

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: EZEKIEL

EZEKIEL

PREFACE

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Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 1

Ezekiel 1:1 *Now it happened-* The intention may be to connect with the previous prophecy, Jeremiah, which had concluded with Jeremiah sending a message to the captives urging them to accept their situation and not expect an immediate return from exile (Jer. 51:59 cp. Jer. 29:1-32). Ezekiel was therefore encouraging the exiles that despite no immediate restoration, they could be sure of a huge activity of God for them which would bring about the restoration in due course.

In the thirtieth year in the fourth month in the fifth of the month- This could refer to Ezekiel as a priest starting ministry at age 30 (:3). He was the priest of the "little sanctuary" in exile (Ez. 11:16 "yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary"), a sanctuary that didn't require a temple.

As I was among the captives by the river Chebar- The mention of the river was to connect with the description sitting by the rivers of Babylon weeping in depression (Ps. 137:1).

That the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God- Ezekiel's opening vision of the cherubim was surely to encourage the captives in Babylon that above them was an awesome

Angelic system, that was able to carry them with it back to the land- if they were workers together with God. Although it seemed that they were sitting still, nothing was happening, they were just passing time by the rivers of Babylon, above them there was an intensely active system of Angels working for their good. Asaph, writing Psalms in the captivity, perceived this when [surely referring to Ezekiel's recent vision] he speaks of how the God who dwells between the cherubim is in fact actively leading Judah somewhere (Ps. 80:1). And yet the common phrase "Lord of Hosts" / Angels never once occurs in Ezekiel or Daniel. This outstanding omission is surely reflective of the sad fact that the Angel-cherubim withdrew from the land during the captivity- the land where the Angelic eyes of the Lord had run to and fro previously. See on:20. Or it could be argued that Ezekiel's point was that although Yahweh's presence had withdrawn from the temple, He was still the King of Israel and still hugely active for His people through direct personal relationship with them as individuals.

Ezekiel 1:2 *In the fifth of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity-* At this time a year before, the false prophets of Judah were prophesying the overthrow of Babylon and the return of Jeconiah within two years (Jer. 28:3). Ezekiel's message was intended to help them reject these fanciful ideas of immediate salvation and to demonstrate that the things of God's glory are far weightier and eternal than that. In the third or fourth year of Jehoiakim, father of Jehoiachin, the first carrying away of Jewish captives to Babylon took place (including Daniel). It seems that Ezekiel was in the second wave of captives.

Ezekiel 1:3 *The word of Yahweh came specifically to Ezekiel the priest the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of Yahweh was there on him-* As noted on :1, he became a priest at 30 and was intended to be the priest of the "little sanctuary" in exile (Ez. 11:16). If Chebar is the same as Chabor or Habor, then this was the place where the ten tribes had been transported by Tiglath Pileser and Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17:6; 1 Chron. 5:26). They had now been joined by the early exiles from Judah. So there was the potential for Israel and Judah to be united, as envisioned under the new covenant; and if they accepted the Spirit, to return together and united to Zion to restore the Kingdom.

I have discussed on Ps. 137 how Jews sat by the rivers / canals of Babylon like the Ulai and Chebar, and some like that Psalmist were caught up in bitterness, endlessly playing the tape of their own experiences and the bitter words spoken to them. Failing to accept that Ezekiel by the Chebar and Daniel by the Ulai had seen visions of restoration and victory over their oppressors. Those canals were dug by slave labour, including the Jewish exiles. But at those very places there was given the hope of glory in the midst of their workaday lives and experience.

Ezekiel 1:4 *I looked, and behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud, with flashing lightning and a brightness around it; and out of its midst as it were glowing metal out of the midst of the fire-* The primary potential fulfilment of Ezekiel was in the restoration from Babylon. The great emphasis on the Angel-cherubim shows the importance of the Angels in it. The Cherubim of chapter 1 "came out of the north". "The North" in the prophets often refers to "the north country" of Babylon. Is the whole vision primarily describing the Angels coming from Babylon, with the wheels "upon the earth" (:15) representing natural Israel under Angelic control? Thus "when the living creatures (Angels) went, the wheels went by them" (:19), due to the Angelic inspiration of the Jews and their touching the hearts of men like Cyrus, Ezra and Nehemiah "according to the good hand (Angel) of... God upon"

them; "the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels" (:20). Had the exiles accepted the new covenant, they would have received the Spirit and returned from exile. Remember that the Angels are the vehicles of God's Spirit. The visions of the glory progressively removing from the temple show the Angel departing from Jerusalem, and then in chapters 40-48 the glory Angel returns to a re-built Jerusalem. Recall how the Angel in Ex. 33 and 34 is also described as the "glory". The idea is that as the depressed captives sat by the rivers of Babylon in "the north", they were to be aware that a huge, powerful, glorious system of Divine operation was hanging over them. If they identified with it, then this would ultimately return them to Zion.

And yet the cherubim vision also spoke of an invasion from Babylon unless there was repentance amongst the exiles and those still in the land. Ezekiel was taken captive in the second wave of deportations; but the temple had still not been sacked nor Jerusalem taken. Hence the cherubim vision had a double application. It could speak of a further invasion from the north, or of the return of the exiles. All alike would work out God's glory.

Ezekiel 1:5 Out of its midst came the likeness of four living creatures. This was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man- The overall silhouette upon them was of a man. This is impossible to visually represent. All attempts at visual representation rather fail here. The cherubim were the heavenly representation of men, both the exiles and also perhaps the invading Babylonian armies. So there was something human about all this majesty of God's glory. His care for man is paramount to His glory and personality. Ultimately this came to full term in His glorious manifestation in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

Ezekiel was prophesying against the background of the Assyrians and Babylonians. Their sculptures reveal winged bulls and lions with human heads. The cherubim alluded to them in that one aspect of meaning is that they could represent the invaders from the north which God would bring upon His people. But the "living creatures" were alive, not dead like the Babylonian ones. They were not quadrupeds, like the Assyrian and Babylonian forms. They were more human, and stood erect, having feet and hands as men have.

Ezekiel 1:6 Each one had four faces, and each one of them had four wings- In Rev. 4:7 the four heads are distributed, one to each of the "living creatures", while here each has four faces. This is to highlight the sense of humanity, and of God's awareness of every angle of human situation. That was the lesson so required by Judah in their depression by the rivers of Babylon.

Ezekiel 1:7 Their feet were straight feet- The return of the exiles led by Ezra made the journey by a "right way" from Babylon to Zion (Ezra 8:21). Yet this is the very word used about the "straight" feet of the Cherubim Angels here (also :23). The Hebrew word for "straight" is quite common and is used nearly always for righteousness, moral straightness. The idea is that the new covenant, if accepted, would mean the Spirit entering the exiles and propelling them in the paths of righteousness back to the land. Their *shub*, repentance / return, would be in that they repented and therefore returned. The vast picture of Divine working is to give some material impression of how great is His working in the hearts of men. If they want it. The return from Babylon involved following in the path of the Angels, walking in step with them. The restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:9 spoke of how the returnees would walk "in a straight way" (s.w.) "by the rivers of waters"- and surely Ezra consciously alluded to this when by the river Ahava he fasted for the exiles to return in a "right / straight way". He knew that these prophecies of restoration would not just automatically come true-

they had to be fulfilled by much prayer, fasting and stepping out in faith. But so very few perceived that. And the challenge remains for us today- to walk in the way which God's Angels have potentially prepared for us, with prayer and boldness. I feel this is especially true in the matter of latter day witnessing. Rev. 14:6 describes the great latter fulfilment of the great preaching commission in terms of an Angel flying in Heaven with the Gospel of the Kingdom to be preached to all nations and languages. Surely the implication is that the latter day preachers of the Gospel are walking on earth in league with an Angelic system above them, empowering and enabling them.

And the soles of their feet were like the soles of a calf's feet; and they gleamed like burnished brass- If the cherubim speak also of God's people, as well as the Angelic hosts and the hosts of Babylon, then perhaps the message was simply that God was awesomely involved- as awesome as the cherubim vision- with His people on earth. The same Angelic system that brought the hosts of Babylon upon Judah also went with Judah into captivity, and would return from there with them- if they still wished to be part of that Angelic system. And yet most of Judah opted out of it, and remained in Babylon, just as we can opt out and remain in Babylon today. In this context it's interesting that the vision of Jesus as the Son of Man in Rev. 1 has similarities with the cherubim vision of Ez. 1 (feet like brass, Ez. 1:7 = Rev. 1:15; shining face, Ez. 1:13 = Rev. 1:16; voice like many waters, Ez. 1:24 = Rev. 1:15). Perhaps this suggests that Israel's failure to identify with the cherubim led to a refulfilment of the prophecy in the person of the Lord Jesus, who was in person all that God intended Israel to have been. Thus the prophecies of Israel as "the servant of Yahweh", given in the context of the restoration, could have been fulfilled in the people of Israel, but were reapplied and fulfilled in the person of the Lord Jesus.

The captives would have been led into exile barefoot. This was part of the shame of captivity. Is. 20:4 speaks of captives led "naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered". But the soles of their feet would return in glory, energized by their connection with the huge cherubic system above them.

Ezekiel 1:8 They had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and the four of them had their faces and their wings like this- See on :10. As noted on :5 and :6, one theme of the visions of glory was God's humanity and how the function and direction of the huge system of Divine activity is influenced by and in a sense dependent upon man. This is why Ezekiel sees the hands of a woman under the wings on every side of them. This presence of human hands is so emphasized; each of them, on all four sides, had this image of human hands as it were supporting them. Because God's work is responsive to human freewill, God is in a sense "in need of man", as Abraham Heschel put it. Or we could see this as all encouraging us to understand that God is a person, we are made in His image, He is thereby closer to us than we imagine. And hence the vision concludes with the vision of God Himself, presented as a human-like Being.

Ezekiel 1:9 Their wings were joined one to another; they didn't turn when they went; each one went straight forward- This is an intentional paradox; wings can hardly be joined to each other if they are used for flying. Likewise the wheels within wheels, with no gears meshing them together, somehow travelling in all directions. But this is the paradox and contradiction, as viewed from earth, of God's glorious progress and activity for His people. The whole system would not be diverted- that is twice emphasized in saying that they didn't turn, but went straight forward. The life led by the Spirit is likewise forward motion only. What appears to be a backward step is in fact forwards towards God's Kingdom. We think of the 3 x 40 year periods in Moses' life. See on :7. An alternative is to understand that they each moved with two wings upward and two always down (:11,24), and it was the two upward

wings which touched each other and therefore appeared to be "joined". The word speaks of joining in fellowship. This huge system was united, for the ultimate good of God's people and to restore Zion. Hence Jerusalem would be built as a city compacted or "joined" together (Ps. 122:3 s.w.).

Ezekiel 1:10 *As for the likeness of their faces, they each had the face of a man; and the face of a lion on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; the four of them also had the face of an eagle-* There are evident similarities between Ezekiel's cherubim, and the four living creatures of Rev. 4. They are both described as "full of eyes" (Ez. 1:18 = Rev. 4:6), with four very similar faces (lion, calf, man, eagle in Rev. 4:7 = lion, ox, man, eagle in Ez. 1:10); and both have wings (Rev. 4:8 = Ez. 1:8). Yet the living creatures of Revelation speak of being redeemed by the blood of Christ and made king-priests in God's Kingdom (Rev. 5:8-10)- as if they are the redeemed people of God. The four faces are likely to be connected with the four standards of the tribes of Israel (Lion = Judah, Man = Reuben, Ox = Ephraim, Eagle = Dan). Each of those tribes had two other tribes assigned to them in the encampment procedures of Num. 2. There is extra-Biblical tradition that the cherubim in Solomon's temple had the same four faces which Ezekiel saw on the cherubim- lion, ox, man and eagle (John Thomas, *Eureka* (West Beach: Logos, 1984 ed.) Vol. 2 Ch. 4 sec. 4.2). Those to whom Ezekiel related his vision would have immediately understood the point- that the earthly sanctuary was a reflection of the Heavenly, and that above that was a huge Angelic system operating, which also represented God's people- them. But that huge system was to remove to Babylon, and then the final visions of Ezekiel show that glory returning. Ezekiel, as the representative "son of man" as he's so often styled, was caught up within that system and transported at ease between Babylon and Jerusalem- and those who wanted to opt in with God and His Angels could likewise be taken to Babylon and returned. Those who chose to remain in Babylon were therefore resisting being part of an awesome system of God manifestation and Angelic operation. We have that same choice in things great and small today.

Ezekiel 1:11 *Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; two wings of each one touched another, and two covered their bodies-* See on :9. Heb. 'were parted from above'. The impression is of unity in diversity. What appeared to the exiles to be contradictory was in fact working together in unity towards God's purpose.

Wings are a picture of protection. The first reference to cherubim is in the context of preservation (Gen. 3:24). The vision therefore promised protection to these spiritually depressed exiles, possibly fearing for their lives. And there is also the sense of salvation, they kept the way to the tree of life. Hab. 3:8 brings this out: "You rode on your horses, your chariots of salvation". But the cherubim are also a chariot, with wheels. The idea is of transport. "He [Yhwh] mounted upon a cherub and flew; he swooped on the wings of the wind" (Ps. 18:11). So the exiles were being shown that God could transport them back to Zion, and protect them. These two things met their worries- of how ever they could possibly experience restoration to Zion.

Ezekiel 1:12 *Each one went straight forward-* Literally, 'in front of their faces'. Their faces were set and they didn't flinch. The same idea was to be applied to Ezekiel in Ez. 3:9. He was to identify with God's way and the cherubim, and would be strengthened to follow in the one way if that was what he chose.

Where the spirit was to go, they went; they didn't turn when they went- The cherubim, this massive system of Divine operation, was direct by God's Spirit. The feature of not

turning during their movement is a major feature (Ez. 1:9,12,17; 10:11,16). The impression was given of God's unchanging massive help towards the realization of His purpose with His people. This idea is alluded to when we are told that we who have accepted the new covenant, who have received the Spirit, are to "walk in step with the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). Likewise in all the commands to "walk not after the flesh, but after[following after] the Spirit... walk in the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1; Gal. 5:16).

Ezekiel 1:13 *As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches. The fire went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning-* See on :7. The visual impression was of perpetual, churning activity and the cycling of power. This was a necessary encouragement for the exiles sitting in depression by the rivers of Babylon. God had not forgotten. His apparent silence only masked a hugely active and powerful system of operation. Whilst on one hand the descriptions here beg to be visualized, and some have made valiant attempts to do so, I'm unsure if that is the intention. The point is that the whole scene as described *cannot* be visualized. The cherubim on the tabernacle curtains were two dimensional, but here we have 3-D. The overall impression is of a huge, intricate, dynamic system of working which is in fact beyond our conception and visualization. It is beyond the visual. The 'end stress' of the vision is that the whole system is overarched by a rainbow, with the message of the end of Divine judgment and salvation by grace.

Ezekiel 1:14 *The living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning-* Perhaps the idea was that they ran and returned between Jerusalem and the exiles' camp in Babylon. The return from exile could be achieved in a flash, and likewise the Jews still in Judah could be taken to Babylon in a flash. "Ran and returned" suggests this was continually happening. Similar visions speak of how "they rest not day or night" (Rev. 4:8; Zech. 4:10). God takes no time out from His purpose to restore and save us. The exiles who thought God had forgotten them are being reminded of His incessant, constant activity to restore them. God doesn't just act now and again in our lives. Because He only comes to our minds "now and again", we are wrongly inclined to think that this is how He relates to us. But in fact His interaction and activity is constant, and we should seek towards a similar constant awareness of Him. This is surely the greatest aspect of salvation, to come to that point of total spiritual awareness and interaction with and for Him.

Ezekiel 1:15 *Now as I saw the living creatures, there was one wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, for each of the four faces of it-* The wheels make the living creatures appear as on a chariot, connecting with "the chariot of the cherubim" (1 Chron. 28:18). The firm grounding of this heavenly vision of power "on the earth" indicates that God's glory and activity were not simply in Heaven but active upon earth, both to transport a repentant Judah back to the land, and also to bring forth chariots of enemies to further destroy the land and temple. The difficulty of a wheel having four "faces" or sides is intentional. Likewise the idea that the four wheels "went in their four directions" or "on their four sides" (:17). Again, the idea is that we can't visualize this system. Tempting as it is- just as it is to try to fully understand our own lives.

Ezekiel 1:16 *The appearance of the wheels and their work was like a beryl: and the four of them had one likeness; and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel within a wheel-* The wheels imply they were chariots, or mounted on chariots; indeed this is a root meaning of the Hebrew word translated "cherub". Zechariah sees the same Angel chariots emerging from between two bronze mountains (Zech. 1:7-11), perhaps designed to recall the

bronze pillars of the temple (1 Kings 7:15-22). The rebuilt temple was intended to be the point from which the Angel chariots would go forth; but that didn't happen at the very limited restoration from Babylon, and so the first four seals of Rev. 6 are full of allusion to this Zechariah vision- it was not left unfulfilled because of Israel's indolence, but rather was reapplied to the latter day events of which Revelation speaks.

The wheel within a wheel, each revolving as a gyroscope, deepens the impression of movement in contrary directions and yet all within the same direction. The confusion and contradictions which the exiles struggled with, as we do, were all somehow moving in the same direction, led by God's Spirit. Daniel was contemporary with Ezekiel, and so the mention of the beryl would connect with his description of the future Messiah figure as having a body of beryl, also replete with torches of fire and lightning just as seen in the cherubim vision (Dan. 10:6). As mentioned above, the final manifestation of God's glory, Spirit, judgment and salvation was to be in the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 1:17 *When they went, they went in their four directions. They didn't turn when they went-* Like a complex series of gyroscopes within each other, so that the movement might be without turning to wherever they advanced. Thus each wheel was composed of two circles, cutting one another at right angles, "one" only of which appeared to touch the ground ("upon the earth" :15), according to the direction the cherubim desired to move in. The idea was that what might appear to be contradictory direction was in fact all seamlessly part of movement in the same direction. And again this has so much meaning for our lives, as it did for the exiles by the river Chebar. What appears useless, taking us away from our intended direction, is being used by God in His bigger direction of our lives towards His Kingdom and restoration.

Ezekiel 1:18 *As for their rims, they were high and dreadful; and the four of them had their rims full of eyes all around-* See on :10. The abundance of eyes gave the impression of God's awareness and intense gaze upon His people. The captives were tempted to think that God was no longer looking at them, unaware of their struggles, their losses, their history. But the vision impressed upon them that He was intensely aware. Likewise the same idea of many eyes is used to encourage the exiles to the same effect in Zech. 3:9; 4:10. And again, as noted on :16, Zechariah's stone full of eyes looked forward to the Lord Jesus, the Messiah figure who was to be the quintessence and personalization of all this Spirit, power and glory. The rims full of eyes may refer to eye-shaped gem stones, giving the idea of total knowledge of their situation and His power to transform it. Although the word "cherubim" doesn't occur in Ez. 1, the similar vision in Ez. 10 uses the term. The Hebrew word comes from the Assyrian *karabu*, "to be near". But Gesenius defines it as meaning 'to be gracious'. This awesome display of physical glory and power was to show the depressed exiles that God knew all about them, was powerful to save by grace, and was in fact very near to them.

