and one lamb of the flock, out of two hundred, from the well-watered pastures of Israel;—for a meal-offering, and for a burnt-offering, and for peace-offerings, to make atonement for them, (oracle of the Lord GOD). (16) All the people of the land shall give unto this oblation for the prince in Israel. (17) And it shall be the prince's part to give the burnt-offerings, and the meal-offerings, and the drink-offerings, in the feasts, and on the new moons, and on the sabbaths, in all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin-offering, and the meal-offering, and the burnt-offering, and the peace-offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel.

COMMENTS

God appeals to the future rulers of His people to abandon the greed and corruption of their predecessors who did violence to the helpless and took spoil of them. He urges them to take away

their *exactions*—the unjust seizure of property; to rule in *justice and righteousness* (v. 9). The most common means of defrauding people was by means of unjust measures. The future leaders must eliminate this evil and demand that just weights and measures be used throughout the land. The *ephah* was a dry measure, the *bath*¹⁸ a liquid measure (v. 10). Both were equal to a tenth of a *homer*,¹⁹ which was the standard unit of measure (v. 11). A shekel (about 0.4 ounces) was equal to twenty *gerahs*. Sixty shekels made up a *mina* (KJV *maneh*).²⁰ The *shekels* were in use in denominations of twenty, twenty-five and fifteen in the days of Ezekiel (v. 12).

The reason for the concern about weights and measures appears in verse 13. The people are to present offerings to their prince. He in turn had the responsibility of supplying the needs of the Temple service. A sixth of an ephah of wheat and barley was required (v. 13), a tenth of each bath of oil,²¹ (v. 14), and one lamb out of a flock of two hundred. These required dues were to be used in Temple offerings to make atonement for the people (v. 15).

The prince had the responsibility of collecting the Temple offerings from the people (v. 16). He in turn provided the communal sacrifices offered throughout the year, as well as those special sacrifices offered on festival days (v. 17).

2. Festival offerings (45:18-25)

TRANSLATION

(18) Thus says the Lord GOD: In the first month, in the first day of the month, you shall take a young bullock without blemish; and you shall cleanse the sanctuary. (19) And the priest shall

18. An ephah and bath were equal to about five gallons.

19. Homer, literally *ass-load*, was equal to about six bushels.

20. Elsewhere it is *fifty* shekels which equals a mina. Perhaps the Jewish shekel had been devalued during the Exile to bring it into harmony with the Babylonian shekel.

21. The *cor* was identical to the *homer*. Cf. verse 11.

take of the blood of the sin-offering, and put it upon the doorposts of the house, and upon the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and upon the posts of the gate of the inner court. (20) And so you shall do on the seventh day of the month for every one that errs, and for him that is simple: so shall you make atonement for the house. (21) In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, you shall have the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten. (22) And upon that day shall the prince prepare for himself and for all the people of the land a bullock for a sin-offering. (23) And the seven days of the feast he shall prepare a burnt-offering to the LORD, seven bullocks and seven rams without blemish daily the seven days; and a he-goat daily for a sin-offering. (24) And he shall prepare a meal-offering, and ephah for a bullock, and an ephah for a ram, and a hin of oil to an ephah. (25) In the seventh month, in the fifteenth day of the month, in the feast, shall he do the like seven days; according to the sin-offering, according to the burnt-offering, according to the meal-offering, and according to the oil.

COMMENTS

The regulations regarding festival offerings sketched out here presuppose the more detailed instructions found in the Pentateuch. Some of the sacrifices spoken of here and in the next chapters were unknown in Solomon's Temple. Some scholars hold that the sacrifices outlined here were intended to be replacement for the Mosaic regulations regarding these holy days. Others see these sacrifices as being in addition to those stipulated in the Mosaic law. Still others see these sacrifices as authorized only for the period of the dedication of the new Temple.

Verses 18-20 speak regarding the New Year's celebration. The blood of a bullock would be employed to purify the sanctuary on New Year's day (v. 18). The blood of that sin offering would be smeared on the doorposts of the Temple, on

the four corners of the greater ledge of the altar (cf. 43:20), and on the post of the gate²² of the inner court (v. 19). These actions were to be repeated on the seventh day of the month. This ritual served to cleanse the holy area from those who through ignorance had wandered into a restricted area of the Temple courtyard.