Ezekiel 1:19 *When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up-* The wheels would speak of God's active engagement with things upon the earth. And there were times when the whole chariot was lifted up above the earth. Potentially, the exiles could have been restored to Zion- through God's gracious work through the cherubim. The intricacy of the vision is beyond exact understanding, and that's the point- that God's working is indeed impossible to depict as a visual or even verbal expression. Zechariah's visions of the restoration include chariots, wheels, horses, the winds / spirit, eyes on a stone, "the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth" (Zech. 4:10) etc. Those visions are in places hard to understand because they are describing what could potentially have happened to the exiles.

But he is alluding all the time to Ezekiel's visions of the cherubim, to explain how the restoration could be accomplished.

Ezekiel 1:20 *Wherever the spirit was to go, they went under the spirit's control*- The wheels, it appears, represented God's people Israel on earth. If they had kept in step with the Spirit-Angel, following Him both to Babylon and back to Judah at His bidding, they would have been in step with God's plan for them, and all would have prospered. This passage appears to be behind Paul's appeal to us to walk in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). Ezekiel himself was the great example of this, for he was "lifted up" by the Spirit just as the wheels were lifted up, and went wherever he was taken, backwards and forwards between Babylon and Judah (Ez. 8:3; 11:1). He became part of the Cherubic system. See on Ez. 10:2,8. Ezekiel is introduced as being "among" the exiles camped by the Chebar. They could share his experience.

And the wheels were lifted up beside them, for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels- The spirit of the living creatures in the Heavens was the same spirit in the wheels, God's people who operationalize God's will here on earth. That vision was then immediately demonstrated in practice when the Spirit of God entered into Ezekiel and he was sent to preach; just as the Spirit of the living creatures had been in the wheels, and they were sent to and fro in the earth (Ez. 2:2). And thus Ezekiel sees the hand of a man coming to *him*, just as he had seen it associated with the cherubim in the vision (Ez. 1:8 = Ez. 2:9). And surely Ezekiel is addressed as "son of man" in this context because the living creatures have the "likeness of a man" (Ez. 1:5); Ezekiel, God's man on earth, alone and separate from his brethren, was merged with the huge Heavenly system above him, because God's Spirit was in him, and he was willing to do God's will. He was "amongst" the exiles by Chebar; they could have had his experience. Just as the cherub "stretched forth his hand" to direct another Angel, so God's hand was stretched forth [s.w.] upon Ezekiel and he likewise was sent to do God's will (Ez. 2:9; 8:3; 10:7 "the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet...behold, an hand was sent unto me...he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem.. "). Knowing that we are part of this huge Heavenly system of working, identified with the Angels and the very cherubim of glory above, can eclipse to a large extent our human feelings of loneliness.

The LXX gives "spirit of life". As will be explained in Ez. 20 and also was explicit in Jer. 31, the returning exiles were offered a new covenant which involved being enlivened with a new spirit, the Spirit which was to bring the dry bones of scattered Judah back to life and restoration to the land in Ez. 37. This was taught here right at the beginning of Ezekiel's vision. See on :21.

Ezekiel 1:21 *When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up beside them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels*- Later, Ez. 37:14 alludes directly back to this vision of the Angel-cherubim's spirit being placed in the "wheels" of natural Israel: "I (the Angel) shall put My spirit in you, and ye shall live". The cherubim therefore can be interpreted in different ways. This was the Angelic system working with and for Israel, and repentant Judah were bidden become part of it. We who have accepted the new covenant and the gift of the Spirit can likewise be assured of the same huge activity of Spirit over our heads and within us.

Ezekiel 1:22 *Over the head of the living creature there was the likeness of an expanse, like an awesome crystal to look on, stretched forth over their heads above*- Continually we encounter the word and idea of "likeness". Ezekiel is seeing a vision of God's operations with His people, and we are unwise to try to attach meaning to every detail. The overall impression is

of hugely powerful and active operation of God through His Spirit. The "expanse" seems to be a kind of crystal platform for God Himself who presided over the workings of this great system.

Ezekiel 1:23 *Under the expanse were their wings straight, the one toward the other: each one had two which covered their bodies on this side, and each one had two which covered their bodies on that side-* For "straight" see on :7. The cherubim are not so much pictured as supporting God but covering themselves in bowed reverence beneath Him.

Ezekiel 1:24 *When they went, I heard the noise of their wings like the noise of great waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a noise of tumult like the noise of an army. When they stood, they let down their wings-* See on :7. This great army was the Lord of hosts, of armies, of Angels. The cherubim also speak of God's people. The noise is that of the LXX in Ez. 3:12, which has "the voice as of a great earthquake". Later, Ezekiel hears the "noise" of "shaking" or earthquake as the bones of Israel in exile come together by the spirit / Angelic operation of Yahweh, thereby forming a great army (Ez. 37:7). The Spirit came from four places (Ez. 37:9)- just as there were four cherubim. As the sound of the cherubim was as of a great army, so revived Israel stood up as a great army (Ez. 37:10). Those who accept the new covenant have the same promise and even current experience of life in and with the Spirit. The Angel cherubim would work with God's disillusioned and broken people, to revive them, so that they would become like the guardian Angels of Israel above them. The point was that the Angel cherubim system which Ezekiel had seen at work amongst the captives was able to gather them together, and give life to the nation. And yet that didn't happen to those exiles- because they didn't walk in step with the spirit.

Ezekiel 1:25 *There was a voice above the expanse that was over their heads when they stood and let down their wings-* It was God's word which was paramount, and even more powerful than this huge system of Angelic power. And it was that word which Ezekiel was to speak to Israel.

Ezekiel 1:26 *Above the expanse that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and on the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man on it above-* The repeated sense of "likeness" is because here we have an impression of God Himself. We are made in God's image; not mentally, because we need to develop that image within us. Therefore it seems that we are somehow in His literal image. Whatever word we use about God- corporeal, material, tangible etc.- seems somehow inappropriate. But the fact is that God is real, He exists in an actual personal form, we pray to Him as children in His image, and we can form personal relationship with Him. He is not a puff of smoke out in the cosmos, nor a mere abstraction, but a personal being who had a begotten Son.

The statement that God was enthroned over Israel had huge [potential] significance for the exiles- who had just lost their human king. As Hosea had shown, the people had rejected Yahweh as their king, and 'king' is understood by him as a metaphor for 'husband'. But despite their rejection of Him, God wanted to as it were force through the relationship, to make it work, and says that He will be their king anyway. And now in all His glory He is presented as actually reigning over them. The plan had been as in Hos. 3:4 "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king" and then they would seek Him. But God presents Himself already as their King, so eager is He for their return to Him in relationship. In anger Yahweh had said in Hos. 11:5 "the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return". But His 'repentings were kindled together, and Hos. 13:10 shows God wanting to

in any case be their King: "I will be thy king". Although His earthly throne in Jerusalem was to be destroyed, He was in fact still their King enthroned above them. The vision of Ez. 1 is before the fall of Jerusalem, and was to teach that the earthly "throne" was being removed [He was "enthroned in Zion... Yahweh will reign forever; your God, O Zion, to all generations", Ps. 9:11; 146:10], so that His people would perceive more clearly that He was indeed enthroned above them anyway- and that is of the essence, rather than any earthly symbol of His kingship.

Zion, the temple mount, had been understood as God's location, the place of His glory, from where He shone forth: "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth... Mount Zion, in which You have lived... His tabernacle is also in Salem; His dwelling place in Zion... Yahweh has built up Zion; He has appeared in His glory... Blessed be Yahweh from Zion, He who dwells at Jerusalem" (Ps. 50:2; 74:2; 76:2; 102:16; 135:21). Ezekiel's vision shows the cherubim shining forth in glory, and dwelling, within His people individually- even the depressed exiles by the river Chebar in Babylon. This message was so much needed, because the Jews had the wrong perception that "Mount Zion [was that] which can't be moved but remains forever" (Ps. 125:1). The destruction of Zion was therefore a tragedy: "Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest... Yahweh has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion; He has stretched out the line, He has not withdrawn His hand from destroying; He has made the rampart and wall to lament; they languish together... He has kindled a fire in Zion, which has devoured its foundations" (Jer. 26:18; Lam. 2:8; 4:11). The cherubic glory would indeed leave Zion: "From the daughter of Zion all her majesty is departed" (Lam. 1:6). The prophets did predict a time when Yahweh would again be present in the physical Zion: "Yahweh of Armies will reign on Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem... Yahweh of Armies will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its mount... Yahweh's ransomed ones will return, and come with singing to Zion; and everlasting joy will be on their heads" (Is. 24:23; 31:4; 35:10), the "good news to Zion" of Is. 40:9, but the essence was unchanged- even now, He was reigning in all His cherubic glory over His people. If they would accept His Kingship. And so "Zion" became used not for the physical temple mount, but for God's people in exile, e.g. Zech. 2:7 "Come, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon". Ezekiel's visions of the cherubim showed God even then reigning over the exiles. Not from Zion but from Heaven itself. The essence was not any geographical location, but relationship between Yahweh and His people. The tragedy is that the next chapter will state that for all this potential, God's people would not listen to Ezekiel, they would not see beyond what was immediately before their eyes. They would nurse their own miserable narratives, their victim mentality, and not see the wonderful reality of God's relationship with them. This is the tragedy. The vision of the cherubim had to be believed- but it was not. And that is the challenge for us.

Ezekiel 1:27 I saw as it were glowing metal, as the appearance of fire within it all around, from the appearance of his waist and upward. From the appearance of his waist and downward I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him- The idea is of the maximum heat known to people at that time- metal which was molten. The Babylonian worship of fire and the gods of fire was being deconstructed; Israel's God was the ultimate fire greater than all others. And yet that intense heat was ameliorated by the grace and promise of the rainbow that appeared silhouetted over it (:28).

Ezekiel 1:28 As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory

of Yahweh. When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of one that spoke- When Paul writes of our being transformed into “the image of Christ” (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49) he seems to have in mind Ez. 1:28 LXX: “The appearance of the image of the glory of the Lord”. “The glory” in Ezekiel is personified- it refers to a person, and I submit that person was a prophetic image of Jesus Christ. But Paul’s big point is that we each with unveiled face have beheld the Lord’s glory (2 Cor. 3:16- 4:6); just as he did on the Damascus road, and just as Ezekiel did. It follows, therefore, that not only is Paul our example, but our beholding of the Lord’s glory propels us on our personal commission in the Lord’s service, whatever it may be.

The appearance of the rainbow overarching all this power and glory was surely allusive to the first rainbow. It was a sign that judgment had passed and God's intention is now to save and not to destroy. We can too easily assume that the colour of "the brightness of glory" was white or golden light- because that is how it is illustrated by artists. But here we have the definition of that brightness of glory as being the rainbow. The vision of the heavenly throne room in Rev. 5 gives the same impression. God's glory is in His saving grace, not white light of itself. And it is in this sense that we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ- His grace, the promise of no more condemnation, His salvation, the rainbow. Not a white, very bright light. What you see as you imagine looking into the face of the Lord Jesus is not bright light, but grace, an end of judgment, grace, a desire to save. And as 2 cor. 3:18,19 explain, that in due course is by stages, from glory to glory, reflected from our faces. By the work of the Spirit.

Presumably Ezekiel was intended to share his vision of the cherubim with the exiles. Representations of the cherubim were located on the ark, and in between them there was the shekinah glory of God, His very presence. It has been observed: "The only time Aaron and his successor high priests were admitted into the sacred space of the Holy of Holies was on the Day of Atonement; but also in that day “he shall place the incense upon the fire, before the Lord, so that the cloud of the incense shall envelop the ark cover that is over the tablets of □ Testimony, so that he shall not die” (Lev. 16:13). This means that, in order “not to die” because “man shall not see Me and live” [Exod. 33:20□], even the high priest legally entering in the sacred space had to carefully make a smoke screen between himself and the ark so that he could not see the cherubim nor the space between them". So to see the cherubim was as it were to see God's presence. The implication may be that the atonement had been made, somehow. An ordinary priest like Ezekiel could now see the glory. And he was to share that with the exiles; but this vision had to be believed, which Ez. 2 suggests the exiles didn't. Far above their immediate suffering and depression, they were to see that God wanted them in His very presence. "Their faces were inward" in 2 Chron. 3:13, but here they are visible and looking outward. God as it were wanted to share His very presence with all Israel.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 2

Ezekiel 2:1 *He said to me, son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you-* We have just read of the cherubim sounding like a great army, and have noted on Ez. 1:20,21 some connections with the prophecy of Ez. 37, of a great army of Israel who were to stand upon their feet once the Spirit had revived them in captivity. Ezekiel perhaps represents the faithful remnant; he is asked to stand upon his feet, and yet in :2 it is the Spirit which stands him upon his feet. His willingness to be obedient was confirmed by the direct action of the Spirit, just as happens today. See on Ez. 3:2.

Ezekiel 2:2 *The spirit entered into me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I*

heard Him who spoke to me- see on Ez. 1:20; 2:1. Ezekiel represents the remnant of the captives who were intended to be filled with the Spirit and stand upon their feet as a great army (Ez. 37:10).

Ezekiel 2:3 *He said to me, Son of man, I send you to the children of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against Me. They and their fathers have transgressed against Me even to this very day-* In Ez. 18, the captives seem to reason that they are unjustly suffering because of their fathers' sins. But here it is made clear that they were sinning themselves "to this very day". Most of Israel and Judah didn't want to leave the lands of their exile and return to the land of Judah. They were rebellious against all God's gracious plans for them, just as Israel had 'rebelled' by refusing to enter the land of promise in Num. 14:9 (s.w.). Jehoiakim had 'rebelled' against the king of Babylon, resulting in the earlier Babylonian invasion; and finally Zedekiah also rebelled, leading to the taking of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple (2 Kings 24:1,20; 2 Chron. 36:13; Ez. 17:15 s.w.). Judah are portrayed as most miserable; in rebellion against Yahweh, and also against the king of Babylon. They were unhappy, rebels without a cause; just as are those today who will not totally surrender to God. God's plan at the restoration was to purge out the rebels and save the remnant (Ez. 20:38 s.w.), and Ezekiel was to play a part in this.

Ezekiel 2:4 *The children are impudent and stiff-hearted. I am sending you to them; and you shall tell them, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh'* - It was a tough ministry- to be sent to people who he was told from the beginning would not be responsive. Ministry work is easy enough when crowds are responding, but not when we know from the start we are working with hard hearts- because the God who alone knows the hearts has told us that they are stuff hearted.

Ezekiel 2:5 *They, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear (for they are a rebellious house), will at least know that there has been a prophet among them-* As noted on :4, it's a hard ministry to keep witnessing to people whom God has revealed as hard hearted. We might think that they would only realize Ezekiel was a prophet when his predictions began to come true. And yet the return from exile was decades future. So they "knew" that he was a prophet in their consciences. Even those who reject the word and seem hard hearted to it- still have a conscience. And their aggression to us is often exactly because in their conscience, they know the truth of the word preached to them.

Ezekiel 2:6 *You, son of man, don't be afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you, and you do dwell among scorpions-* There was active opposition to Ezekiel's witness to the exiles- they persecuted him as with "briars and thorns", behaving as scorpions to him. See on Ez. 3:25. His face had to be hardened against their faces (Ez. 3:8). This was in the very early days of the exile. Jewish tradition has it that Ezekiel was murdered at the command of senior Jews in Babylon (See *The Lives And Deaths Of The Prophets* in J.H. Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1985). The same book claims that Isaiah was sawn in two by Manasseh, and Jeremiah was stoned to death by the Jews). By the time of Isaiah 66, we see that even well after the restoration had happened, there was still major persecution of the faithful remnant and their prophets.

Don't be afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house- Jeremiah speaks of how he came to see Israel for who they were: "The Lord made it known to me and I knew; then thou didst show me their evil deeds" (Jer. 11:8). Ezekiel was shown "what the house of Israel is doing in the dark" (Ez. 8:12). To pass through human life with this level of sensitivity must've been so hard. Psychologically and nervously,

the stress would've been awful. It seems to me that the prophets had to be somehow psychologically strengthened by God to endure living that sensitively in this crass and unfeeling world- hence God made Ezekiel and Jeremiah as a wall and "iron pillar" to Israel, hardened their faces, so that they wouldn't be "dismayed at [the] looks" of those who watched them with anger and consternation (Jer. 1:18; 15:20; Ez. 2:4-6; 3:8,9,27). This psychological strengthening was not aimed at making them insensitive, but rather in strengthening them to live sensitively to sin in a sinful world without cracking up. And He will do the same for us, too.

The allusion is to Dt. 1:17, where the judges of Israel were not to be afraid at the looks or faces (s.w.) of men, "because the judgment is God's".

Ezekiel 2:7 You shall speak My words to them, whether they will hear, or whether they will refuse to hear; for they are most rebellious- Sharing God's word should be done whether or not there is response. Ezekiel was obviously tempted not to speak God's words to them because they weren't listening, but still he is encouraged to continue. This is a timeless principle for all ministry.

Ezekiel 2:8 But you, son of man, hear what I tell you; don't be rebellious like that rebellious house: open your mouth, and eat that which I give you- By refusing to preach to the rebellious, Ezekiel himself would become like them- "rebellious". We have here a parade example of a sin of omission. It is such sins which are likely our problem rather than cold blooded sins of commission. For how many times have we not shared God's word when we ought to have done, fearing how people might look at us (:6). But the sin of omission particularly in view here would have been refusing to eat the scroll- refusing to take God's word for others deeply and personally within ourselves.

Ezekiel 2:9 When I looked, behold, a hand was put forth to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was therein- Whether Ezekiel read the words and then later repeated them is unlikely, because the opening rubric for the visions implies he had God's word coming to him, and then spoke it out. The hand was perhaps "put forth" from the cherubim vision. That enormous Spirit activity was in response to God's word, which Ezekiel was to now preach.

Ezekiel 2:10 He spread it before me. It was written within and without; and there were written therein lamentations and mourning and woe- These were the woes to come still upon Jerusalem. Remember Ezekiel went into captivity with the second batch of exiles, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was yet to come. The purpose of sharing this "woe" with the captives in Babylon and perhaps also the Jews left in the land was surely so that they might repent. Just as Jonah announced Nineveh's coming doom in forty days' time... with no mention of repentance. But the very existence of the prophecy elicited repentance, and so the judgment didn't come.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 3

Ezekiel 3:1 He said to me, Son of man, eat that which you find. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel- Eating the scroll spoke of the need at the beginning of his ministry to absorb the message personally into himself. Our preaching is not to be a mere forwarding of information to others, a sharing of fact in a mechanical way, a passive invitation to attend church social events. Rather is the reality of judgment to come and the real possibility of participating in the coming

restored Kingdom of God to be part of our very core being. Only when we personally identify with it will our personal witness become compelling.

Ezekiel 3:2 *So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat the scroll-* Ezekiel was told to eat the scroll (:1), and when he expressed willingness to do so, he was made to eat the scroll- which otherwise, in a literal sense, would have been impossible. We recall how on Ez. 2:1 we noted that he was told to stand on his feet, and when willing to do so, the Spirit made him stand on his feet (Ez. 2:2). And this is how God works with us today. See on :11.

Ezekiel 3:3 *He said to me, Son of man, cause your belly to eat, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you. Then I ate it; and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth-* As explained on :1, Ezekiel like all preachers had to internalize God's word before preaching it. To eat a literal scroll would have seemed impossible; but he was willing, and so the Spirit - Angel empowered him to do so (:2). What he instinctively imagined to be bitter and impossible to digest- turned out as sweet as honey. But note: "In my mouth". The hope of the message was sweet to him, and to all who would accept it. But the content was "woe" to Jerusalem (Ez. 2:10). That bitter judgment could be turned to sweet honey- for those who chose true spirituality. The same figure is used in Rev. 10:9. There is indeed a silver lining to all suffering caused as a result of Divine judgment. But it's not immediate; it is the hope of the Kingdom and personal salvation for God's true people. But the reality was that the word would not be sweet for those judged by it; hence in Rev. 10:9 the scroll was sweet as honey in the mouth, but then bitter in his stomach. This may be reflected here by Ezekiel subsequently feeling "bitterness" (:14). Bitterness is the experience of the condemned, and the prophets so identified with their message and audience that like the Lord Jesus, they felt the bitterness of condemnation within themselves, whilst personally being innocent and experiencing the word and purpose of God as sweet as honey.

Ezekiel 3:4 *He said to me, Son of man, go to the house of Israel, and speak My words to them-* "Son of man" is of course the common title for the Lord Jesus, who Ezekiel pointed forward to. But the phrase can simply mean 'a human one'. It was Ezekiel's humanity which was to be the basis of appeal to the audience, as ours should be likewise.

Ezekiel 3:5 *For you are not sent to a people of a foreign speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel-* see on Jer. 23:18,22. The foreign, hard language is surely that of Assyria and Babylon (Is. 28:11; 33:19).

Ezekiel 3:6 *Not to many peoples of a foreign speech and of a hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you-* The fact Gentiles would have responded in a given situation is often held up as an extra reason for Israel's condemnation. The God who knows all possible futures sees this more clearly than we do; if he or she or they had been given what *we* have been, they would have responded far better. See on Mt. 11:21.

We may well wonder why Ezekiel was sent to the first deportees in Babylon, to announce to them the sins of the Jews still in Judah and the impending destruction of the temple because of their idolatries. Why wasn't he sent to tell this to the Jews in Judah, so that *they* might repent? Perhaps the implication was that if the Jews in exile,

that first group taken captive, had repented, then *their* repentance would have been enough to forestall the planned judgment upon those back in Judah. But it didn't work out like that. The tragedy was, according to Ez. 3:6, that had Ezekiel preached his message in the Babylonian language to the Babylonians, they would've repented. In this we have an insight into the pain of God, knowing as He does all possible futures, all potential outcomes. Truly the hardness of heart of the exiles was something amazing. And God likewise looks down upon our lives today, seeing all possibilities, and how unbelievers would respond so much more to Him than His own dear people. It's the pain of the parent, knowing that other children would respond so much more to their love than their own beloved offspring. The Lord Jesus had something of this when He commented that Tyre and Sidon would've repented had they had His message preached to them; but Israel would not (Mt. 11:21). See on Ez. 10:2,7.

Ezekiel 3:7 *But the house of Israel will not listen to you; for they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are obstinate and hard-hearted-* God told Ezekiel that Israel would not hear his preaching; and yet Ezekiel repeatedly prefaced his preaching addresses with an appeal to *please hear* God's word (Ez. 6:3; 13:2; 18:25; 20:47; 34:7; 36:1,4). He was hoping against hope; his preaching work was asking him to attempt the impossible. To make a nation hear who would not hear. Jeremiah likewise was told that Israel wouldn't hear him (Jer. 7:27), but still he pleaded with them to hear (Jer. 9:20; 10:1; 11:6; 16:12; 17:24; 38:15).

Ezekiel 3:8 *Behold, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their foreheads-* The idea is that he was face to face up against the Jews. The hardness of their foreheads was a reflection of how stiff hearted they were, as earlier lamented (:7). The heart effectively means the mind. Ezekiel was to have the Spirit work upon his heart, confirming him in the path and mental positions he had chosen; just as God had apparently confirmed Judah in their hard mindedness. There is an "evil spirit from the Lord" such as plagued Saul, and also the holy Spirit from Him. He confirms men in the mental path they choose. "Hard" is the word translated "obstinate" in :7. They both were confirmed or hardened in the mental attitudes they adopted.

Ezekiel 3:9 *As an adamant harder than flint have I made your forehead. Don't be afraid of them, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house-* The hearts of the captives were to be described with the same word, "adamant" (Zech. 7:12). God can harden us in the way of either spirituality or hardness of heart. This psychological strengthening was necessary for Ezekiel as he engaged with Jews hardened by the experience of captivity. The command not to be dismayed is exactly that spoken to Israel as they first entered the promised land (Dt. 1:21; 31:8; Josh. 1:9; 8:1; 10:25). Ezekiel and the repentant remnant could likewise leave Babylon (cp. Egypt) and enter and possess the land, against all apparent obstacles. The same word is used in Is. 51:7, where the faithful at the time of the captivity are urged not to be dismayed because of opposition from apostate Jews. Jeremiah had been given the same encouragement (Jer. 1:17). Circumstances repeat between the lives of God's children. We are not alone. No situation is totally unprecedented. This is the value of empathetic Bible reading, as well as of fellowship with others within God's people; for through them we also realize that we are not alone.

Ezekiel 3:10 *Moreover He said to me, Son of man, all My words that I shall speak to*

you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears- This appeal had been materially symbolized by the eating of the scroll with those words upon it. Ezekiel is several times encouraged not to be a mere purveyor or forwarder of information, but to internalize the message. This is even now what makes for credible, compelling witness.

Ezekiel 3:11 *Go to them of the captivity, to the children of your people, and speak to them, and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh;'* whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear- Ezekiel was told to "go to them", he was willing, and was confirmed by the Spirit lifting him up and transporting him there in a moment. We have earlier seen this confirmation by the Spirit of his willingness; see on Ez. 2:2; 3:1,2.

Ezekiel 3:12 *Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of Yahweh from His place-* As noted on :11, this was the Spirit's confirmation of Ezekiel himself being willing to make the journey and "go". The Angels are involved with the Cherubim. Yet in Ezekiel's context, the language of chariots inevitably suggests the approach of enemy armies (Ez. 26:10). Thus the cherubim chariots represented not only the Angels, but also the chariots of God's enemies; for the Lord of the Angelic hosts was manifested on earth in the Babylonian hosts. The word for the "rushing" noise of the cherubim wheels is used elsewhere about the noise of the chariots of Israel's enemies and the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 10:22; 47:3; Nah. 3:2). The Angelic armies of Heaven were therefore revealed on earth in the chariots of Babylon; it was both Babylon and the Angelic cherubim behind them who took Judah captive, and who could also return them to their land. Hence the stress in Ezekiel's vision that the wheels of the cherubim were on the earth / land. Clearly enough, the things that go on in our lives, even those things which appear as brutal and tragic as the Babylonian chariots were to Judah, are not random machinations of men; they are, in some unfathomable way, under the direct control of a God of love, who only means to do us good at our latter end.

Yet the cherubim also speak of God's people. The LXX here has "the voice as of a great earthquake". Later, he hears the "noise" of "shaking" or earthquake as the bones of Israel in exile come together by the spirit / Angelic operation of Yahweh (Ez. 37:7). The Spirit came from four places (Ez. 37:9)- just as there were four cherubim. As the sound of the cherubim was as of a great army (Ez. 1:24), so revived Israel stood up as a great army (Ez. 37:10). The Angel cherubim would work with God's disillusioned and broken people, to revive them, so that they would become like the guardian Angels of Israel above them. The point was that the Angel cherubim system which Ezekiel had seen at work amongst the captives was able to gather them together, and give life to the nation. And yet that didn't happen to those exiles- because they didn't walk in step with the spirit.

Ezekiel 3:13 *I heard the noise of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, even the noise of a great rushing-* The four Angels or groups of Angels that comprised them had wings which "kissed one another" (A.V. mg.) and moved with a soft, smooth sound, despite all four being distinct in some ways. Thus the loving co-operation of the Angels in their work is emphasized. See on Gen. 1:26. The wings made a noise, but apparently didn't turn or move as they "went" (Ez. 1:9). This again is the paradox of God's working- motion without movement, winged beings moving without moving their wings. And so it

seemed to the exiles; the apparent lack of Divine movement was in fact movement. And this likewise explains the apparent silence of God in our human lives.

Ezekiel 3:14 *So the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away-* This was in confirmation of his own desire to "go" there in obedience (:11).

And I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; and the hand of Yahweh was strong on me- The bitterness is explained on :3. The word of judgment was sweet as honey in Ezekiel's mouth, but when John ate a similar scroll, it was sweet as honey in his mouth but then bitter in his stomach (Rev. 10:9). This is the bitterness spoken of here. Ezekiel had absorbed the word into himself, so that he felt the bitterness for those who would be judged by it. See on :15.

Ezekiel 3:15 *Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel Abib, by the river Chebar, and to where they lived; and I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days-* He sat astonished and silent among the captives for seven days when he arrived to them with his message of judgment. The connection with Job's friends is obvious and intended. Ezekiel, the one whom Israel hated and rejected as they did all the prophets, beating some and killing some, felt their grief and sat with them, deeply sympathizing, just as Job's friends initially did. The Hebrew translated "astonished" is usually translated "destroyed", "desolate" or "wasted". All that had happened to Israel for their sins, Ezekiel felt had happened to him, such was his identification with sinners. Two closely related words occur in Ez. 3:14,26 [*marah* cp. *maree*]: "I went in *bitterness*... they are a *rebellious* house". Why was Ezekiel bitter / rebellious of spirit when he went to preach to his people; even though he personally *was* willing to preach to them? Surely it was because he shared their spirit with them; he so entered into their spirit that he reflected their feelings within himself, even though he was not ultimately rebellious personally as they were. Because Israel's heart would melt and be feeble "Because of the tidings" which Ezekiel taught, therefore *his* heart sighed and broke because he identified with how they would later feel when his words came true (Ez. 21:6,7).

Ezekiel 3:16 *It happened at the end of seven days, that the word of Yahweh came to me, saying-* The seven days of Ezekiel's silence could be interpreted as disobedience to the command to speak. Hence he needed encouragement. He perhaps feared their looks, perceiving they were men hardened by the traumas of captivity and exile. He was therefore temporarily disobedient, or hesitant to obey, the commands not to fear their looks.

Ezekiel 3:17 *Son of man, I have made you a watchman to the house of Israel: therefore hear the word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me-* As suggested on :16, this can be read as a rebuke of Ezekiel's seven days silence. If Ezekiel personally was Israel's watchman, then he is the watchman in view in Ez. 33:2,6,7.

Ezekiel was prepared for his ministry by being told to eat and absorb the roll containing the words he was to preach. He was then picked up the spirit-wind, and transported to his audience (Ez. 3:12,13). The noise of the wind in the wings of the cherubim is elsewhere interpreted as the sound of God's word (Ez. 10:5). Yet Ezekiel 3 goes on to warn Ezekiel that if he doesn't preach the word to his audience, their blood will be upon his head (Ez. 3:17-21). This warning was given after Ezekiel had been transported to the people but sat silent with them for 7 days (Ez. 3:16). I

understand from all this was that God's intention was that His message was not to be merely parroted out by Ezekiel, but that it was to be fundamentally part of him; and the message of God's word, symbolized by the awesome wind-spirit generated by the movement of the cherubim's wings, was to propel him forward to make his witness to hard faced men and women. This is the ideal. And yet Ezekiel even when he failed to live to up it, was still propelled forward in the mission. And many a missionary knows the truth of this. I take the way that Ezekiel was told to go preach to the captives, and yet was then taken up and transported there, to suggest a reluctance on his part. Perhaps being struck dumb until the fulfilment of the prophecies (Ez. 3:26; 24:27) suggests this was a punishment of Ezekiel for a lack of faith- for this is exactly the judgment upon Zacharias for faithlessness (Lk. 1:20).

Many times we read of how those who hold God's word are to shine it out to others. The Old Testament tends to use a Hebrew word translated "warn" in speaking of how prophets like Ezekiel were to warn-out, or shine out, God's word to others (Ez. 3:17,18 etc.). Yet the same word occurs in Dan. 12:3 about how the preachers of God's word will "shine" eternally in His Kingdom. The connection is clear- how we shine forth God's word now, is how we will eternally shine it forth. Thus in the practice of preaching today, we are working out who and how we shall eternally be. The very concept of preaching is therefore partly designed by God for our benefit, to develop us into the persons we shall eternally be, by His grace. When we read that God will 'require the blood' of those to whom we fail to preach His word (Ez. 3:18), we may here have another reference to a 'going through' of our deeds at the day of judgment. There, perhaps, we will have to give an account, an explanation, of why our neighbours and workfellows lie eternally dead- because we were too shy, too weakly convinced of the eternal realities we knew, to tell them. For the Hebrew word translated "require" implies some kind of inquisition / explanation. Here we see the vital importance of witness.

Ezekiel 3:18 *When I tell the wicked, You shall surely die-* The same phrase used in Genesis for the condemnation of Adam. Adam is everyman.

And you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at your hand- We may reason that if we fail to upbuild a brother, or preach, then God will somehow do it anyway. But this doesn't seem to be the spirit of Ez. 3:18. We are to appeal to men and women with the message that there is no third road; that it truly is a case of believe or perish. There is no example of apologetics in their preaching, but rather an utter confidence that they were holding out to men the words that gave eternal life. Their words, lives and body language reflected their deep sense of the peril of those outside of Christ. By preaching, they were freed from the blood of men (20:26); evidently alluding to how the watchman must die if he didn't warn the people of their impending fate. In line with this, "*necessity* is laid upon me...woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16). Not talking to folks is perhaps the easiest and commonest sin of omission in our lives.

Ezekiel 3:19 *Yet if you warn the wicked, and he doesn't turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have saved your own life-* The "you" in view is primarily Ezekiel, the watchman. By sitting there with the captives, scared of their hard, sceptical looks and saying nothing... Ezekiel was risking his eternal salvation. By warning them, he was saving his life. We note that

the captives were in a "wicked way"; and yet in Ez. 18 they apparently reasoned that they were innocent and unfairly suffering because of their fathers' sins. "Turn" is the word commonly used for repentance and also for the 'return' from Babylon to the land. If the captives repented, then the return and restoration would have happened. This was the significance and deep weight of Ezekiel's ministry.

Ezekiel 3:20 *Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at your hand-* If a person turns to sin, God confirms them in that way by laying a stumbling block before them. We are not to do this; but God can. He confirms us in the way we choose to go. The idea of righteous deeds being remembered struck a chord with Nehemiah, who would have been aware of this prophecy; he asks for his good deeds to be "remembered" (Neh. 13:14,31). This was not, therefore, a works reliant attitude. Nehemiah was citing Ezekiel's words. We are saved by grace, the penny a day of the parable which all receive (Mt. 20:2); and yet the nature of our eternity will be a reflection of the works we do in this life. All we do for God will have its eternal moment and significance. Our lives therefore should be devoted to such good works. For we are thereby shaping our eternal experience.

Ezekiel 3:21 *Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man, that the righteous not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning; and you have saved your own life-* The allusion is to Elisha warning (s.w.) the king of Israel, and the king thereby saving his life from the Syrians (2 Kings 6:10). And the leadership of God's people were again being warned by a prophet, and could save their lives from the potential invasion by Babylon. The sword was coming upon Judah, and Ezekiel as the watchman was warning them, so that they could save their lives and avert the invasion planned by God (Ez. 33:3-9 s.w.). This was the tragedy of the final Babylonian invasion which destroyed the temple and sacked Jerusalem. It was avoidable, if Ezekiel's message had been heeded.

Ezekiel 3:22 *The hand of Yahweh was there on me; and He said to me, Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with you-* Just as the Lord Jesus heard God's word in private and then revealed it to Israel, so with Ezekiel. "Plain" here could as well be translated "valley" as it is in Ez. 37:1,2. "The valley of dry bones" may have been the same valley in view as here.

Ezekiel 3:23 *Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and behold, the glory of Yahweh stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face-* The point to note is that God's glory was as much in that plain / valley, perhaps in the Jerusalem area, as it was by the Chebar in Babylonia. Stephen was to later point out that "the God of glory" likewise appeared to Abraham when he was outside of the promised land. He was not limited by geography nor nationality. The cherubim of glory are described as the Lord being "there", and yet they move away to Babylon. Israel were being asked to follow their Angel, as they had followed the Angel in the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness. But they refused, generally, and therefore the great things the Angels had potentially made possible were not realized. Our following of the Angel is just as real, and just as much a matter of daily freewill choice, as it was for the exiles. See on Ez. 35:10.

Ezekiel 3:24 *Then the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet-* As noted on :22, the "plain" is the same Hebrew word translated "valley" in the valley of dry bones prophecy (Ez. 37:1,2). And the connection continues, and that the Spirit enters Ezekiel and he stands on his feet- the very same words used of the dry bones in Ez. 37:10. Ezekiel was representative of what could have happened to all the dry bones of Israel in captivity.

And He spoke with me, and said to me, Go, shut yourself inside your house- The wonderful vision given was to strengthen him for the pain of the abuse he was about to suffer. They Jews bound him and placed him under house arrest; but before that happened, he himself was to shut himself inside his house, representing how God had for the time being closed His house to the Jews. Psychologically this was also powerful, in that what they wanted to do to Ezekiel he had effectively already done to himself. They bond him with shackles (:25) but then God does this to Ezekiel in Ez. 4::8. God was in control even of their own apparently freely chosen hatred of Ezekiel, and worked through it to further His appeal for repentance.

Ezekiel 3:25 *But you, son of man, behold, they shall lay shackles on you and shall bind you with them-* This suggests Ezekiel was actually tied up by the Jewish captives he prophesied to by the river Chebar; they set their foreheads hard against hearing the prophecies of hope (Ez. 3:9). See on Ez. 2:6. In Ez. 4:8 it is God who puts shackles (s.w.) upon Ezekiel so that he lives out an acted parable of captivity. But perhaps this refers to Him working through the angry Jews who bound Ezekiel with these shackles.