In verses 21-24 Ezekiel speaks concerning the Passover. This feast commemorated the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt. It was celebrated on the fourteenth day of Nisan, the first month. This spring festival lasted seven days during which only unleavened bread was eaten (v. 21). The prince was to *prepare*, i.e., provide, a bullock as a sin-offering for himself and for the people (v. 22). No such sacrifice was connected with Passover in the Mosiac dispensation. In addition to the sin-offering bullock, the prince was to provide for burnt-offerings seven bullocks and seven rams on each of the seven days of the festival, as well as a he-goat each day for a sin-offering (v. 23). Along with each bullock and ram the prince was to provide a *ephah* of grain and a *hin* of oil (v. 24).

The feast of Tabernacles (v. 25) was observed during Tishri, the seventh month. During this joyous seven-day festival the prince was to duplicate the offerings required during Passover.

3. *The sabbath and new moon (46:1-7)*

TRANSLATION

(1) Thus says the Lord GOD: The gate of the inner court that looks toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the sabbath day it shall be opened, and on the day of the new moon it shall be opened. (2) And the prince shall enter by the way of the porch of the gate without and shall stand by the post of the gate; and the priests shall prepare his burnt-offering and

22. The word *gate* may be used here in a collective sense of all three gates of the inner court.

his peace-offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate: then he shall go forth; but the gate shall not be shut until the evening. (3) And the people of the land shall worship at the door of that gate before the LORD on the sabbaths and on the new moons. (4) And the burnt-offering that the prince shall offer unto the LORD shall be on the sabbath day six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish; (5) and the meal-offering shall be an ephah for the ram, and the meal-offering for the lambs as he is able to give, and a hin of oil to an ephah. (6) And on the day of the new moon it shall be a young bullock without blemish, and six lambs and a ram; they shall be without blemish: (7) and he shall prepare a meal-offering, an ephah for the bullock, and an ephah for the ram, and for the lambs according as he is able, and a hin of oil to an ephah.

COMMENTS

On the sabbath day and on the new moon (first day of the month) the eastern gate of the inner court was to be opened (v. 1).²³ On these occasions the prince would be allowed to enter the eastern gate. He was the official representative of the people who would present to the priests the sacrifices which were to be offered on behalf of the nation. From his vantage point at the *post of the gate* (i.e., the western end of the gateway) he would worship as the priests offered his sacrifices within his view upon the altar. Even after he departed from the Temple, the inner gate was to be left open until evening (v. 2). At the door of that open gate the people of the land would worship throughout those sacred sabbath days (v. 3).

The offerings prescribed for the sabbath and new moon of the new Temple age do not correspond with those prescribed in the Law of Moses (cf. Num. 28:9, 11-15).²⁴ The prince is to offer

23. This gate is not to be confused with the eastern gate of the outer court which was never to be opened (44:2).

24. To reconcile this account with the Pentateuch some Jewish scholars have proposed that these sacrifices are special, additional sacrifices required during the sabbaths of the dedication period for the new Temple.

each sabbath day six lambs and a ram (v. 4); an ephah of meal with the ram; an unspecified amount of meal for each lamb; and at least a *hin* of oil (v. 5). On the new moon the prince would offer the regular sabbath offerings but add to them an unblemished bullock and another ephah of meal (vv. 6-7).

4. *The entrance and exit of worshipers (46:8-10)*

TRANSLATION

(8) And when the prince shall enter, he shall go in by the way of the porch of the gate, and he shall go forth by the way thereof. (9) But when the people of the land shall come before the LORD in the appointed feasts, he that enters by the way of the north gate to worship shall go forth by the way of the south gate; and he that enters by the way of the south gate shall go forth by the way of the north gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth straight before him. (10) And the prince, when they go in, shall go in the midst of them; and when they go forth, they shall go forth together.

COMMENTS

On the sabbath and new moon the prince was allowed to enter by the porch of the east gateway and leave by the same way (v. 8). But in the *appointed seasons* (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles)²⁵ when the crowds were numerous the worshipers were required to enter the outer court by one of the side gates and leave by the gate on the opposite side. This made for orderly flow of traffic across the inner court (v. 9). On these occasions the prince would have no special privileges. He was to enter and depart by the gates with the worshipers (v. 10). Perhaps this served to underscore the fact that all worshipers stand on equal footing before God.

25. On these festivals every male Israelite was required to appear at the Temple.

5. *The offering of the prince on behalf of the people*
(46:11-15)

TRANSLATION

(11) And in the feasts and in the solemnities the meal-offering shall be an ephah for a bullock, and an ephah for a ram, and for the lambs as he is able to give and a hin of oil to an ephah. (12) And when the prince shall prepare a freewill-offering, a burnt-offering or peace-offerings as a freewill-offering unto the LORD, one shall open for him the gate that looks toward the east; and he shall prepare his burnt-offering and his peace-offerings, as he does on the sabbath day: then he shall go forth; and after his going forth one shall shut the gate. (13) And you shall prepare a lamb a year old without blemish for a burnt-offering unto the LORD daily: morning by morning you shall prepare it. (14) And you shall prepare a meal-offering with it morning by morning, the sixth part of an ephah, and the third part of a hin of oil, to moisten the fine flour; a meal-offering unto the LORD continually by a perpetual ordinance. (15) Thus shall they prepare the lamb, and the meal-offering, and the oil, morning by morning, for a continual burnt-offering.

COMMENTS

On all *feasts* (e.g., Pentecost) and *appointed seasons* (e.g., New Year's, Day of Atonement) the prince had the obligation to provide meal offerings as well as animals for sacrifice. He was required to offer an ephah of meal for each bullock or ram; for each lamb he would make a voluntary contribution of meal. Each ephah of meal was to be accompanied by a hin of oil (v. 11).

If the prince should desire to offer a free-will offering on a weekday, the eastern gate of the inner court would be opened for him. Upon his departure the gate was to be closed again. Only on sabbath days was the eastern gate left open all day so

that worshipers might view the sacrificial ritual (v. 12).

Every day sacrifices were to be offered by the priests upon the great Temple altar. A lamb was to be offered and a meal-offering as well (vv. 13-15). No mention is made here of an evening offering (cf. Num. 28:4f.).²⁶

6. *The inheritance of the prince (46:16-18)*

TRANSLATION

(16) Thus says the Lord GOD: If the prince gives a gift unto any of his sons, it is his inheritance, it shall belong to his sons; it is their possession by inheritance. (17) But if he gives of his inheritance a gift to one of his servants, it shall be his to the year of liberty; then it shall return to the prince; but as for his inheritance, it shall be for his sons. (18) Moreover, the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance, to thrust them out of their possession; he shall give inheritance to his sons out of his own possession, that My people be not scattered every man from his possession.

COMMENTS

Having spoken of the offerings that a prince might give to God, a pronouncement is made about gifts which the prince might make to others. A gift of property given by the prince to his sons was to be regarded as a *possession by inheritance*. That property would not revert to its original owner in the year of Jubilee (v. 16). However, royal property given to a servant was to revert back to the prince in *the year of liberty* (Jubilee year) which occurred every fiftieth year (v. 17). Moreover, in the new era the prince was to respect the property rights of his subjects.

26. The amount of the meal offering also differs from that prescribed in Numbers.

Confiscations of property by the crown as in the case of Naboth's vineyard (I Kings 21) would be a thing of the past (v. 18).

7. Preparing the sacrificial meals (46:19-24)

TRANSLATION

(19) Then he brought me through the entry, which was at the side of the gate, into the holy chambers for the priests, which looked toward the north: and, behold, there was a place on the hinder part westward. (20) And he said unto me, This is the place where the priests shall boil the trespass-offering and the sin-offering, and where they shall bake the meal-offering; that they bring them not forth into the outer court, to sanctify the people. (21) Then he brought me forth into the outer court, and caused me to pass by the four corners of the court; and, behold, in every corner of the court there was a court. (22) In the four corners of the court there were courts inclosed, forty cubits long and thirty broad; these four in the corners were of one measure. (23) And there was a wall round about in them, round about the four, and boiling-places were made under the walls round about. (24) Then said he unto me, These are the boiling-houses, where the ministers of the house shall boil the sacrifice of the people.

COMMENTS

Ezekiel's conducted tour of the Temple resumes in these verses. He was taken by his angelic guide into the priests' chambers which ran parallel to the Temple on the north and south. This block of chambers faced north. He was led to the extreme western end of this structure (v. 19) and there was shown a special chamber. Here the priests were to boil the meat of the guilt-offering and sin-offering, and bake the meal of the

meal-offering. These meats and cakes could only be eaten by the priests. They were to exercise care not to accidentally carry these sanctified foods into the outer court where they would sanctify or communicate holiness to the people (v. 20; 44:19).

The angel next brought Ezekiel to the outer court. He observed in each of the four corners of this court enclosures or small courts (v. 21). Each of these courts was forty by thirty cubits. The courts are said to be *keturoth*, which the King James Version renders *inclosed*. Some Rabbis thought the word meant "uncovered," i.e., the corner structures were roofless to allow the smoke to freely ascend (v. 22). These small courts were equipped *boiling places*, i.e., fire places where large boiling pots could be placed (v. 23). *The ministers of the house*—the Levites—boiled the people's sacrifices for them (v. 24). This part of the sacrificial animal was eaten by the worshipers in a communal meal in the Temple courtyards.