And you shall not go out among them- The same words are used of how Jeremiah had gone out among the people preaching his message, and was then imprisoned (Jer. 37:4). Jeremiah was experiencing this about the same time as Ezekiel. Their lives were in parallel, just as through fellowship with other believers we too learn that we are not alone nor are our experiences as terribly unique and unprecedented as we may feel without that fellowship.

Ezekiel 3:26 *I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth, that you shall be mute, and unable to reprove them; for they are a rebellious house-* This may not have been permanent, because we twice read of Ezekiel's mouth being opened to prophecy (Ez. 24:27, four years later; and Ez. 29:21). The idea may be that their rejection of him and his message meant that there was no more word from Yahweh to the people. But it could be that he was dumb literally. This would have been a powerful acted parable. They likely would have liked to imagine that being struck dumb was judgment from God as in Lk. 1:22. But the more perceptive would have realized it was in fact God's silence toward them, and Ezekiel was a living embodiment of the word he preached. For he had internalized the word preached, represented by eating the scroll of the words, and therefore he was the word made flesh to his audience, as we should be.

Ezekiel 3:27 *But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall tell them, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh: He who hears, let him hear; and he who forbears, let him forbear;'* for they are a rebellious house- These words are quoted by the Lord Jesus when He invites those who have ears to hear, to hear (Mt. 11:15; 13:9). He was the One whose mouth Yahweh had opened supremely. The LXX "He who is disobedient, let him disobedient" is quoted in Rev. 22:11. Clearly Ezekiel's preaching

to the captives is no mere historical record, but is set up by way of NT allusion as representative of all who hear the Gospel of the restored Kingdom and the call to repent in view of that.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 4

Ezekiel 4:1 *You also, son of man, take a tile, and lay it before yourself, and portray on it the city - Jerusalem-* Such engraven tiles with cities upon them were common in Babylon. Again we see God working to appeal to people in local terms. And our witness of His word must be likewise. It's unclear where Ezekiel was imprisoned in Ez. 3, with the captives in Babylonia or in Jerusalem. His message in the acted parable which follows is clearly to the effect that Babylon would come a third time against Jerusalem and destroy it (:16). The message of judgment was of course an appeal to "turn" in repentance, for that was the aim of Ezekiel's witness as Ez. 3 has made clear. If this parable was acted out by the Chebar, then there was the possibility that the repentance of those already in captivity could have saved Jerusalem from the threatened destruction. For it was God's intention that Judah repent and Jerusalem not be destroyed.

Ezekiel 4:2 *Lay siege against it, and build forts against it, and cast up a mound against it; set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around-* Presumably this was done by drawing these things upon the tile. But it was as if by doing so, a siege was actually laid against Jerusalem- so certain was this prophetic word of fulfilment. Presumably Ezekiel was still dumb at this time (Ez. 3:26). Hence the acted parable, the still small voice of lived example which was and is more powerful than the spoken word.

Ezekiel 4:3 *Take for yourself an iron pan and set it for a wall of iron between yourself and the city: and set your face toward it, and it shall be besieged, and you shall lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel-* The setting of Ezekiel's face represented the setting of God's face against Jerusalem (Jer. 21:10; Ez. 15:7). Jeremiah's message in Jerusalem was being repeated by Ezekiel to the captives in Babylon. The iron pan speaks of the "northern iron" of Babylon (Jer. 15:12; 28:13- again we note similarities between Jeremiah and Ezekiel, prophesying at about the same time and delivering the same message, Jeremiah in Judah and Ezekiel to the captives already in Babylon). Later Ezekiel would liken the defences of Jerusalem to a weak "wall" of clay bricks that toppled easily (Ez. 13:12,14). But Ezekiel represented God, and the iron wall spoke of the barrier between Jerusalem and God through which their desperate prayers would not penetrate. It was a "sign" in that "the house of Israel" were to realize this is how it would be, and repent so it didn't happen. There is a gap between the Divine pronouncement and its realization, in which we can repent and change that pronouncement. We also live in such a gap, and have repented and changed the verdict of eternal death for us. "The house of Israel" is a term used repeatedly in Ezekiel. And yet the captives he was among were apparently from Judah. But it was God's plan that at the restoration, both the ten tribes and Judah would together repent and return to the land. Perhaps there were also members of the ten tribes in captivity in Babylon, or Ezekiel's prophecies were to be taken to them, as they were apparently taken to the Jews still in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 4:4 *Moreover lie on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel on it; according to the number of the days that you shall lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity-* Again we see the "son of man" Ezekiel looking forward to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate bearer of Israel's sins. Ezekiel was to "lie" on his side, but the Hebrew is often used for sleeping. Whilst sleeping he was to bear their sin and when he awoke from the final sleep, their sin would have been carried; again looking forward to the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Samaria, the capital of the ten tribe kingdom, is described by Ezekiel as being on the left side (Ez. 16:46). To 'bear iniquity' meant 'to bear the punishment for iniquity' (Ex. 28:43; Num. 18:1 etc.). They were as it were to sleep and then arise at the restoration.

Ezekiel 4:5 *For I have appointed the years of their iniquity to be to you a number of days, even three hundred and ninety days. So you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel-* Perhaps some restoration could have happened to the ten tribes after 390 years, if the right conditions had been fulfilled by them; although there's no sign it ever did. See on :6. Perhaps God was willing to accept Ezekiel as the sin bearer for them, whether or not they repented; but they didn't even accept that. The start of the 390 day-years may have begun some time earlier for Israel, the ten tribes. We note that $390 + 40$ gives 430, which was the number of years Israel were in Egypt (Ex. 12:40). The LXX reads 190, not 390. If we take the beginning of Israel's punishment as the deportations under the reign of Pekah in BC 736, this brings us to BC546. If Judah's punishment began with the destruction of Jerusalem in BC586, forty years from that comes to the same date, BC546.

Ezekiel 4:6 *Again, when you have accomplished these, you shall lie on your right side, and shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah: forty days, each day for a year, have I appointed it to you-* Ezekiel was asked to prophecy that Judah would suffer for their sins for 40 years. Perhaps something could've happened after 40 years... And then, the starting point of the 70 or 40 years was somewhat flexible- for Ez. 22:3,4 records Ezekiel's prophecy that the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians [the starting point of the time periods] was actually being hastened, brought forward, by the terrible behaviour of the Jews living there after the initial Babylon invasion of the land. Closer study reveals the variableness of outworking of the time periods. Jer. 25:11,12 and Jer. 29:10 speak of a 70 year period of Babylonian rule over Judah, beginning with the invasion of BC597. But Babylon only ruled over Judah for 49 years, before Babylon fell to the Persians. This would connect with the way that Zech. 4:3 speaks of 7 menorah candlesticks each with 7 lamps, making 49 lamps. 49 is the cycle of 7 sabbath years that culminated in the jubilee year, and the jubilee year, the proclamation of liberty to the land (Lev. 25:8-12; 27:7-24) is a figure used so often in Isaiah to describe the freedom of Judah once released from Babylon. Lev. 26:34,43 speak of the land enjoying her Sabbaths whilst Israel were in exile for their sins- i.e. for 49 years. So it seems that there could have been some restoration after 49 years- but it didn't happen. But Dan. 9:2 and 2 Chron. 36:21 seem to reinterpret those 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecies as speaking of a 70 year period during which Jerusalem and the temple would be desolate. See on Ez. 6:8.

Ezekiel 4:7 *You shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem with your arm uncovered; and you shall prophesy against it-* Ezekiel was representing God, whose arm was uncovered in His active judgment of Jerusalem. He was ready for action, and

only desperate repentance would change this. But the same phrase "arm uncovered" is found only in Is. 52:10, which speaks of how God's arm was uncovered in preparing to destroy the nations abusing Israel through the revelation of Messiah. There is always a silver lining in God's judgments. The judgment of His people was to presage the destruction of Babylon and the establishment of His restored kingdom in Israel at the restoration, replete with a Messiah figure. But His people precluded this possibility by their disobedience.

Ezekiel 4:8 *Behold, I lay shackles on you, and you shall not turn yourself from one side to the other, until you have accomplished the days of your siege-* "Shackles" is the same word used of how the Jews bound Ezekiel with shackles in Ez. 3:25. Perhaps this refers to Him working through the angry Jews who bound Ezekiel with these shackles. Our apparent limitations are used by God and even placed by Him, even through the hands of evil people; in order that we might be a witness to them and lead them to repentance.

Ezekiel 4:9 *Take for yourself also wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt, and put them in one vessel and make bread of it; according to the number of the days that you shall lie on your side, even three hundred and ninety days, you shall eat of it-* The idea was that whilst sleeping in captivity, Israel and Judah would eat only very basic food without meat. But the book of Esther reveals that this isn't what happened in the longer term; many of Judah ended up prosperous. Again we have here a potential scenario which was precluded by the utter refusal of the Jews generally to repent. See on :16.

Ezekiel 4:10 *Your food which you shall eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day: from time to time you shall eat it-* The way Peter was given a vision and asked to eat what he had previously thought unclean has many similarities with Ezekiel going through a similar experience (Ez. 4:10-14 cp. Acts 10:14). Peter was intended to have made the connection, which he apparently didn't do. We too find points of contact between our experiences and those of Biblical characters. This is where familiarity with the basic text of scripture can open up the meaning of our lives to us.

Ezekiel 4:11 *You shall drink water by measure, the sixth part of a hin: from time to time you shall drink-* Not much less than a pint of water / day, less than what today would be considered a necessary fluid intake in a hot climate (1 Kings 22:27; Is. 30:20). Ezekiel was effectively imprisoned at this time, as explained at the end of Ez. 3; the idea was that his captors would in turn suffer like this.

Ezekiel 4:12 *You shall eat it as barley cakes, and you shall bake it in their sight with dung that comes out of man-* This suggests a very stark existence without even firewood. But as noted on :9, God punished His people far less than He planned, less their iniquities deserved, as Ezra observed to the captives who returned (Ezra 9:13). Here we see how God's statements may not come true because His mercy and pity is stronger than His judgment of sin. But that grace is not automatic, and is given depth and meaning the more we consider the reality of the statements of judgment made in His anger. See on :16; Ez. 5:2.

Ezekiel 4:13 *Yahweh said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their bread unclean among the nations where I will drive them-* They were to be purposefully

defiled, made to eat unclean food (Hos. 9:3), driven to realize that they existed as unclean in God's eyes, their situation precluding perfect obedience to Divine law. And thereby they were to be driven to appreciate His grace. Again, there was purpose and intention behind all God's judgments for sin.

Ezekiel 4:14 *Then I said, Ah Lord Yahweh! Behold, my soul has not been polluted; for from my youth up even until now have I not eaten of that which dies of itself, or is torn of animals; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth-* The implication might be that given such a lack of meat in the diet, the captives like Ezekiel would be driven to eat unclean meat. We wonder whether Ezekiel was in fact so totally technically obedient; his words recall that of the older brother who claimed total obedience to his father.

Ezekiel 4:15 *Then He said to me, Behold, I have given you cow's dung for man's dung, and you shall prepare your bread thereon-* This was a concession to Ezekiel, showing how God is open to dialogue with man. However, the use of any dung would still have made the food ritually unclean; so the essential lesson of :13 was still to be learnt.

Ezekiel 4:16 *Moreover He said to me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem. They shall eat bread by weight, and with fearfulness; and they shall drink water by measure, and in dismay-* The situation acted out by Ezekiel was however to go on many years, not just during the siege of Jerusalem. The idea was that the deprivations of the siege were to continue throughout their captivity. But in wrath God remembered mercy and this didn't in fact happen; see on :9,12.

Ezekiel 4:17 *That they may want bread and water, and be dismayed one with another, and pine away in their iniquity-* This pining away was that of Lev. 26:39, the judgment for breaking covenant. But we must recall that they had just witnessed Ezekiel bearing their iniquity, in the spirit of the Christ. Their pining away, sitting depressed by the rivers of Babylon pining away in their sins, could have been resolved by realizing that Ezekiel had carried the punishment for their iniquity. He really was set up as their representative, "son of man" saviour. But as later with the Lord Jesus, they refused to accept that. See on Ez. 5:3.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 5

Ezekiel 5:1 *You, son of man, take a sharp sword. You shall use it like a barber's razor on yourself, and shall cause it to pass on your head and on your beard. Then take balances to weigh, and divide the hair-* This was presumably to be done during the period Ezekiel was laying bound in Ez. 4. Ezekiel represented God, as made clear throughout the acted parable of Ez. 4. God like Ezekiel was taking the sword of the Babylonians into His own hand and as it were cutting off His own glory, represented by Ezekiel's hair (1 Cor. 11:15). Ezekiel may well have been a Nazirite with long hair. The eating of unclean food would have meant the end of his vow, and the need to shave his hair. The use of balances spoke of God's judgment of His glory, His hair, His people. They in all their sinfulness, like us, were intended to be His glory. God was not therefore left without personal suffering and loss through the sword He was bringing upon His people.

Ezekiel 5:2 *A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled; and you shall take a third part, and strike with the sword around it; and a third part you shall scatter to the wind - and I will draw out a sword after them-* We would expect from this that the exiles would be persecuted and slain in captivity, and this surely was God's intended judgment. But in Esther we find the exiles in prosperity, in positions of power, and respected by their captors; and Jeremiah concludes his long prophecy with the information that Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled King, was exalted "above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon" and he was given special favour and honour by the King of Babylon (Jer. 52:31-34). I can only understand these things as pure grace; see on :9. God showed tenderness and favour to His people in captivity, far above what He had intended or what they deserved; they were punished less than their sins deserved at this time (Ezra 9:13; see on Ez. 4:12). And He does the same with us- He gives us so much more than we deserve. And yet most of Judah abused that grace; they were so taken up with the good life God gave them in captivity that they chose to remain there and not participate in the restoration. And we *so* easily can end up abusing His grace likewise.

The judgment of the people of Jerusalem by thirds becomes the basis for some of the visions of Revelation; and it is the same subject in view there, the latter day judgment upon the people of God in their land and city.

Ezekiel 5:3 *You shall take of it a few in number, and bind them in your skirts-* A tiny remnant would survive, but even they would be reduced to a tiny remnant. Only a remnant of a remnant would survive, and these were intended to be the repentant group who would bring about the restored kingdom of God in Israel. But in His grace, God didn't destroy on such a scale as here envisaged; and no repentant remnant therefore emerged. The "skirts" are s.w. "wings" in the cherubim visions (Ez. 1:9,11,23 etc.). Ezekiel was representing God; he could have been for the salvation of the remnant; see on Ez. 4:17. He was identified with the cherubim, as Judah also could have been. They too could have been transported with ease back to Jerusalem. But instead they imprisoned Ezekiel at the Chebar river.

Ezekiel 5:4 *Of these again you shall take, and throw them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire; from it shall a fire come forth into all the house of Israel-* Perhaps the idea is that the destruction of the tiny minority of faithful ones by the persecution of the Jews themselves was what would bring the fire of judgment upon all Israel. The latter chapters of Isaiah speak of the persecution of this remnant by the Jews; Jeremiah was imprisoned and almost killed, as was Ezekiel. And Jewish tradition says that both those prophets were finally murdered by the Jews. Jerusalem killed the prophets, as the Lord lamented. The LXX however links this with :5 to imply that it was the burning of the house of Israel which would lead to the fire of judgment spreading from Jerusalem to the surrounding peoples who had participated in it.

Ezekiel 5:5 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the peoples and countries which are around her-* Jerusalem ought to have been the spiritual light of the world around her, but she was not. She was the city set on a hill for all to see. But she failed in this, and so the Lord reapplied that idea to every individual believer in Him (Mt. 5:14,15).

Ezekiel 5:6 *She has rebelled against My ordinances in doing wickedness more than*

the nations, and against My statutes more than the countries that are around her; for they have rejected My ordinances, and as for My statutes, they have not walked in them- The Jews of course insisted that they were compliant with the law and covenant; but God perceived that in essence they were totally disobedient, and instead of being a moral light to the nations (see on :5), they were worse than the nations. The AV implies that Judah "changed" God's laws into wickedness.

Ezekiel 5:7 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you are rebellious more than the nations that are around you and have not walked in My statutes, neither have kept My ordinances, neither have done after the ordinances of the nations that are around you- God was disappointed that His people had not only been disobedient to *Him*, but they had not even been obedient to their conquerors. He so values obedience, and had an attitude that sought to see if they would show it to at least someone, even if they had rejected *Him*. He analyzes every facet of human life, disobedience and obedience, and this highlights the depth of His grace.

Ezekiel 5:8 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I, even I, am against you; and I will execute judgments in the midst of you in the sight of the nations- Jerusalem and the temple was the location "in the midst of you", and the nations would view this in that their mercenaries were all part of the Babylonian army which sacked Jerusalem. But just as all the surrounding nations had been drawn against Zion to destroy it, so at the restoration it was God's intention that they would be gathered together there again in repentant worship (Jer. 3:17).

Ezekiel 5:9 I will do in you that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like, because of all your abominations- Again, this threat was ameliorated by God's grace. For the time of final unprecedented trouble for Jacob is yet future (Dan. 12:1,2; 1 Thess.2:16). It could have come in the Babylonian invasion, but God's grace didn't let it happen; see on :2. But the essence will come true, the prophetic word is not falsified by this grace; it will come true in the last days.

Ezekiel 5:10 Therefore the fathers shall eat the sons in the midst of you, and the sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments on you; and the whole remnant of you will I scatter to all the winds- This again repeats to the exiles in Babylon the words which Jeremiah had told to those in the land (Jer. 19:9). These things did indeed happen (Lam. 2:20; 4:10), in fulfilment of the curses for breaking the covenant (Lev. 26:29; Dt. 28:53). But as Solomon's prayer made clear, once those things had happened, then Israel were to look to Zion in repentance from the lands of their exile. And it was to this end that Ezekiel was amongst them. The scattering to the winds is again an allusion to the cherubim vision; the sound of wind is associated with them. They who could have saved Israel and returned them from captivity would further scatter them to the winds- and also, if the exiles were willing, return them. The Hebrew for "scatter" is literally to winnow, and again repeats Jeremiah's message to those in the land (Jer. 15:7 s.w.). But the idea of winnowing is that the grain falls to the earth, and this again was the idea- that out of the scattering throughout the provinces of Babylon, a remnant would fall to the earth / land from where they were winnowed, namely to Zion.