III. THE FUTURE LAND 47:1—48:35

In his last vision Ezekiel observes the blessing which the people of God would enjoy in the new Temple age. In that blessed land the tribes of Israel would have eternal possession. Here he discusses (1) the transformation of the promised land (47:1-12); (2) the boundaries of the promised land (47:13-21); (3) the place of aliens in the land (47:22-23); (4) the apportionment of the land among the tribes (48:1-35).

A. The Transformation of the Promised Land

47:1-12

TRANSLATION

(1) And he brought me back unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward; (for the forefront of the house was toward the east);

and the waters came down from under, from the right side of the house, on the south of the altar. (2) Then he brought me out by the way of the gate northward, and led me round by the way without unto the outer gate, by the way of the gate that looks toward the east; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side. (3) When the man went forth eastward with the line in his hand, he measured a thousand cubits, and he caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were to the ankles. (4) Again he measured a thousand, and caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were to the loins. (5) Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass through; for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. (6) And he said unto me, Son of man, have you seen this? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the bank of the river. (7) Now when I had returned, behold, upon the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other. (8) Then he said unto me, These waters issue forth toward the eastern region, and shall go down into the Arabah; and they shall go toward the sea; into the sea shall the waters go which were made to issue forth; and the waters shall be healed. (9) And it shall come to pass, that every living creature which swarms in every place where the rivers come, shall live; and there shall be a very great multitude of fish; for these waters are come thither, and the waters of the sea shall be healed, and every thing shall live wheresoever the river comes. (10) And it shall come to pass, that fishers shall stand by it: from En-gedi even unto Eneglaim shall be a place for the spreading of nets; their fish shall be after their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many. (11) But the miry places thereof, and the marshes thereof, shall not be healed; they shall be given up to salt. (12) And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow every tree for food, whose leaf shall not wither, neither shall the fruit thereof fail: it shall bring forth new fruit every month, because the waters thereof issue out of the sanctuary; and the fruit thereof shall be for food, and the leaf thereof for healing.

COMMENTS

The angelic guide brought Ezekiel back to the inner court and the *door of the house*. There he saw a stream issuing forth from under the threshold of the house. The waters were flowing in a south-easterly direction, past the altar, out into the outer court (v. 1). Ezekiel was led out the north gate of the inner court (the nearer east gate was closed; cf. 44:2; 46:1), around the outside wall of the Temple complex to the east gate of the outer court. There he saw the waters trickling²⁷ forth (v. 2).

A thousand cubits east of the eastern gate Ezekiel was directed to wade into the waters. They were ankle deep (v. 3). At two thousand cubits the waters were knee deep; at three thousand cubits, waist deep (v. 4); at four thousand cubits (about a mile and a third) the waters were so deep that the prophet could not get across them without swimming (v. 5). By means of a rhetorical question the angelic guide underscored the amazing increase in the depth of the water. No mention is made of any tributaries, yet the river increased in volume as it descended eastward through the mountains toward the Dead Sea (v. 6).

Apparently the banks of the river were bare when Ezekiel tested the depth of the water. Now he observed a thick growth of trees shooting up on both banks of the river (v. 7). These were no ordinary trees. They would bear a new crop every month. Furthermore, the leaves of these trees had curative powers (v. 12).

The prophet is informed that the river of life flowed far beyond the range of vision to the Arabah²⁸ and the Dead Sea. The lifeless waters of that body of water would be *healed*, i.e., purified by the fresh flowing water of life (v. 8). Where previously no aquatic creatures could exist, swarms of fish would be found (v. 9). Commercial fishermen would flock to the shore of the once dead sea, and they would find the catch as abundant as that to which they were accustomed on the Great

27. The Hebrew word is found only here and its exact meaning is doubtful.

28. Arabah is the technical name for the deep depression through which the Jordan river flows and in which the Dead Sea is situated.

(Mediterranean) Sea. Along the shoreline of the Dead Sea they would spread their nets from En-gedi (mid-point on the western shore of the Dead Sea) to En-eglaim (exact location unknown; v. 10). But even though the waters of the sea would be healed, the marshy areas about the sea would remain in their former state so as to provide the people with salt (v. 11).

Those who try to interpret the vision of the life-giving stream *physically* have completely missed the point of the passage. This is a clear instance of symbolism. Fertility and water are virtually interchangeable (See Ps. 46:4; 65:9; Isa. 33:20f.). The sheer physical impossibility of a stream increasing in volume without aid of tributaries should be a clue to the symbolic import of the text. Furthermore, fruit trees which bear a new crop every month would be hard to interpret physically. The main point being made is that in the new age the Temple of God would be the source of life, healing and fruitfulness.

B. The Boundaries of the Promised Land 47:13-21

TRANSLATION

(13) Thus says the Lord GOD: This shall be the border whereby you shall divide the land for inheritance according to the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph shall have two portions. (14) And you shall inherit it, one as well as another; for I swear to give it unto your fathers; and this land shall fall unto you for inheritance. (15) And this shall be the border of the land: On the north side, from the great sea, by the way of Hethlon, unto the entrance of Zedad; (16) Hamath, Berothah, Sibram, which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazer-hatticon, which is by the border of Hauran. (17) And the border from the sea, shall be Hazarenan at the border of Damascus; and on the north northward is the border of Hamath. This is the north side. (18) And the east side, between Hauran and Damascus and Gilead, and the land of Israel, shall be the Jordan; from the north border unto the east sea shall you

measure. This is the east side. (19) And the south side southward shall be from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribath-kadesh, to the brook of Egypt, unto the great sea. This is the south side southward. (20) And the west side shall be the great sea, from the south border as far as over against the entrance of Hamath. This is the west side. (21) So shall you divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel.

COMMENTS

In the new age the land of promise is to be divided fairly between the twelve tribes. It has already been noted the Levites were to receive no land inheritance (44:28) because God had provided for their needs in the Temple offering system. Joseph was given two portions, because his sons Ephraim and Manasseh were reckoned as separate tribes. Thus was retained the number *twelve* for the tribes of Israel (v. 13). In this new allocation each tribe was to receive an equal portion of land.²⁹ God had made promises to the Patriarchs—had lifted up His hand in the gesture of an oath—that the land would belong to their descendants. So God would keep His promise. The land of promise would finally and forever belong to His people (v. 14).

In verses 15-20 the borders of the promised land are listed. Not all the towns mentioned can be located with certainty. The Mediterranean Sea (*the great sea*) was to be the western boundary (v. 20) and the Jordan river the eastern (v. 18). The northern boundary stretched roughly from Tyre on the west to the head waters of the Jordan. Hamath (i.e., the entrance of Hamath, v. 20)³⁰ would mark the northern-most point (v. 16). The southern boundary extended from Tamar near the southern end of the Dead Sea to Meribath-kadesh (lit., *the waters of*

29. By contrast in the first apportionment of the promised land numerical strength of the tribes was taken into account (cf. Num. 26:54).

30. Cf. Num. 34:8. The entrance of Hamath is generally thought to refer to the one-hundred-mile long valley leading up to Hamath. In Solomon's day the entrance of Hamath actually served as the north border of Israel (I Kings 8:65).

strife, i.e., Kadesh-barnea), to the Brook (i.e., the Brook of Egypt) which ran into the Mediterranean Sea.

C. The Place of Aliens in the Land 47:22-23

TRANSLATION

(22) And it shall come to pass, that you shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you and to the strangers that sojourn among you, who shall beget children among you; and they shall be unto you as the home-born among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. (23) And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourns, there shall you give him his inheritance, (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

Aliens who lived among the Israelites would receive an inheritance within the restored Israel of the future (vv. 22-23). Proselytes who embraced the worship of the true God would have the same privileges as native-born Israelites. Similar broad-minded statements are found in 14:7 and 22:7. The unification of Jew and Gentile in the kingdom of Jesus Christ is thus foreshadowed.

D. The Apportionment of the Land 48:1-35

Now that the boundaries of the promised land have been spelled out, the prophet deals with the division of that land among the tribes. The whole territory west of Jordan is to be divided into twelve parallel portions running from east to west. No mention is made of the width of these tribal areas.³¹

31. The Rabbis gave the width of these portions as 25,000 reeds. They equated the dimensions of the *sanctified portion* with those of a tribal tract.

1. *The seven northern tribes (48:1-7)*

TRANSLATION

(1) Now these are the names of the tribes: From the north end, beside the way of Hethion to the entrance of Hamath, Hazar-enan at the border of Damascus, northward beside Hamath, (and they shall have their sides east and west,) Dan, one portion. (2) And by the border of Dan, from the east side unto the west side, Asher, one portion. (3) And by the border of Asher, from the east side even unto the west side, Naphtali, one portion. (4) And by the border of Naphtali, from the east side unto the west side, Manasseh, one portion. (5) And by the border of Manasseh, from the east side unto the west side, Ephraim, one portion. (6) And by the border of Ephraim, from the east side even unto the west side, Reuben, one portion. (7) And by the border of Reuben, from the east side unto the west side, Judah, one portion.