However, the scattering was not at all to the extent that God had envisaged here and in other prophecies. In wrath He remembered mercy, or perhaps the intercession and repentance of a minority led Him to ameliorate His judgments for their sakes. The

Babylonians, unlike the Assyrians, didn't practice mass deportations. They removed the leadership of subjected peoples, and appointed locals as the leaders under their control. This is what they did to Judah, taking the royal family and priesthood into captivity, and establishing Gedaliah as puppet governor (Jer. 40: 7; 2 Kings 25:2) along with some local Jewish "elders" (Lam. 5:12), with Mizpeh rather than Jerusalem as the capital. Ezra 9:7 is clear that it was "our kings and our priests [who] have been delivered" into captivity. The Babylonians saw no economic purpose in bringing masses of unskilled peasant farmers into captivity in their cities. It's been estimated that at least 90% of Judah were peasant farmers; and these, the impoverished masses, were left in the land and not deported (Jer. 52:16; 2 Kings 25:12). See on Ez. 11:15. The Babylonian policy regarding deportation and management of conquered lands is described in N.P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) and D.L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone, 1989). God did not therefore scatter all the people quite as He intended. There is archaeological evidence for continued agricultural activity in the land after the deportations. And Jer. 41:5 seems to speak of men coming to the Jerusalem temple from Shechem and Shiloh, in the ten tribe area, in order to offer grain offerings at the site of the temple. Presumably the altar had been destroyed, hence no animal sacrifices are mentioned. It has been suggested that the book of Lamentations was written as part of a temple ritual or at least material to be recited at the site of the temple.

Ezekiel 5:11 *Therefore as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations-* "Defiled" is the word used in Ez. 4:14 of how Judah were to be defiled, to be ritually unclean, in their exile; but this is what they themselves had done by defiling or polluting the temple with the idols they placed within it, as Ezekiel will later reveal. So their judgment was as ever, appropriate to their sin. Their condemnation to defilement was in fact only a continuation of what they themselves had done.

Therefore will I also diminish you- They would likewise be "diminished" just as they had "diminished" God's laws and requirements (Dt. 12:32), minimizing and practicing reductionism to the point that they had done away with His law. We too can tend towards reductionism, reasoning towards the lowest common denominator rather than to the highest.

Neither shall My eye spare, and I also will have no pity- But the wonder of God's grace was that His eye did spare and He did pity at the restoration (Ez. 36:21; Joel 2:18; Mal. 3:17 s.w.), just as His eye had spared them in the desert (Ez. 20:17). This reveals the emotion of God, His pity even for the spiritually weak, and how this triumphs over His judgment.

Ezekiel 5:12 *A third part of you shall die with the plague and with famine shall they be consumed in the midst of you; and a third part shall fall by the sword around you; and a third part I will scatter to all the winds-* It seems doubtful whether two thirds of Jerusalem died during the Babylonian siege. Rather it seems that God's grace was such that He didn't carry out His threats to the full extent; as Ezra perceived about the situation, they were punished less than their iniquities deserved (Ezra 9:13; see on Ez. 4:12). Jer. 40:7-12 is clear that a number of Jews did remain in the land immediately after the final Babylonian invasion.

And will draw out a sword after them- See on :2.

Ezekiel 5:13 *Thus shall My anger be accomplished-* These are the very words used about God's intention to utterly destroy Israel at the time of Ex. 32:10,12. But thanks to the intercession of Moses, this didn't happen. Moses later uses the term in reflecting how God's anger had been accomplished upon Israel, but not in the form of totally destroying them as He had first planned (Ps. 90:7). The implication of course was that a Moses-like figure could arise in intercession, God had been open to change the outworking of His anger, and so by implication He was likewise open at Ezekiel's time. And it seems He did relent, because as noted on :12, God did not totally destroy Jerusalem's population to the extent He had threatened. And yet just as Moses perceived that His anger was still accomplished, although without the total destruction of Israel, so Jeremiah uses this phrase in reflecting how in fact God's anger was accomplished in the Babylonian destruction (Lam. 4:11). Ezekiel himself will later note this too (Ez. 20:8,21).

And I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, and I shall be comforted- The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

They shall know that I, Yahweh, have spoken in My zeal, when I have accomplished My wrath on them- As noted on :12, God's words in wrath were not actually totally fulfilled. The Hebrew here is phrased in such a way as to imply that when the wrath was accomplished, they would realize that these threats were spoken in anger and had not been totally fulfilled; although it seems they will be finally in the holocaust of the last days.

Ezekiel 5:14 *Moreover I will make you a desolation and a reproach among the peoples that are around you, in the sight of all that pass by-* Again Ezekiel is repeating to the captives in Babylon the same message which Jeremiah was giving to the Jews in Judah (Jer. 19:8). This was the punishment for breaking the covenant (Lev. 26:13). But as shown on :12, God's threatened judgments were not executed to the degree He had originally planned; in wrath He remembered mercy. For there is

evidence that Jerusalem was broken down but not completely desolate, some lived there, and even operated some limited temple services after the Babylonian destruction.

Ezekiel 5:15 So it shall be a reproach and a taunt, an instruction and an astonishment, to the peoples that are around you, when I shall execute judgments on you in anger and in wrath and in furious rebukes. I, Yahweh, have spoken it- God's fury was in order to rebuke. It was unlike human fury poured out upon the weak by the stronger. See on :13.

Ezekiel 5:16 They shall see, when I shall send on them the evil arrows of famine that are for destruction, which I will send to destroy you: when I will increase the famine on you, and will break your staff of bread- The arrows of famine may refer to the stabs of pain felt in extreme hunger, hence GNB "You will feel the pains of hunger like sharp arrows sent to destroy you". "Evil arrows" were thought to be cast by displeased gods; but here Yahweh insists that there is no supernatural evil, and He is going to be the one who fires such arrows. His omnipotence meant that there was no place left for any understanding of "evil" as coming from some cosmic evil being, such as the "satan" of modern theology.

Ezekiel 5:17 I will send on you famine and wild animals, and they shall bereave you; and pestilence and blood shall pass through you; and I will bring the sword on you: I, Yahweh, have spoken it- see on 1 Kings 22:22. The wild animals may be literal (as Dt. 32:23,24). In 2 Kings 17:25 literal lions were sent by God to punish people. However there is no record of this happening; again, as explained on :12, in wrath God remembered mercy. But the reference could be figurative, to Babylon as the "lion" with "eagle's wings" (Dan. 7:4). But this would then be an awkward repetition of "the sword" coming upon them.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 6

Ezekiel 6:1 The word of Yahweh came to me, saying- This phrase is used multiple times in Jeremiah and Ezekiel; but very rarely elsewhere. It is never once used in Isaiah. The fact it occurs so often in Jeremiah and Ezekiel supports the impression that they were giving very similar messages, often using the same words; Jeremiah to the Jews still in Judah, and Ezekiel to the Jews taken into captivity in the first and second invasions. Ezekiel was bidding the exiles to repent in order to avert the catastrophe which was otherwise to come upon the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. This shows how much the spirituality of third parties can really affect people.

Ezekiel 6:2 Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy to them- We wonder why Ezekiel in Babylon would usefully prophecy against or towards the mountains of Israel. I suggest as on :1 that the repentance of the minority in Babylon could have affected the outcomes for the Jews still in Judah.

Ezekiel 6:3 And say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord Yahweh: Thus says the Lord Yahweh to the mountains and to the hills, to the rivers and to the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword on you- God told Ezekiel that Israel would not hear his preaching (Ez. 3:7); and yet Ezekiel repeatedly prefaced his

preaching addresses with an appeal to *please hear* God's word (Ez. 6:3; 13:2; 18:25; 20:47; 34:7; 36:1,4). He was hoping against hope; his preaching work was asking him to attempt the impossible. To make a nation hear who would not hear. Jeremiah likewise was told that Israel wouldn't hear him (Jer. 7:27), but still he pleaded with them to hear (Jer. 9:20; 10:1; 11:6; 16:12; 17:24; 38:15). The "mountains" are put by metonymy for the people sacrificing to idols upon them; just as the altar is addressed in 1 Kings 13:2, when the people sacrificing upon it are in view.

And I will destroy your high places- Quoting from Lev. 26:30; this was the result of having broken the covenant.

Ezekiel 6:4 Your altars shall become desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken; and I will cast down your slain men before your idols- "Incense altars" is literally 'sun images'. But they had supposedly been destroyed in Josiah's reformation (2 Chron. 34:4). This point is made so many times- that leaders destroyed idolatry but the people continued it. And it tends to be the same with so much apparent reform we may make in our lives. The corpses of the worshippers would be placed before their idols, because by worshipping them, the worshippers had effectively prostrated their lives before them. Again, the judgment was appropriate to the sin. They had effectively condemned themselves, and this will be true for all who are condemned at the last day.

Ezekiel 6:5 I will lay the dead bodies of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones around your altars- See on :4. The valley of dry bones vision in Ez. 37 depicted Israel in captivity as bones waiting to come together and return to the land as a great army. Jer. 8:1 and other passages earlier in Ezekiel (Ez. 6:5; 24:4) had described both Judah and Israel as dry bones. The feeling of those bones was that "our bones are dried and our hope is lost" (Ez. 37:11). Judah in captivity felt that they had no "hope", that God had cast them off, and that they were unable to have a full relationship with Him outside the land. However, it seems that this was a rather convenient piece of theology for them- they were doing well in Babylon, and despite the opportunity to return to the land, they largely chose to remain in Babylon.

Ezekiel 6:6 In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your incense altars may be cut down, and your works may be abolished- Here the idols are called the works of their hands. And here we see the essential relevance for us today, living in an age where physical idols don't exist. The idols were attractive because they were the works of the hands of the worshippers. This is what is so relevant to us. What we have made in our lives and by our own device, a business, a self built home... so easily thereby become our idols.

Ezekiel 6:7 The slain shall fall in the midst of you, and you shall know that I am Yahweh- The "midst" of the mountains may refer specifically to Jerusalem. They would know "I am Yahweh" in that they would all too late come to recognize Him. This is the tragedy of the Biblical pictures of condemnation; that all too late, the condemned come to realize the essence of Yahweh.

Ezekiel 6:8 Yet will I leave a remnant: you shall have some that escape the sword among the peoples, when you shall be scattered through the nations- This "remnant" were intended to return in repentance and be the basis of the restored kingdom of

God. The same word is used in Jer. 43:5: "Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces took all the remnant of Judah, who were returned from all the nations where they had been driven, to live in the land of Judah". But this remnant didn't respond; having returned, they then began worshipping the sun again and went to Egypt, against God's specific pleading with them through Jeremiah. The time spent in exile could have been far shorter than the 70 years of Jeremiah; there were various time frames potentially possible, as noted on Ez. 4:6.

Ezekiel 6:9 Those of you that escape shall remember Me among the nations where they shall be carried captive because I have been broken with their lewd heart which has departed from Me- When God said that "I have been broken with their whorish heart" (Ez. 6:9 RV), He meant it. Sinful Israel broke the heart of Almighty God. The tone of God's speeches in Jeremiah varies wildly, moving abruptly from outraged cries of pain to warm entreaties of love, and then to desperate pleas for a new start. He is responding like a jilted lover, who gained His Israel by wooing them in the wilderness. He felt the pain of Israel's rejection, and went through very human-like reactions to this. The book of Hosea shows all this lived out in a real human life. Hosea was representative of God, and yet he married a slut called Gomer, and in their life together they portrayed graphically the pain of God's relationship with His people. The image of God as the wounded lover which we meet in Hosea and Jeremiah ought to deeply impress us. The God who created all of existence subjects Himself to such humiliation from His creation. One is almost haunted by the reality of a God who lets our response to Him count that much. God says that the remnant of His people would "remember" what they had done to Him. But they didn't, and that is the abiding tragedy.

And with their eyes, which play the prostitute after their idols- As an alcoholic's eyes dart immediately to the alcohol on display in a supermarket, so their eyes had a natural inclination and attraction towards idols. And the glance of their eyes, their mental predisposition toward idolatry, was prostitution in God's eyes. We see powerfully portrayed the sensitivity of God toward our deepest psychology and the core yearning of our hearts. May that be ever toward Him alone.

They shall loathe themselves in their own sight for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations- But they didn't. Ez. 18 explains how they considered they were suffering unjustly for the sins of their fathers, and sat depressed by the rivers of Babylon, still looking towards their idols. "They shall..." do this was the Divine hope of the unrequited lover for the beloved. Or at best it was command rather than prediction.

Ezekiel 6:10 They shall know that I am Yahweh: I have not said in vain that I would do this evil to them- There was the tendency to think that Ezekiel was just another prophet groaning on about evil to come from Yahweh. By considering that God's word is somehow not precisely, personally relevant to ourselves, we consider it to be "vain", no matter what high view of Divine inspiration of the scriptures we may hold. "They shall..." as noted on :9 was God's desperate hope for them.

"In vain" is literally "without cause". Ezekiel is very clear that God's judgments upon His people were not at all "without cause" (Ez. 6:10; 14:23). But just as He gave them a bill of divorce and then destroyed it as if the reasons didn't exist any more (Is. 50:1,2), so the "cause" of the judgments was taken away. They were "oppressed without cause", God says, as He seeks to persuade the exiles of how totally He has dealt with their sin (Is. 52:3).

Ezekiel 6:11 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Strike with your hand and stamp with your foot and say, Alas!- These things were an expression of anger. The intense wrath of God was appropriate considering the deep love He had for them, and the way they were breaking His heart by their adultery against Him; see on :9. "Alas!" is really a calling to mourning, and in that word there may be also a calling to repentance, so that this tragedy need not happen.

Because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, they shall fall by the sword, by the famine and by the plague- "Evil" would come upon them (:10) because they had been evil. Their condemnation through the experience of "evil" was therefore really a reflection of the evil they themselves had wrought. By doing evil they were therefore living out their own condemnation.

Ezekiel 6:12 He who is far off shall die of the plague; and he who is near shall fall by the sword; and he who remains and is besieged shall die by the famine- The differentiation between those "far off" and those "near" is important. Jeremiah and Ezekiel were saying the same things, but Jeremiah to those still 'remaining' in Judah, and Ezekiel to the captives "far off"; that phrase is used of how Judah were to be exiled "far off" in Babylon. The captives to whom he ministered, and who at this time had placed him under house arrest, would "die of the plague". Their repentance was required, lest they face yet further suffering.

Thus will I accomplish My wrath on them- The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

Ezekiel 6:13 You shall know that I am Yahweh, when their slain men shall be among their idols around their altars on every high hill, on all the tops of the mountains and under every green tree and under every thick oak- Judah were indeed slain and their corpses mockingly placed next to their idols. But they did not "know that I am Yahweh". For "you shall...", see on :9. To know Yahweh was not so much to know *about* Him theologically, but to have a relationship with Him; for that is the Hebraic sense of 'to know'.

The places where they offered pleasant aroma to all their idols- "Pleasant aroma" is the phrase often used for the "pleasant aroma" of sacrifices to Yahweh- three times in Exodus, seventeen in Leviticus, seventeen in Numbers. As a priest, Ezekiel would have been aware of this. But instead, they offered this to the idols. The Divine hope (see on :9), the desperate hope of the unrequited lover for the beloved, was that a repentant remnant would realize this and then offer "pleasant aroma" again to Him alone (Ez. 20:41). But they didn't.

Ezekiel 6:14 I will stretch out My hand on them, and make the land desolate and waste- This was the judgment to come upon Babylon (Jer. 51:26). Babylon was to be punished as they had punished Judah. This is the great theme of Revelation; the seals of judgment poured upon Israel in the last days are related to the vials of judgment poured upon those who perform that judgment.

From the wilderness toward Diblah, throughout all their habitations- This is the equivalent of "From Dan [the north] to Beersheba [the south]". The "wilderness" is usually applied to the nomad region south of Palestine, and this would lead us to look for Diblah in the north. The two Hebrew letters for 'd' and 'r' are easily confused. Riblah may therefore be the place in view, and the LXX has "Diblah" whereas the AV and Masoretic Text has "Riblah" in 2 Kings 23:33; 25:6. Riblah was a fortified town on the north road from Palestine to Babylon. Hamath, in the same region, is given as the northern boundary in Ez. 47:16.

They shall know that I am Yahweh- See on :9.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 7

Ezekiel 7:1 Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me, saying- See on Ez. 6:1.

Ezekiel 7:2 You, son of man, thus says the Lord Yahweh to the land of Israel, An end: the end has come- The language of "the end... an end" sounds as if this was intended to be the actual end of Judah. But it wasn't; the judgments threatened didn't work out in the totality they were described. More survived than envisaged in the judgment prophecies. And it was not the final end. This could be simply because God in His grace remembered mercy, and did not punish Judah as their iniquities deserved at this time, as Ezra notes (Ezra 9:13). But it could also be that Ezekiel's prophetic ministry did in fact persuade a tiny minority to repent, and because of that, the judgments were ameliorated and the total end of Judah didn't happen. The situation is analogous to how God had threatened to totally destroy Israel and make a new nation from Moses; but He was open to persuasion by the intercession of one faithful man, and this didn't in fact happen.

On the four corners of the land- "Corners" is the same word translated "wings", which throughout Ezekiel usually refers to or alludes to the wings of the cherubim. The land had been under the protection of the cherubim wings, and even in judgment, they would be the channel through which that judgment was brought.

Ezekiel 7:3 Now is the end on you, and I will send My anger on you, and will judge you according to your ways; and I will bring on you all your abominations- "Abominations" is a reference to their idols, and is put by metonymy for 'sin with your abominations'. The thing sinned with, the channel of the sin, is thus out for the sinful actions of people. This suggests that God views sinners as their idol. Those who

create idols are like unto them (Ps. 115:8). It's a question of identity. If our deepest heart and passion is upon anything other than God, then the object of that passion becomes 'us'. We identify with that which we worship, and all human beings have this tendency to focus upon something to worship. In this lies the challenge of the fact there is only one God; from that it psychologically follows that we serve Him with our whole strength and heart. Therefore believing there is only one God and rejecting a Trinity is not of itself a 'belief in one God'; for true belief will mean a total service of Him with all the heart and mind. And we can hold true theology whilst not doing this.

Ezekiel 7:4 My eye shall not spare you, neither will I have pity; but I will bring your ways on you, and your abominations shall be in the midst of you- See on 2 Kings 17:23. The wonder of God's grace was that His eye did spare and He did pity at the restoration (Ez. 36:21; Joel 2:18; Mal. 3:17 s.w.), just as His eye had spared them in the desert (Ez. 20:17). This reveals the emotion of God, His pity even for the spiritually weak, and how this triumphs over His judgment.

You shall know that I am Yahweh- See on Ez. 6:9.

Ezekiel 7:5 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: An evil, a one-time evil; behold, it comes- As noted on :2, this sounds as if the projected evil would never be repeated. But the time of Jacob's direst trouble is to be only in the last days (Dan. 12:1,2). This means that the threatened 'final evil' didn't come, either because God's mercy overwhelmed His wrath; or because of at least some intercession or repentance which meant it was delayed. But the essence of the prophetic word shall be fulfilled in the last days, when the final evil shall come upon Israel.

Ezekiel 7:6 An end has come, the end has come; it awakes against you; behold, it comes- The continual expression of the idea that 'It is starting to come, it's nearly here...' ["it awakes against you"] is reflective of the 'gap' there is with God. He pronounces certain judgment, as He did upon Nineveh, but in the gap between the statement and its execution, His mind can be changed by repentance. Hence the urgency of 'it is really and truly about to come'; for this implies the window of repentance was still just about open.

Ezekiel 7:7 Your doom has come to you, inhabitant of the land. The time has come, the day is near, a day of tumult, and not of mere echoing on the mountains- So many times the threats of judgment had not been carried out, perhaps because God was simply gracious, or because of His sensitivity to human intercession and the repentance of a remnant. But this had created the impression that the mountains were merely echoing with threats and the threats were not the real thing, mere echoes. The previous prophecy in Ez. 6 had specifically concerned the mountains of Israel. But judgment was real and would really come.

Ezekiel 7:8 Now will I shortly- See on Ez. 5:13. "Shortly" presents the same idea as noted on :6; the judgment was about to come, and so the window of opportunity to repent was only just about still open.

Pour out My wrath on you and accomplish My anger against you, and will judge you according to your ways; and I will bring on you all your abominations- These are the very words used about God's intention to utterly destroy Israel at the time of Ex. 32:10,12. But thanks to the intercession of Moses, this didn't happen. Moses later uses

the term in reflecting how God's anger had been accomplished upon Israel, but not in the form of totally destroying them as He had first planned (Ps. 90:7). The implication of course was that a Moses-like figure could arise in intercession, God had been open to change the outworking of His anger, and so by implication He was likewise open at Ezekiel's time. And it seems He did relent, because as noted on Ez. 5:12, God did not totally destroy Jerusalem's population to the extent He had threatened. And yet just as Moses perceived that His anger was still accomplished, although without the total destruction of Israel, so Jeremiah uses this phrase in reflecting how in fact God's anger was accomplished in the Babylonian destruction (Lam. 4:11). Ezekiel himself will later note this too (Ez. 20:8,21).

Ezekiel 7:9 My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity. I will bring on you according to your ways; and your abominations shall be in the midst of you; and you shall know that I, Yahweh, do strike- See on :4. They would realize that it was God who was striking them, that He was working through the Babylonians, and their suffering was not simply due to the local geopolitics of a neighbouring empire attacking a smaller neighbouring state. But did they "know" this? "You shall know..." could be command more than prediction (see on Ez. 6:9). "Strike" is the word used of God's destruction of the *eretz* promised to Abraham at the flood (Gen. 8:21). This was the scale of total destruction envisaged, although in reality, God's grace was such that there was not absolutely total destruction. The amelioration of the judgments was maybe just because of God's grace; or His response to intercession and repentance from a minority. See on Zeph. 1:2,3.

Ezekiel 7:10 Behold, the day, behold, it comes: your doom is gone forth- See on :6. The pronouncement of doom had gone forth from the court of heaven, but in the gap between the statement and its realization, there was still the possibility for repentance. We too live in that same gap.

The rod has blossomed, pride has budded- The message may simply be that above all their many sins, Juda were to be punished because their pride had come to full fruition- in judgment. But "the rod" may refer to Babylon, as rods represent nations and leaders (2 Kings 18:21), and Assyria is described in just the same way, as the rod for Judah's correction (Is. 10:5). The budding rod is a parody of Aaron's budding rod. But the buds were those of pride, which God saw as Babylon's lead characteristic. We might have characterized Babylon in other ways, perhaps alluding to their idolatry. But typical of the prophets, God through Ezekiel focuses upon pride as the worst and fundamental characteristic of Babylon. The rod of Babylon's pride was prepared to execute the final judgment.

Ezekiel 7:11 Violence has risen up into a rod of wickedness- The Hebrew words for "violence" and "wickedness" are often used by the prophets about Israel, translated things like 'unjust gain'. The rod has been defined in :10 as that of the Babylonian invaders. But Israel's oppression of each other had grown up into a rod of wickedness. Here we have the metaphor of 'making a rod for your own back'. Their sins grew into a rod of punishment, the rod of the proud Babylonians, whose pride had grown parallel with the violence of the Jews against each other.

None of them shall remain, neither of their multitude, nor of their wealth. There shall be nothing of value among them- As noted on Zeph. 1:2,3, it was God's intention to destroy Judah as He did the *eretz* at the time of the flood. None would remain. But in fact many did. The amelioration of the judgments was maybe just because of God's

grace; or His response to intercession and repentance from a minority. The destruction of the people is paralleled with the destruction of their wealth; because like many today, they identified with their wealth. It was their self-identity. Their wealth is mentioned in the context of their oppression of each other for "unjust gain" (NEV "violence") in the preceding sentence. See on :19.

Ezekiel 7:12 The time has come, the day draws near: don't let the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn; for wrath is upon all its multitude- The situation would be so desperate that people would sell anything they had for very low sums. But the end for them all was so near that the purchaser would have no time to rejoice over his good deal, nor the seller to lament how cheaply they had sold.

Ezekiel 7:13 For the seller shall not return to that which is sold, even if they be still alive- The idea as explained on :12 is that the seller would be taken into captivity; the buyer, the manipulative wealthy spoken of in :11, would be killed and so the purchased things would be left for the former owner to just come and take back. But the impoverished seller would not be able to, because they would be taken into captivity.

The vision is touching the whole multitude of it, none shall return- AV "the multitude therefore which shall not return". The majority are pictured as dying; only a minority would return. Remember that Ezekiel is speaking to the captives in Babylon. They were to see themselves as the minority who had survived by grace. They were therefore to repent. But at this time they had placed Ezekiel under house arrest and refused to accept his appeals.

Neither shall any strengthen himself in the iniquity of his life- The context is of their materialism (:11,12) and the loss of the things they bought and sold. This materialism was the sin of their soul, and they would be unable to continue [NEV "strengthen"] that addictive way of life.

Ezekiel 7:14 They have blown the trumpet, and have made all ready, but none goes to the battle; for My wrath is on all its multitude- The men of Judah blew the trumpet to call their soldiers, but Ezekiel and Jeremiah were blowing God's trumpet of repentance (Jer. 6:1; Ez. 33:3,6). There was a total mismatch between God and His people. Again it is emphasized that God's wrath was upon "all", but in fact a larger group than here envisaged survived; by God's way of remembering mercy in wrath, and His extreme sensitivity to the repentance and intercession of a minority.

Ezekiel 7:15 The sword is outside, and the pestilence and the famine within. He who is in the field shall die with the sword; and he who is in the city, famine and pestilence shall devour him- As I have continually noted, the death by famine, sword and plague did not destroy as many as here envisaged. I suggested why on :14. But another factor to be considered is that in Jer. 34:8-10 we read that there was some repentance amongst the Jerusalem Jews; at the beginning of the Sabbath year on 29 September 588 BC they released their slaves and stopped abusing them. In response to this, the siege was lifted by God- for the Babylonians temporarily lifted the siege due to the approach of the Egyptian army. Between that October and 29 April 587 BC they were concerned with fighting the Egyptians until they defeated them (Jer. 34:22; Ez. 30:20,21). In that time, many Jews took their slaves back (Jer. 34:11-22; 37:15,16). So from May 587 BC the siege resumed until the walls were breached, Zedekiah was

captured and the city sacked on 29 July 587 BC (2 Kings 25:2-4; Jer. 39:2; 52:7; Ez. 33:21). Perhaps it was in response to this repentance, even though many didn't follow through with it, that God rescheduled and ameliorated His plans of total destruction. Perhaps some did permanently release their slaves and stop abusing others, and God took notice of this.

Ezekiel 7:16 But those of the ones who escape shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them moaning, every one in his iniquity- The idea was that the remnant who were saved by grace would flee to the mountains, the place of their previous apostasy (Ez. 6:2), and repent. They fled, and yet most didn't repent. They "shall / should" do this may be command rather than prediction, and again a reflection of God's intense hope, the hope of unrequited love.

Ezekiel 7:17 All hands shall be feeble, and all knees shall be weak as water- This again is Ezekiel repeating the message Jeremiah was preaching to the Jews in Judah (Jer. 6:24). There would be a psychological paralysis- evidence that God can work directly on the mind of people, positively [through the "holy spirit"] and negatively [an "evil spirit from the Lord"].

Ezekiel 7:18 They shall also clothe themselves with sackcloth, and horror shall cover them; and shame shall be on all faces, and baldness on all their heads- The mourning was intended to be for their sins; their "shame" was to be for their sins. This was the Divine intention of the invasion; the remnant would repent. But this didn't really happen. We too can have repentance set up for us by God, but still not make it.

Ezekiel 7:19 They shall throw their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be as an unclean thing; their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of Yahweh. They shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their stomachs; because it has been the stumbling block of their iniquity- We noted on :11-13 that the materialism of the Jews was a major reason for their sins. Their unjust abuse of each other noted there was to the end that they might accumulate more wealth. This love of wealth was their stumbling block, that which made them fall headlong into sin. We would perhaps rather have focused upon their worship of idols within the holy place of the temple. But the prophets always look to the essence. Even their idolatry was perhaps rooted in this desire for wealth, believing some kind of primitive prosperity Gospel, whereby worship of the gods would bring them wealth. This endless pursuit of wealth would not "satisfy". Their subconscious assumption was that of many today- that wealth can buy anything, even salvation from the day of God's wrath. In one form or another, that is the same underlying assumption made by many religions and Christian groups, from Catholicism to Pentecostalism. But in that day of final judgment they like Judas would throw down their silver and gold in the streets, realizing it could not save them.

Ezekiel 7:20 As for the beauty of His ornament, He set it in majesty; but they made the images of their abominations and their detestable things therein; therefore have I made it to them as an unclean thing- Ezekiel will later be shown awful idolatry and images being used within the temple. "Therein" therefore refers to the temple, the crowning ornament of beauty set in majesty. Just as their wealth was to be declared "unclean" (:19), so the temple would be. I suggested on :19 that the connection is in the fact that they thought that by worshipping those abominable images in Yahweh's

temple, they would get wealth. For many of the idol cults, Baal especially, were fertility cults, promising good harvests and wealth in return for worship. God would desecrate the temple, making it unclean; but this, as with all His judgments, was only a confirmation of what they themselves had done.

Ezekiel 7:21 I will give it into the hands of the gentiles for a prey, and to the wicked of the earth for a spoil; and they shall profane it- The Gentiles would "profane" the temple, but God would do so (:20). The tribal gods of the nations were thought to always be on the side of the tribe, fighting for them and ever protecting the sanctity of their own holy places. Yahweh was uniquely different; He could fight against His people and desecrate even His own holy place. This is the essence of the "problem of suffering"; that the one true God doesn't act as we all subconsciously expect a God to.

Ezekiel 7:22 My face will I turn also from them, and they shall profane My secret place; and robbers shall enter into it, and profane it- As noted on :20,21, it was God who would do this, working with those blasphemous soldiers who actually profaned it, the Babylonian "robbers" who took His holy vessels into captivity. We note that only then, in the final desecration of the temple, would God turn away His face or presence from Israel. Right up until then, His face was still towards them, eager for their repentance. See on :6. Jeremiah had used the same word for "robbers" in lamenting that the Jews had turned the temple into a "den of robbers" (Jer. 7:11). Again, the judgment brought upon them was an appropriate extension of what they themselves had done, and not the Almighty lashing out in anger. Sin is its own condemnation.

Ezekiel 7:23 Make the chain; for the land is full of bloodshed, and the city is full of violence- The chain spoke of their captivity in chains, but the word is only elsewhere used of the golden chains in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:21). Those chains of gold which they so coveted were as it were to become chains of captivity. This continues the theme of :11-13 and what is stated explicitly in :19- that their love of gold and wealth was the essential reason for their stumbling into sin and now into captivity. We would likely have thought the essential reason was their idolatry, but that idolatry was essentially fuelled by a desire for wealth, which they thought their idolatry would bring them. We note that the land and the city of Jerusalem are placed in parallel. The bloodshed of the invasion was related to the "violence" ['unjust gain'] they had done to each other. The prophets, like the Lord Jesus, saw to the essence. A lack of love towards our brethren is effectively violence and bloodshed, and this was to be reflected in the bloodshed they were to suffer from the Babylonians.

Ezekiel 7:24 Therefore I will bring the worst of the nations- "Worst" is "evil"; the same words are used to lament how Israel had done worse evil than the Gentile nations (2 Kings 21:9). Again, the judgment brought was appropriate to what Israel themselves had done.

And they shall possess their houses. I will also make the pride of the strong to cease; and their holy places shall be profaned- Again the theme of materialism continues; the wealthy houses they had built on the backs of unjust gain would be destroyed, just as happened at the invasion; and the destruction of their personal houses would be reflected in the destruction of God's house.

Ezekiel 7:25 Destruction comes; and they shall seek peace, and there shall be none-

"Peace" often refers to peace with God. "Seeking peace" is a quotation from Ps. 34:14; now is the time to seek peace with God, and not all too late as the condemnation process begins. The logic is powerful. All those responsible to God shall come to desperately seek their peace with Him, either in this life, or all too late at judgment day. This theme of desperately searching for God all too late is continued in :26. But the idea may also be that all too late they would seek a peace treaty with the Babylonians which would not be accepted.

Ezekiel 7:26 Mischief shall come on mischief, and rumour shall be on rumour; and they shall seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders- This is the scenario of :26; the condemned desperately seeking God's word and being unable to find it, like the rejected virgins of the parable rushing to buy oil and finding it all too late. The function of the priest was to teach God's law and His word as revealed to the prophets. But no word would be given, and the priests would perish. Ezekiel at this time was a prophet-priest under house arrest. Instead of receiving revelations of God's word, instead they would receive message after message of bad news concerning the Babylonian advance: "One disaster will follow another, and a steady stream of bad news will pour in" (GNB); "There shall be woe upon woe, and there shall be message upon message" (LXX).

Ezekiel 7:27 The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed with desolation, and the hands of the people of the land shall be troubled- Jeremiah had given Zedekiah a way of escape, but he feared his image. So he was to be stripped of his royal robes and clothed with shame. We note the parallel between the leadership and the ordinary "people of the land". The masses didn't suffer because of the failures of the leadership, and neither did the leadership suffer because of the sins of the masses. Quite apart from democracy, it is a simple fact of human sociology that a population get the leadership they essentially want. Because leadership seeks to please the masses. And so the prophets often make the point that the masses as well as the leadership were equally guilty.

I will do to them after their way, and according to their own judgments will I judge them- As so often noted, their judgments would be a continuation of their own actions. They were self condemned. See on :22; Ez. 8:6.

And they shall know that I am Yahweh- See on Ez. 9:13.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 8

Ezekiel 8:1 In the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house and the elders of Judah sat before me, the hand of the Lord Yahweh fell there on me- This was one year and one month from the opening vision of Ez. 1, once the days lying on his side were completed (Ez. 4:5,6). These "elders" may have been visitors from Judah rather than the elders of the community of captives in Babylon. Jeremiah had sent a letter through Elasah, warning against the false prophets competing with Ezekiel, who were claiming that Jerusalem wouldn't fall (Jer. 29:1-3,9,25). The prophecies which Ezekiel now begun seem to continue until Ez. 13:23, concluding with a threat of destruction upon the false prophets. These elders may have come in order to seek Ezekiel's explanation of himself in the light of the false prophecies being made of immediate salvation. The eldership of Judah are roundly

condemned at this time. So we can assume that they had not come humbly seeking God's word. And therefore this chapter reveals how Ezekiel had a vision convicting them of the idolatry going on in Jerusalem, perhaps contrary to the impression of righteousness which they were giving.

Ezekiel 8:2 Then I saw, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of fire; from the appearance of His waist and downward, fire; and from His waist and upward, as the appearance of brightness, as it were glowing metal- As earlier in Ezekiel, this burning, molten metal speaks of God's intense anger. See on Ez. 1:27. The person appears without the cherubim. To be picked up by this person (:3) must have been a frightening experience. God's wrath was because of the awful idolatry and blasphemy which Ezekiel was now to behold. The elders of Judah had come to Ezekiel (:1) and said nothing of the true state of affairs in Jerusalem. Ezekiel was being shown that God's burning anger was in reality upon the people, whatever veneer of spirituality the elders had.

Ezekiel 8:3 He put forth the form of a hand and took me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between the earth and the sky and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the gate of the inner court that looks toward the north- This was the upper or higher gate (Ez. 9:2), the gate where Jeremiah was put in the stocks (Jer. 20:2). The false prophets were assuring Jerusalem of safety as Yahweh's special city. Perhaps the elders had come with this message (:1). So Ezekiel is now going to testify what is really going on there.

Where there was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy- "Image" translates an unusual word which appears to refer specifically to the worship of the asherah or groves (2 Chron. 33:7,15). There would have been a distinctly sexual aspect to the worship. It was in this area that there were "houses of the Sodomites" (2 Kings 23:7). The adultery of Israel against their God was both literal and spiritual, as demonstrated by Hosea's experience with Gomer. This is why the image provoked God to jealousy, because it was the scene of His peoples' literal and spiritual adultery against Him. Josiah's reformation, like so much attempted spiritual reformation, was short-lived. The images were soon replaced.

Ezekiel 8:4 The glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the appearance that I saw in the plain- There is a purposeful juxtaposition between Yahweh's glory and the awful idolatry going on. We too live in the shadow of His glory and all idolatry in whatever form ought to instinctively feel utterly inappropriate. It is worth considering whether the visions Ezekiel had of the progressive departure of "the glory of the God of Israel" (Ez. 8:4) from the temple to the East of Jerusalem and then further away are describing the literal departure of the Angel from His dwelling place over the ark in the temple. Similarly "the glory" Angel departed (1 Sam. 4:21) when the ark over which He dwelt was taken by the Philistines. See on Ps. 78:60.

Ezekiel 8:5 Then He said to me, Son of man, lift up your eyes now to the road that leads toward the north. So I lifted up my eyes toward the northern road, and behold, northward of the gate of the altar this image of jealousy was in the entry- The northward aspect is perhaps because the Jews were looking and worshipping towards the north, Babylon. To worship the idols of their enemies may seem incredible, but it is psychologically likely as it reflects the perversity and deep contradiction within

unrestrained human nature. It was by that same northern road that the Jews would be led away captive.