COMMENTS

Seven tribes are assigned territories north of *the holy portion of the land*, i.e., the Temple area and domains of the priests, Levites and prince. From north to south, these seven tribes are (1) Dan, (2) Asher, (3) Naphtali, (4) Manasseh, (5) Ephraim, (6) Reuben, and (7) Judah. The three tribes farthest away from the sanctuary are those descended from Jacob's concubines.³² Judah, because of the Messianic blessing of Genesis 49:8-12, was given the honor of inheritance nearer to the sanctuary.

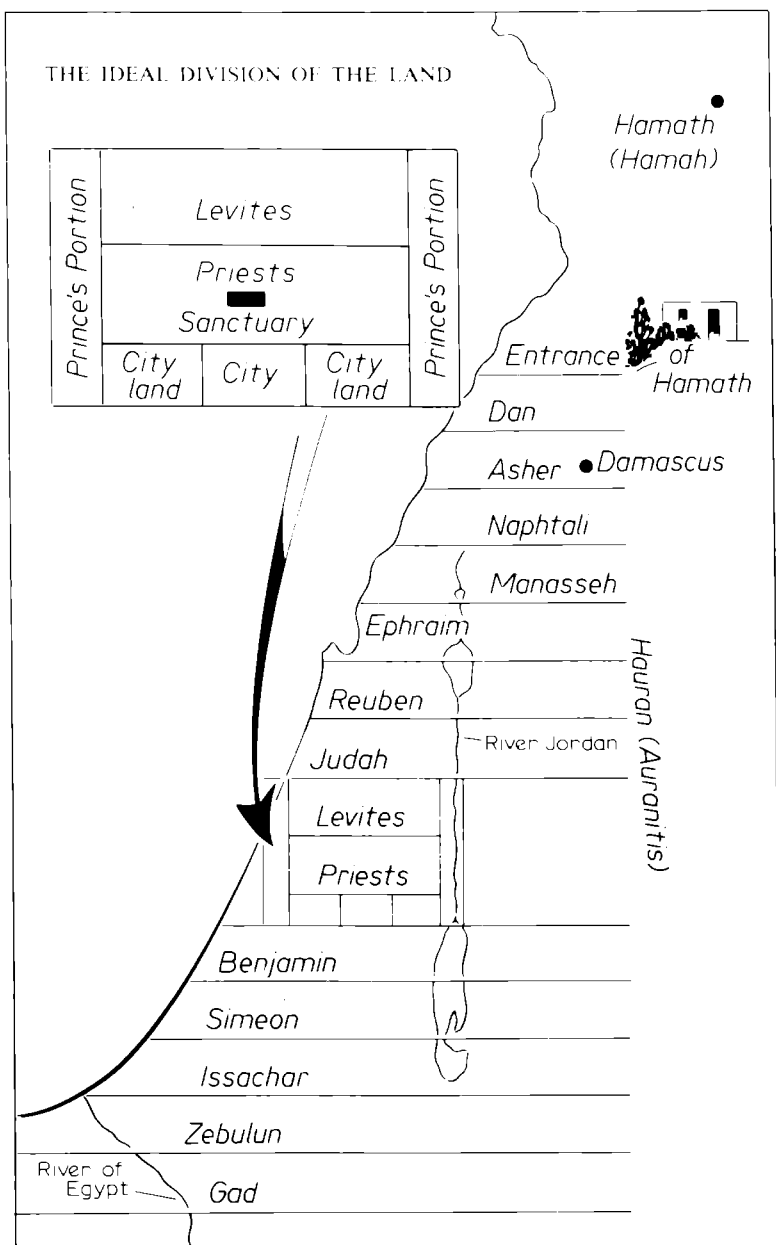
2. *The sanctified portion (48:8-22)*

TRANSLATION

(8) And by the border of Judah, from the east side unto the west side, shall be the oblation which you shall offer, twenty-five

32. Dan and Naphtali were born to Rachel's maid Bilhah and Asher to Leah's maid Zilpah (Gen. 30:5-13).

THE IDEAL DIVISION OF THE LAND



thousand reeds in breadth, and in length as one of the portions, from the east side unto the west side: and the sanctuary shall be in the midst of it. (9) The oblation that you shall offer unto the LORD shall be twenty-five thousand reeds in length, and ten thousand in breadth. (10) And for these, even for the priests, shall be the holy oblation; toward the north twenty-five thousand in length, and toward the west ten thousand in breadth, and toward the east ten thousand in breadth, and toward the south twenty-five thousand in length: and the sanctuary of the LORD shall be in the midst thereof. (11) It shall be for the priests that are sanctified of the sons of Zadok, that have kept My charge, that went not astray when the children of Israel went astray. (12) And it shall be unto them an oblation from the oblation of the land, a thing most holy, by the border of the Levites. (13) And answerable unto the border of the priests, the Levites shall have twenty-five thousand in length, and ten thousand in breadth: all the length shall be twenty-five thousand, and the breadth ten thousand. (14) And they shall sell none of it, nor exchange it, nor shall the first-fruits of the land be alienated; for it is holy unto the LORD. (15) And the five thousand that are left in the breadth, in front of the twenty-five thousand, shall be for common use, for the city, for dwelling and for suburbs; and the city shall be in the midst thereof. (16) And these shall be the measures thereof: the north side four thousand and five hundred, and the south side four thousand and five hundred, and on the east side four thousand and five hundred, and the west side four thousand and five hundred. (17) And the city shall have suburbs: toward the north two hundred and fifty, and toward the south two hundred and fifty, and toward the east two hundred and fifty, and toward the west two hundred and fifty. (18) And the residue in the length, answerable unto the holy oblation, shall be ten thousand eastward, and ten thousand westward; and it shall be answerable unto the holy oblation; and the increase thereof shall be for food unto them that labor in the city. (19) And they that labor in the city, out of all the tribes of Israel, shall till it. (20) All the oblation shall be twenty-five thousand: you shall offer the holy

oblation four-square, with the possession of the city. (21) And the residue shall be for the prince, on the one side and on the other of the holy oblation and of the possession of the city; in front of the twenty-five thousand of the oblation toward the east border, and westward in front of the twenty-five thousand toward the west border, answerable unto the portions, it shall be for the prince; and the holy oblation and the sanctuary of the house shall be in the midst thereof. (22) Moreover from the possession of the Levites, and from the possession of the city, being in the midst of that which is the prince's, between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin, it shall be for the prince.

COMMENTS

Just south of the tribal area of Judah was a tract 25,000 cubits square. Like the tribal areas this tract occupied the entire length of the land from east to west. This area was known as the offering or oblation (v. 8). Within the oblation was a smaller oblation or offering. This area measured 25,000 cubits east and west and 10,000 cubits from north to south. The sanctuary was situated in the midst of this inner oblation (vv. 9-10). The smaller oblation was to be the possession of the faithful priests of the line of Zadok (v. 11). The larger oblation area was holy; but the smaller oblation within it was *most holy* (v. 12).

Another section of the larger oblation was set aside for the Levites. It was comparable in size to the area set aside for the priests, 25,000 by 10,000 cubits (v. 13). Scholars are not agreed as to whether this Levite area was north or south of the priestly area. The areas inhabited by the priests and Levites were holy, therefore could not be sold or exchanged by them. This area was called the *first portion (reshith)*³³ as well as the oblation.

The city of Jerusalem was assigned the territory south of the priestly area within the oblation. This area measured 5,000 cubits north to south and, like the other sections of the oblation, 25,000 cubits east to west. This area contained the city proper, (a square of 4,500 cubits), *open land*³⁴ about the city

³³ The priestly dues from the crops are called *first-fruits (reshith)* in Deut. 18:4.

³⁴ Hebrew, *migrash* actually means *common-land*, perhaps for grazing cattle.

(250 cubits on all sides), and two tracts of arable land on either side of the city (10,000 by 5,000 cubits each; vv. 15-17). These latter areas were to be cultivated by the inhabitants of the city. Regardless of tribal affiliation, every citizen of the city was expected to work that ground for the good of all (v. 19).

The entire oblation area with all of its subdivisions formed a square of 25,000 cubits (v. 20). This would be equivalent to about fifty square miles if the conventional cubit is intended, sixty-nine square miles if the longer cubit is intended.

On the east and west sides of the oblation was a large territory belonging to the prince. To state the matter differently, the territories of the priests, the Levites, the sanctuary and the city were situated between the two halves of the domain of the prince (vv. 21-22).