Ezekiel 8:6 *He said to me, Son of man, do you see what they do, even the great abominations that the house of Israel do commit here, so that I should go far away from My sanctuary? But you shall again see other, greater abominations-* "Do you see...?" could imply that Ezekiel was struggling to allow himself to realize what was going on. As he had not long been in captivity himself and was a priest familiar with the temple, we may enquire why he needed to be shown these things. Perhaps he had earlier been aware of them but not perceived their full import. See on :7. Or perhaps these things had only started going on in the temple area since he had gone into captivity. As the Babylonian threat increased, so the people increasingly turned to their idols. This is a paradox and yet psychologically credible given the perversity of the human mind when it comes to matters of faith. The Divine 'going far away' was in the form of the cherubim of glory departing from the sanctuary, effectively driven out by Israel's abominations. They had set up idols within the temple; effectively they were pushing God out rather than Him departing from them. They thereby had chosen the path of their condemnation. Hence "I will do to them after their way, and according to their own judgments will I judge them" (Ez. 7:27).

Ezekiel 8:7 *He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a hole in the wall-* The hole was there but apparently needed to be dug through in order for Ezekiel to see clearly. I discussed on :6 the possibility that Ezekiel was vaguely aware of abuses in the temple from his time there before his captivity. This corresponds to the hole in the wall; but he had to make some effort to now see through to what was actually going on, and accept it.

Ezekiel 8:8 *Then He said to me, Son of man, dig now through the wall; and when I had dug through the wall, behold, a door-* See on :7. The worship was going on "in the dark... in rooms of images" (:12). The darkness could mean this was the most holy place, lit only by the candlestick; although 70 men would hardly have fitted in there (:11). But the reference may be to the priestly chambers which surrounded the court; the priests had their images there. This would explain the huge emphasis in Ez. 40-48 upon the chambers. Much detail is given about them. The idea is that the previous abominations performed in them were not to be done in the new temple which the exiles were to build and operate.

Ezekiel 8:9 *He said to me, Go in, and see the wicked abominations that they do here-* It seems Ezekiel needed to be urged to 'see' it, hinting at some reluctance in him to recognize the real state of affairs in Jerusalem and Judah.

Ezekiel 8:10 *So I went in and saw; and behold, every form of creeping thing and abominable animals and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed around on the wall-* We know from Jer. 44 and Zech. 5 that many Jews had accepted the idols of their Babylonian conquerors, rather like Ahaz did after his defeat by Assyria (2 Kings 16:10). The spirit of exposing the idolatry of Babylon whilst living in it, waiting the call to leave, is so relevant to modern Christians working, living and waiting in latter day Babylon. However the animal worship implied here is more Egyptian than Babylonian. Egypt were the great hope of Israel rather than Yahweh; perhaps they thought that by worshipping Egyptian gods, Egypt would come and save them. And it

did for a few months appear that way; for the Babylonian siege was lifted in order to fight the Egyptian army (Jer. 34:22; Ez. 30:20,21). They were made to eat unclean animals in captivity (Ez. 4:13; Hos. 9:3), but this was really a reflection of the choices they themselves had made- to worship them. This worship of that which we are externally and religiously separate from remains a big temptation for us all.

Ezekiel 8:11 *There stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel; and in their midst stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, every man with his censer in his hand; and the odour of the cloud of incense went up-* These 70 were the forerunners of the Sanhedrin, based upon the 70 elders with Moses. Ezekiel as a type of the Lord Jesus exposed their evil. These elders were not priests, and yet here they offer incense; this was exclusively the work of the priests. Shaphan was the scribe who had read the discovered law of God to Josiah (2 Kings 22:3-12), leading to his reforms; now his son was a leader of this apostasy. Clearly enough, the cases of both Josiah and Shaphan demonstrate that spirituality cannot be passed on in any blood line nor by upbringing alone. There has to be a genuine desire for God in every individual heart.

Ezekiel 8:12 *Then He said to me, Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, every man in his rooms of images?-* See on Ez. 2:6. Jeremiah speaks of how he came to see Israel for who they were: “The Lord made it known to me and I knew; then thou didst show me their evil deeds” (Jer. 11:8). Ezekiel was shown “what the house of Israel is doing in the dark” (Ez. 8:12). To pass through human life with this level of sensitivity must’ve been so hard. Psychologically and nervously, the stress would’ve been awful. It seems to me that the prophets had to be somehow psychologically strengthened by God to endure living that sensitively in this crass and unfeeling world- hence God made Ezekiel and Jeremiah as a wall and “iron pillar” to Israel, hardened their faces, so that they wouldn’t be “dismayed at [the] looks” of those who watched them with anger and consternation (Jer. 1:18; 15:20; Ez. 2:4-6; 3:8,9,27). This psychological strengthening was not aimed at making them insensitive, but rather in strengthening them to live sensitively to sin in a sinful world without cracking up. And He will do the same for us, too.

They say, ‘Yahweh doesn’t see us; Yahweh has forsaken the land’- They likely didn’t say this in so many words. But as the Lord Jesus taught clearly, the thought is counted by God as if it is a spoken word. Ezekiel was up against the idea amongst the captives that Yahweh had forsaken the land. Hence his visions of God’s cherubim-angels, present both in the land as well as amongst the captives by Chebar in Babylon (Ez. 10:20). It was the same message as the lesson of Jonah- who likewise thought that Yahweh somehow only operated within the land of Israel. The amazing truth was that Yahweh only forsook the land when the Jews left it. He was there with them right up until the end.

Ezekiel 8:13 *He said also to me, You shall again see more, greater abominations which they do-* The great abominations being done are those referred to in Ez. 18:12,13,24, where Ezekiel encourages them with the reality that a man may do great abominations all his life, but then repent at the end and be saved.

Ezekiel 8:14 *Then He brought me to the door of the gate of Yahweh’s house which was toward the north; and see, there sat the women weeping for Tammuz-* Tammuz

was the equivalent of Adonis in Greek mythology. But *adon*, "Lord", is typically used of the Lord God. They had replaced Yahweh as "Lord" with Tammuz. But there is only one Lord, the God of Israel. Having any other Lord was therefore a denial of Yahweh, just as it is today. The weeping for "Tammuz" was the ritual weeping for the death of the young handsome Adonis by Aphrodite, whose role the women played in the worship, and then became ecstatic with joy in the worship ritual when Adonis resurrected. Tammuz / Adonis was therefore a false Messiah.

Ezekiel 8:15 *Then He said to me, Have you seen this, son of man? You shall again see greater abominations than these-* The repeated questions imply Ezekiel struggled to perceive and see the import of the apostasy; see on :6.

Ezekiel 8:16 *He brought me into the inner court of Yahweh's house; and there, at the door of Yahweh's temple, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men-* Perhaps in imitation of the 24 orders of priests in 1 Chron. 24. They are likely the 25 princes of the people of Ez. 11:1, who were located where only the priests should have been. It was at this very point between the porch and altar that Joel envisaged the repentant priesthood earnestly begging God for a change in plan, pouring out their repentance to avoid destruction (Joel 2:17). Instead, the leaders of Israel were worshipping the sun.

With their backs toward Yahweh's temple, and their faces toward the east; and they were worshipping the sun toward the east- Jeremiah had said that Judah had gone backward from Yahweh (Jer. 7:24; 2 Chron. 29:6), and this was symbolized by turning their backs upon the temple. God's turning His back upon Israel was therefore only what they themselves had done to Him. Again, "I will do to them after their way, and according to their own judgments will I judge them" (Ez. 7:27).

Ezekiel 8:17 *Then He said to me, Have you seen this, son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here?-* The same word for "trivial" is used in Ez. 22:7 for how these people had a "light" attitude to their parents. This lighthearted, not serious view of life affected all their relationships, with God as well as family. And we live in an age where as never before, nothing is taken seriously.

For they have filled the land with violence- The sins of the temple cult had spread to the whole land. The idea could be that the violence engulfing the land was their fault. But "violence" also carries the idea of unjust gain. It may refer to how what God took as 'violence' was done by the Jews to each other as a result of the example set in Jerusalem.

And have turned again to provoke Me to anger- "Turned again" is literally 'returned'. Perhaps some of the community of captives had returned to Judah, as there was some contact between them and Judah (see on :1). But they had returned only to commit abominations, rather than in repentance.

And behold, they put the branch to their nose- The allusion is to the Persian ritual of the Avesta. When men prayed to the sun, they held in their left hands a bouquet of palm, pomegranate, and tamarisk twigs, while the priests for the same purpose held a veil before their mouth, so that the bright rays of the sun might not be polluted by human breath. Judah went into captivity in Babylon which was then taken over by Persia. Again, they got what they essentially wanted. They had loved the Persian gods and culture, and so they were taken there to be dominated by it.

Ezekiel 8:18 *Therefore will I also deal with them in anger; My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them-* The wonder of God's grace was that His eye did spare and He did pity at the restoration (Ez. 36:21; Joel 2:18; Mal. 3:17 s.w.), just as His eye had spared them in the desert (Ez. 20:17). This reveals the emotion of God, His pity even for the spiritually weak, and how this triumphs over His judgment.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 9

Ezekiel 9:1 *Then He cried in my ears with a loud voice saying, Cause those who are in charge of the city to draw near, every man with his destroying weapon in his hand-* It was Ezekiel who caused the Angels of judgment to go in to Jerusalem and slay her elders (Ez. 9:1-4). *How* Ezekiel did this was simply by teaching his prophecies to the captives in Babylon. If they had responded, then the judgment could have been averted. *So* much power and eternal consequence lies in the message we preach, and in the invitation we give men to repent. See on Ez. 10:2. Those "in charge of the city" were Angels; along with Ezekiel, the "writer" of :2, this made seven in total. The Jewish leadership weren't really "in charge". The Angels along with their human agent, Ezekiel, who was effectively under house arrest in a prison camp by the Chebar river, were those really in control. We too have far more influence in world geopolitics than we realize; for "all things are for your sakes". A new group of faithful men were to 'have charge' over the temple in the rebuilt Zion (Ez. 44:11 s.w.) who would likewise be in step with the Angel cherubim.

Ezekiel 9:2 *Behold, six men came from the way of the upper gate which looks toward the north, every man with his slaughter weapon in his hand-* The men, representing Angels, came from the north. They had charge of the city (:1) but were also on the side of the Babylonians, who approached from the north. The tribal gods of the nations were thought to always be on the side of the tribe, fighting for them and ever protecting the sanctity of their own holy places. Yahweh was uniquely different; He could fight against His people and desecrate even His own holy place. This is the essence of the "problem of suffering"; that the one true God doesn't act as we all subconsciously expect a God to.

And one man in their midst clothed in linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side. They went in, and stood beside the bronze altar- This man was Ezekiel the prophet, who presumably also wrote down the words he saw in vision. He was "in their midst". Ezekiel was alone in a prison camp in Babylon effectively under house arrest. But he was in the midst of the Angels. They came to the bronze altar, the altar where the burnt offerings were made, as if to offer a sacrifice. The destruction of Jerusalem by fire was to be an offering to God.

Ezekiel 9:3 *The glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub upon which it rested, to the threshold of the house: and He called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writer's inkhorn by his side-* The departure of the cherubic glory from the temple was the sign of God's leaving Jerusalem. And the massive cherubim system went to Babylon. That was where God now intended to work with the remnant whom

He hoped would repent. The way the cherubim of glory had "gone up" and removed to the threshold shows that now God's departure was imminent.

Ezekiel 9:4 *Yahweh said to him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark on the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry over all the abominations that are done in its midst-* The faithful in Ezekiel's time sighed and groaned over all the abominations committed in Jerusalem. Likewise the bleeding hearts of Jeremiah and Moses were actually for the ecclesia. David's eyes wept "streams of tears" because Israel didn't keep the Law (Ps. 119:136); Paul spoke "even with tears" about those in the ecclesia who lived as enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18), exhorting the Corinthians to mourn for those they had to disfellowship (1 Cor. 5:2; 2 Cor. 12:21); Ezra wept for the sins of his people (Ezra 10:1). Is this attitude seen amongst us? We lament in a gossipy way the weaknesses of the brotherhood; but is there this bleeding heart for the cases we mention? Perhaps we should never think of disfellowshipping anybody unless the decision has been come to through a process of such prayerful mourning for them first. The mark was placed upon the foreheads because it was the mental attitude of the faithful which was of paramount importance, as it is today. Those marked off were to be preserved. Presumably they were not a large enough minority for God to avert the destruction of the majority for their sakes.

Ezekiel 9:5 *To the others He said in my hearing, Go through the city after him, and strike. Don't let your eye spare, neither have pity-* These men were a manifestation of God; as their eye was not to pity, so God would not (:10; see note there). The situation recalls the Passover night, where those marked with the blood of the lamb were saved and the rest destroyed. We also think of Lot, who like these faithful ones, bemoaned the apostacy of Sodom and was spared. The implication is that the Angels followed Ezekiel; it was totally within his power as to who was preserved. Perhaps he personally knew all the few faithful in Jerusalem. In vision, he did this, and we imagine him marking Jeremiah.

Ezekiel 9:6 *Kill utterly the old man, the young man and the virgin, and little children and women; but don't come near any man on whom is the mark. Begin at My sanctuary. Then they began at the old men that were before the house-* These men were not necessarily old, but the elders. We notice that the little children were to be killed too. They were not marked. This raises the impossible question as to the death of little children. We are humbled and tested by the whole issue to accept by faith alone that the judge of all the earth judges rightly. He knew their futures, as He knows all possible futures. And on top of that there is the fact that we suffer the consequences of others' sins, and there is no Divine mechanism which stops children from not suffering the results of their parents' sins and positions.

Ezekiel 9:7 *He said to them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the dead. Go forth! They went forth, and struck in the city-* Judah had already defiled the temple, God's house (Jer. 7:30; 32:34; Ez. 5:11). This judgment, as all God's judgments of men, was simply confirming them in what they had themselves done in their time of opportunity. They were judged according to their own judgments. "According to their own judgments will I judge them" (Ez. 7:27).

Ezekiel 9:8 *It happened, while they were smiting, and I was left-* Jeremiah was asked

to do likewise and he found nobody in the city to as it were "mark" (Jer. 5:1). It seems that Ezekiel too knew nobody whom he could mark. He was the only one left of the priests 'in the sanctuary'.

That I fell on my face and cried, and said, Ah Lord Yahweh!- This was to intercede for his people as Moses and Aaron "fell upon their faces" to intercede for the people in Num. 16:22. God does hear intercession, but by grace. And not always.

Will You destroy all who remain of Israel in Your pouring out of Your wrath on Jerusalem?- Ezekiel hadn't marked anyone, because he didn't know any of his former acquaintances who truly lamented the abominations. But he believed that surely there must be a remnant apart from him. He had learnt the lesson from Elijah's arrogance, who considered himself the only one faithful in Israel because he was unaware of the remnant. He was seeing in vision absolutely everyone destroyed apart from himself. He was sure there must be more spirituality, a remnant at least somewhere. And there wasn't. The implication was that all in Jerusalem and Judah were to be destroyed apart from himself. There was no righteous remnant. Although God apparently responds negatively in :9, He doesn't say He will not hear Ezekiel. And the reality was that not literally all of the unmarked people were slain. Ezekiel's intercession worked. Just as if Abraham had reduced his numbers in reasoning with God to the point that if there were one faithful found in Sodom it wouldn't have been destroyed... it seems it wouldn't have been. This is the 'power of one'. It's an endlessly powerful challenge. The intercession of just one can save lives, even eternally. And we see this come to its ultimate term in the work of the Lord Jesus for us.

Ezekiel 9:9 Then He said to me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great- Although only Judah is in view, it seems the sins of Israel, the ten tribes, were being also visited. And probably there were many of the ten tribes who had fled to Judah from the Assyrians and were living there with them. The restoration prophets envisaged a uniting of Israel and Judah at the restoration on the basis of their common experience of the new covenant, repentance and grace meaning that all personal divisions would end. That ought therefore to be true of all under the same new covenant today.

And the land is full of blood, and the city full of perversion; for they say, Yahweh has forsaken the land, and Yahweh doesn't see- They considered that Yahweh existed but was somehow distant from them, and therefore they had turned to other gods and even placed their images in the sanctuary of Yahweh. We too can have a sense that God is so distant that it leads us to turn to other gods and assume that He is not watching our thoughts and actions. But if God seems distant, then it is we who have moved and not Him. I suggest on :8 that God did in fact take notice of Ezekiel's intercession. But He doesn't mention that here, because He simply wishes to emphasize that the volume of judgment inflicted would never exceed their sin.

Ezekiel 9:10 As for Me also, My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will bring their behaviour on their heads- The wonder of God's grace was that His eye did spare and He did pity at the restoration (Ez. 36:21; Joel 2:18; Mal. 3:17 s.w.), just as His eye had spared them in the desert (Ez. 20:17). This reveals the emotion of God, His pity even for the spiritually weak, and how this triumphs over His judgment. This apparent change was due to Ezekiel's intercession; see on :8.

Ezekiel 9:11 Behold, the man clothed in linen, who had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as You have commanded me- In the AVmg.

we read that “the man clothed with linen”- representing Ezekiel or his representative Angel- “returned the word, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me”. The word ‘returned’ in the sense that someone, somewhere, was obedient to it even if others weren’t. This idiom is also found in Is. 55:11. Ezekiel alone was obedient to God's word. For all his concerns about the justice of God and the 'problem of suffering', he was personally obedient. These whole issues exist as a test for us, a help in our attaining of the humility which is so important to God.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 10

Ezekiel 10:1 *Then I looked, and behold, in the expanse that was over the head of the cherubim there appeared above them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne-* Ezekiel has pretty much a vision of the silhouette of God Himself. This was to encourage and inspire him for the very difficult ministry he now had to perform in :2, whereby he was going to be presented as the one who actually brought about Jerusalem's destruction. He who at that time was under house arrest at the hands of his own apostate brethren in a prison camp at the Chebar river in Babylon, apparently a nobody with his chips down on every front. This man... saw one of the closest visions of God personally granted to any man.

Ezekiel 10:2 *He spoke to the man clothed in linen and said, Go in between the whirling wheels, even under the cherub, and fill both your hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city. He went in as I watched-* That Ezekiel's prophecies were not simple predictions but effectively an appeal for repentance is shown by the way in which he saw himself in vision as the prophet who put his hand in to the cherubim vision, and took out from it the coals of fire which would kindle the fire of judgment upon Jerusalem (Ez. 10:2,7). He would have recalled how his opening vision of the cherubim had the strange feature of a man's hand under their wings (Ez. 1:8; 10:21). This hand, he now understood, was *his* hand, the hand of the prophet. In Hebrew thought, the hand symbolizes power and control. Thus Ezekiel was taught an awesome truth- that the entire Angelic-Cherubic system was under the control of his word- in the sense that if Israel responded to his message, then the Cherubim would act accordingly. Likewise we read that it was Ezekiel who caused the Angels of judgment to go in to Jerusalem and slay her elders (Ez. 9:1-4). *How* Ezekiel did this was simply by teaching his prophecies to the captives in Babylon. If they had responded, then the judgment could have been averted. *So* much power and eternal consequence lies in the message we preach, and in the invitation we give men to repent. See on Ez. 3:6.