3. *The five southern tribes* (48:23-29)

TRANSLATION

(23) And as for the rest of the tribes: from the east side unto the west side, Benjamin, one portion. (24) And by the border of Benjamin, from the east side unto the west side, Simeon, one portion. (25) And by the border of Simeon, from the east side unto the west side, Issachar, one portion. (26) And by the border of Issachar, from the east side to the west side, Zebulun, one portion. (27) And by the border of Zebulun, from the east side unto the west side, Gad, one portion. (28) And by the border of Gad, at the south side southward, the border shall be even from Tamar unto the waters of Meribath-kadesh, to the brook of Egypt, unto the great sea. (29) This is the land which you shall divide by lot unto the tribes of Israel for inheritance, and these are their several portions, (oracle of the Lord GOD).

COMMENTS

To the south of the oblation lay the territories of (1) Benjamin, (2) Simeon, (3) Issachar, (4) Zebulun, and (5) Gad.

Benjamin received the favored position near the oblation because that tribe had descended from Jacob's youngest son by Rachel, the beloved wife. Descendants of Gad, descendants of the son of the concubine Zilpah were farthest away from the holy portion. Except for Judah and Benjamin, Ezekiel's tribal arrangement bears no resemblance to the original apportionment of the land in the days of Joshua (vv. 23-29).

4. The gates of the city (48:30-35)

TRANSLATION

(30) And these are the egresses of the city: On the north side four thousand and five hundred reeds by measure; (31) and the gates of the city shall be after the names of the tribes of Israel, three gates northward: the gate of Reuben, one; the gate of Judah, one; the gate of Levi, one. (32) And at the east side four thousand and five hundred reeds, and three gates: even the gate of Joseph, one; the gate of Benjamin, one; the gate of Dan, one. (33) And at the south side four thousand and five hundred reeds by measure, and three gates: the gate of Simeon, one; the gate of Issachar, one; the gate of Zebulun, one. (34) At the west side four thousand and five hundred reeds, with their three gates: the gate of Gad, one; the gate of Asher, one; the gate of Naphtali, one. (35) It shall be eighteen thousand reeds round about: and the name of the city from that day shall be, Yahweh-shammah.

COMMENTS

The new Jerusalem as envisioned by Ezekiel had twelve gates, three on each side. These gates were named after the twelve tribes. The gates on the north and south are named after the sons of Leah:

On the North Side

Reuben gate
Judah gate
Levi gate

On the South Side

Simeon gate
Issachar gate
Zebulun gate

Two gates on the east of the city were named for the sons of Rachel, and the third was named for the son of her handmaid Bilhah. The gates on the west were named for the sons of handmaids, Zilpah and Bilhah. These were:

On the East Side

Joseph gate
Benjamin gate
Dan gate

On the West Side

Gad gate
Asher gate
Naphtali gate

It should be noted in the enumeration of gates that Ephraim and Manasseh have been united under the designation Joseph.

The Jerusalem of the future would receive a new name. She would be called *Yahweh-shamma*, Yahweh is there. God will never again depart from that holy city (v. 35).

As one reads this description of Ezekiel's new Jerusalem, one cannot help but think of that new Jerusalem described by John in Revelation 21. It too had twelve gates, named after the twelve tribes of Israel. It also had twelve foundations which bore the names of the twelve apostles (Rev. 21:12-14). Like his prophetic predecessor, John foresaw the day when God would dwell with His people finally and forever (Rev. 21:3).

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What stood at the center of Old Testament worship? What is the New Testament altar? (See Hebrews 13:10.)
2. What were the horns of the altar?
3. To what two uses was the Old Testament altar put?
4. What was the significance of the burnt-offering? the peace-offering? the meal-offering? Why was salt sprinkled on the burnt-offering?

5. Why were the Levites demoted in privilege in Ezekiel's Temple?
6. What restriction would be put on aliens in the new Temple age?
7. How were the Zadokite priests to be dressed when they served in the Temple? What is the significance of this dress?
8. What duties did Ezekiel envision being performed by priests in the new Temple age?
9. Why did God require such strict ritual regarding priests who contacted dead bodies?
10. Why would the Zadokite priests receive no inheritance?
11. In the new apportionment of Canaan who would possess the central section of the land?
12. What appeal does Ezekiel make to future rulers of Israel?
13. What responsibility would the prince have in reference to the Temple offerings?
14. What various festival days does Ezekiel mention in connection with the new age?
15. Why was the eastern gate of the Temple forever to remain shut?
16. What restrictions were placed on the prince in reference to the disposition of his property?
17. What is symbolized by the river which flowed forth from the Temple of God? What problems do literalists have in dealing with Ezekiel's river?
18. How does the original apportionment of land to the twelve tribes differ from that described by Ezekiel?
19. What inheritance rights would aliens have in the new Canaan?
20. How is Ezekiel's description of the new Jerusalem similar to that of John in Revelation?

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