The "coals" are the same word used about the coals used in the sanctification of the tabernacle after the gross apostasy of Aaron's two sons (Lev. 16:12). The coals were used to burn incense which formed a cloud which covered the most holy place and made atonement for the desecration of the tabernacle (Lev. 16:13,17). The situation is clearly that of Ez. 10, where Ezekiel takes the coals and then the cloud of God's glory fills first the most holy, then the holy and then the entire temple. The cleansing ritual is then symbolized as complete by a live goat having the sins of the house of Israel placed upon it, and sent by a willing [AV "fit"] man into the desert far away. This willing man represented Ezekiel, sent by the Lord into the desert and thence to Babylon along with the captives. The word is also used in Ez. 24:11

concerning how there would be "coals" of fire in Jerusalem, upon which the cauldron of Jerusalem would be burnt and judged. This action was a direct result of Ezekiel taking the coals of fire from the cherubim in Ez. 10:2 and scattering them upon the city. This was therefore a direct result of the action of the cherubim, God's massively powerful Angelic way of working, in cooperation with Ezekiel. The whole arrangement shows God's eagerness to work with people. The coals of fire therefore don't solely and simply speak of the burning of Jerusalem by fire at the hands of the Babylonians. That burning was part of the cleansing of the temple from its apostasy, and the exile into Babylon along with Ezekiel, the willing man of Lev. 16:21, was in fact the bearing away of Israel's sin. There is always a silver lining to God's judgments. They are not simply Him lashing out in the offended anger of an omnipotent deity. They were and are designed to propel forward His purpose of saving by grace whilst at the same time judging sin and sinners.

Ezekiel 10:3 Now the cherubim stood on the right side of the house when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court- This cloud was that of God's glory but also of the incense; see on :2,4. The cherubim now removed to the right side, presumably the north, connecting with the Babylonian judgment to come from there. If to the south, then we have the picture of the cherubim as it were retreating as the northern invaders entered from the north. We note the perfect concert of action between the movement of Ezekiel, "the man", "the son of man", the cherubim and the cloud. This was and is how seamlessly God can work with man. And in this sense, "God is in need of man", as Abraham Heschel put it.

Ezekiel 10:4 Then the glory of Yahweh was lifted up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of Yahweh's glory- As explained on :2, the cloud of glory alludes to the cloud of incense. That intercession of Ezekiel and God's cleansing of His people's desecration of the temple was in fact all of His glory; for this cloud is the cloud of the opening vision in Ez. 1:4. This was and remains the challenge to faith- to see things like the Babylonian siege as all a development of God's glory.

Ezekiel 10:5 The sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of God Almighty when He speaks- There seems to be a strong implication that the Angels were involved with writing the Bible through their inspiration of men. It was Angels who gave God's word to many of the prophets. So close is the connection between the word of God and of Angels that "the sound of the (Angel) cherubim... was heard as the voice of God Almighty God when He speaks". Zechariah stresses that the prophecies of the restoration were given by an Angel (Zech. 1:9-14; 4:1,5; 5:5,10; 6:4,5). The true prophet is one who "has stood in the council of the Lord to perceive and hear His word" (Jer. 23:18,22); and yet these are exactly the words used of how the Angels stand in the council of Heaven and hear Yahweh's word (1 Kings 22; Ps. 103:18-22). The Angels are therefore reflective of the situation on earth; as they stood before the Father's throne to hear the word in the council of Heaven, they were representative of the prophet on earth whom they were used to inspire. As the prophets were gathered together before the thrones of the Kings of Israel and Judah, they were reflecting how the Angels in Heaven were assembled before the throne of Yahweh, on whose throne the human kings were ruling (1 Kings 22:10). The lying spirit / Angel which appeared before Yahweh's throne would therefore have been reflected in Micaiah (1 Kings 22:15). What we have

here is the court of Heaven being reflected in the situation upon earth, seeing that each of the prophets was represented by an Angel in Heaven.

Ezekiel 10:6 *It came to pass, when He commanded the man clothed in linen saying, Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim, that he went in and stood beside a wheel-* This "man" was Ezekiel. It must have been a scary thing, to go in to that vision and stand beside one of the mighty wheels. Ezekiel's obedience is recorded as it was indeed quite something. The more we sense the vastness of God's working, portrayed visually here in the cherubim visions, the more utterly awesome is the idea that we as men can have a hand in it, quite literally in Ezekiel's case. The fire of judgment had to be scattered by a man, rather than God merely doing this as direct punishment. Ezekiel as a priest was "son of man", representing the Lord Jesus. It was Ezekiel's humanity which gave legitimacy to God's judgment and also out of this the final salvation of His people which that judgment portended. See on :2.

Ezekiel 10:7 *The cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubim to the fire that was between the cherubim and took of it, and put it into the hands of him who was clothed in linen, who took it and went out-* The opening vision of the cherubim had a man's hand silhouetted against the most internal working of the cherubim system. This was now to be understood as Ezekiel's hand. But the cherubim also had a hand. His hand and that of "the man", Ezekiel the "son of man" were united in working out this whole scheme of judgment and yet salvation which was to be brought about through that fire (see on :2).

Ezekiel 10:8 *There appeared in the cherubim the form of a man's hand under their wings-* Ezekiel had to put his hand under the wings of the cherubim; and then there appeared permanently in the Cherubim visions "the form of a man's hand [i.e. Ezekiel's] under their wings" (Ezekiel 10:2,8). I take this to be indicative of how humanity can be so deeply a part of God's work; we are identified with Him and His Angels. The visions involved the whole system held up as it were upon a human hand; and God in the image of a man crowning it all in the Heavens. Truly God isn't far from any of us; and in a sense, as the great Rabbi Abraham Heschel put it, "God is in need of man". Note how when the cherubim lifted up, so was Ezekiel lifted up (Ez. 11:22-24). Judah should have left Jerusalem when the Spirit told them to; and they should have upped and left Babylon when the Spirit told them to. But they were out of step with the Spirit, despite Ezekiel's acted parable of literally being lifted up and going where the Cherubim went. The equivalent of this for us is surely our sense of doing all for God's glory, of having this as the final deciding factor in all our decisions. See on Ez. 1:1,20.

In Ez. 40:5, the measuring reed or rod is defined as being 6 cubits plus 6 handbreadths. This recall this presence of a man's hand, Ezekiel's, within the cherubim visions. That represented the human part of the whole wondrous vision; God requires human response, but would work powerfully with it. This may explain the otherwise strange measuring unit which mixed a human hand with the cubit measure.

Ezekiel 10:9 *I looked and behold, four wheels were beside the cherubim, one wheel beside one cherub, and another wheel beside another cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like a beryl stone-* Ezekiel now sees the cherubim portrayed as a chariot. Pure beryl stone is transparent, and extremely hard and enduring. The wheels

imply they were chariots, or mounted on chariots; indeed this is a root meaning of the Hebrew word translated "cherub". The wheels make the living creatures appear as on a chariot, connecting with "the chariot of the cherubim" (1 Chron. 28:18). The firm grounding of this heavenly vision of power "on the earth" indicates that God's glory and activity were not simply in Heaven but active upon earth, both to transport a repentant Judah back to the land, and also to bring forth chariots of enemies to further destroy the land and temple.

Daniel was contemporary with Ezekiel, and so the mention of the beryl would connect with his description of the future Messiah figure as having a body of beryl, also replete with torches of fire and lightning just as seen in the cherubim vision (Dan. 10:6). As mentioned on Ez. 1, the final manifestation of God's glory, Spirit, judgment and salvation was to be in the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 10:10 *As for their appearance, the four of them had one likeness, like a wheel within a wheel-* The wheel within a wheel, each revolving as a gyroscope, deepens the impression of movement in contrary directions and yet all within the same direction. The confusion and contradictions which the exiles struggled with, as we do, were all somehow moving in the same direction, led by God's Spirit.

Ezekiel 10:11 *When they went, they went in their four directions. They didn't turn as they went, but to the place where the head looked they followed it; they didn't turn as they went-* Like a complex series of gyroscopes within each other, so that the movement might be without turning to wherever they advanced. Thus each wheel was composed of two circles, cutting one another at right angles, "one" only of which appeared to touch the ground ("upon the earth" Ez. 1:15), according to the direction the cherubim desired to move in. The idea was that what might appear to be contradictory direction was in fact all seamlessly part of movement in the same direction. And again this has so much meaning for our lives, as it did for the exiles by the river Chebar. What appears useless, taking us away from our intended direction, is being used by God in His bigger direction of our lives towards His Kingdom and restoration

Ezekiel 10:12 *Their whole body and their backs and their hands and their wings and the wheels were full of eyes all around, even the wheels that the four of them had-* "Body" is literally "flesh". The idea is that this hugely powerful system of Divine operation was essentially connected to people. The huge number of eyes speaks of God's intense awareness- in response to Israel's attitude that God saw somehow distant and unaware of their situation and also of their sins. He was incredibly aware. And we need to have the essence of this vision with us too.

Ezekiel 10:13 *As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing, 'the whirling wheels'-* Or, "the chariot". Although the vision appeared to be stationary, the wheels were whirling, God was in intricate movement. And this was the lesson to an Israel who considered God to be passive, distant and inactive. Even His apparent silence and lack of visible, proactive movement is not to say that He is not moving at a huge speed and complexity.

Ezekiel 10:14 *Each one had four faces: the first face was the face of the cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third face the face of a lion, and the*

fourth the face of an eagle- The first face is that of an ox in Ez. 1:10. From this some have concluded that the cherubim had the appearance of an ox in some ways.

There are evident similarities between Ezekiel's cherubim, and the four living creatures of Rev. 4. They are both described as "full of eyes" (Ez. 1:18 = Rev. 4:6), with four very similar faces (lion, calf, man, eagle in Rev. 4:7 = lion, ox, man, eagle in Ez. 1:10); and both have wings (Rev. 4:8 = Ez. 1:8). Yet the living creatures of Revelation speak of being redeemed by the blood of Christ and made king-priests in God's Kingdom (Rev. 5:8-10)- as if they are the redeemed people of God. The four faces are likely to be connected with the four standards of the tribes of Israel (Lion = Judah, Man = Reuben, Ox = Ephraim, Eagle = Dan). Each of those tribes had two other tribes assigned to them in the encampment procedures of Num. 2. There is extra-Biblical tradition that the cherubim in Solomon's temple had the same four faces which Ezekiel saw on the cherubim- lion, ox, man and eagle (John Thomas, *Eureka* (West Beach: Logos, 1984 ed.) Vol. 2 Ch. 4 sec. 4.2). Those to whom Ezekiel related his vision would have immediately understood the point- that the earthly sanctuary was a reflection of the Heavenly, and that above that was a huge Angelic system operating, which also represented God's people- them. But that huge system was to remove to Babylon, and then the final visions of Ezekiel show that glory returning. Ezekiel, as the representative "son of man" as he's so often styled, was caught up within that system and transported at ease between Babylon and Jerusalem- and those who wanted to opt in with God and His Angels could likewise be taken to Babylon and returned. Those who chose to remain in Babylon were therefore resisting being part of an awesome system of God manifestation and Angelic operation. We have that same choice in things great and small today.

Ezekiel 10:15 The cherubim mounted up: this is the living creature that I saw by the river Chebar- The same glorious activity of God seen in the Jerusalem temple was equally present amongst the group of depressed Jews who sat by the rivers of Babylon weeping. No longer was God to be perceived as tied to sacred space. His presence and glory were everywhere and in any situation, geographically, mentally or spiritually; just as today.

Ezekiel 10:16 When the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them; and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the wheels also didn't turn from beside them- The cherubim, this massive system of Divine operation, was direct by God's Spirit. The feature of not turning during their movement is a major feature (Ez. 1:9,12,17; 10:11,16). The impression was given of God's unchanging, massive help towards the realization of His purpose with His people.

Ezekiel 10:17 When they stood, these stood; and when they mounted up, these mounted up with them; for the spirit of the living creature was in them- The heavy stress upon 'mounting up' (:15,17,19) uses a word which means "exalted" (s.w. Job 24:24). Even in the judgment of sinners, God was to be exalted and glorified. And the Hebrew idea of 'glory' is literally 'that which is lifted up'.

Ezekiel 10:18 The glory of Yahweh went forth from over the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim- The withdrawal of God's glory and cherubic presence from the temple is described in fine detail, as if it were painfully slow in progressing. It could have been described in just a sentence- 'The glory of God departed from the

temple'. The various stages described are perhaps because at each point, there was still the opportunity of repentance. It's as if God left reluctantly.

Ezekiel 10:19 *The cherubim lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight when they went forth, and the wheels beside them. They stood at the door of the east gate of Yahweh's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above-* See on :18. The cherubim would finally return through the east gate if Israel were repentant and built and operated the temple system of Ez. 40-48. It was from here that they left. But in the whole process of the presence of God being withdrawn from that place, the earth was alight with His glory. Just as happens today when we face situations which defy our understanding.

Ezekiel 10:20 *This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river Chebar; and I knew that they were cherubim-* Ezekiel was up against the idea amongst the captives that Yahweh had forsaken the land (Ez. 8:12). Hence his visions of God's cherubim-angels, present both in the land as well as amongst the captives by Chebar in Babylon (Ez. 10:20). It was the same message as the lesson of Jonah- who likewise thought that Yahweh somehow only operated within the land of Israel. But again we see how God's judgments are appropriate to human actions and positions. They acted as if God had forsaken the land (Ez. 8:12), as if His presence was not really actual for them. And so in response, He did forsake the land and temple.

Ezekiel 10:21 *Every one had four faces, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings-* This silhouette of a human hand is repeatedly emphasized. In Rev. 4:7 the four heads are distributed, one to each of the "living creatures", while here each has four faces. This is to highlight the sense of humanity, and of God's awareness of every angle of human situation. That was the lesson so required by Judah in their depression by the rivers of Babylon. See on :6,8.

Ezekiel 10:22 *As for the likeness of their faces, they were the faces which I saw by the river Chebar, their appearances and themselves; they went each one straight forward-* Again there is emphasis upon the fact that the same cherubim of glory were now by the rivers of Babylon amongst the captives as had been in the Jerusalem temple. The whole system would not be diverted- that is strongly emphasized in saying that they didn't turn, but went straight forward. See on Ez. 1:7.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 11

Ezekiel 11:1 *Moreover the Spirit lifted me up-* As the cherubim lifted up at the end of Ez. 10, so did Ezekiel. He as a mere tiny man was part of this amazing vision of Heavenly glory and activity. Just as we can be.

And brought me to the east gate of Yahweh's house which looks eastward- From here the cherubim of glory departed, and to here the glory would return (Ez. 43:4) if Israel returned repentant from captivity and rebuilt the temple.

At the door of the gate were twenty-five men- The same 25 sun worshippers of Ez. 8:16. The glory of the east gate is emphasized in the visions of the restored temple (Ez. 40:6,22,23 etc., in all a total of 12 references to it in Ez. 40-48). The idea was that in the restored temple, this kind of desecration was not to occur.

And I saw in their midst Jaazaniah the son of Azzur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people- There is an irony in the meaning of these names. Jaazaniah ("God hearkens") the son of Azzur ("The Helper"), Pelatiah ("God rescues") the son of Benaiah ("God builds"). Azzur was the father of the false prophet Hananiah (Jer. 28:1). God was willing and eager to hear and save His people and to help them rebuild the temple. But instead they advised the people to build their own houses (:3) because the promised destruction would not come.

Ezekiel 11:2 *He said to me, Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked advice in this city-* They were teaching directly against Ezekiel's prophecies (:3). But this began with 'devising iniquity', and the phrase is only elsewhere used of devising iniquity privately "on your beds" (Ps. 36:4; Mic. 2:1). Typical of the prophets, the root of false teaching and sin is seen as the human heart.

Ezekiel 11:3 *Who say, The time is not near to build houses-* The idea may be that destruction would not come, so they should instead focus upon their own houses. But the Hebrew can also mean 'Not at hand is the building of houses'. This would then be an allusion to Jeremiah's recent letter to the captives in Babylon where he had urged them to build houses because a return from captivity was not going to happen soon, contrary to the message of the false prophets (Jer. 29:5).

This is the cauldron, and we are the meat- This would have been a sneering at Jeremiah's prophecy that Jerusalem would be boiled in the fire of Babylonian judgment- Jer. 1:13 "I see a seething pot; and the face thereof is toward the north". Their idea was that the holy city was as a cauldron which would defend them from the fire of judgment. But this is deconstructed by Ezekiel in Ez. 24:3. The cauldron would refuse to respond to the purging of the fire and they would all in fact be destroyed. Their concept of sacred space would not save them. And in reality, the walls of Jerusalem were so weak they could be dug through by hand; seeon Ez. 12:7.

Ezekiel 11:4 *Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, son of man-* As noted on :13, Ezekiel seems to have needed encouragement in his ministry as he may not have perceived the depth of Israel's sin.

Ezekiel 11:5 *The Spirit of Yahweh fell on me-* As if to say that this was a very heavy level of inspiration, God really wanted to say this.

And He said to me, Speak, Thus says Yahweh: 'Thus you have said, house of Israel; for I know the things that come into your mind- The words of Israel are paralleled with their inner thoughts. The Lord emphasizes this in His teaching too. God knew, and knows, the inner thoughts and mental words of every person, especially those of His people.

Ezekiel 11:6 *You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled its streets with the slain-* The slain bodies of those to be killed by the Babylonians were their fault; they had slain them. But as noted on :5, the prophets have the same attitude to human behaviour as the Lord later did. To hate your brother and abuse him was to murder him. The slain bodies were what they had in essence already done. But the same language is used of what was to happen to Babylon (Jer. 51:4). What Babylon did to Judah was to be done to them, and that is the reason for the structure of the

book of Revelation. The seals describe what is to be done to Israel in the last days, and the vials what is to then be done in return to her abusers.

Ezekiel 11:7 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Your slain whom you have laid in its midst, they are indeed the meat, and this is the cauldron; but you shall be brought out of its midst-* Again the blame for the deaths is placed upon the Jews themselves. The cauldron of Jerusalem was not going to save them, God was going to end all concept of sacred space, and instead dwell in the hearts of repentant people. "You shall be brought out..." is amazing grace. A remnant would be preserved in order to give them the chance of repentance.

Ezekiel 11:8 *You have feared the sword; and I will bring the sword on you, says the Lord Yahweh-* Part of Divine judgment is to bring upon men their worst fears. And He did so with Job, not because he had sinned, but to teach him further (Job 3:25). Job is indeed set up as a representative of Judah at this time, but he personally hadn't sinned. This isn't God being cruel; it is to force us to psychologically discard all clever plans to somehow thwart the worst, all insurance policies are voided by God. In order to bring us to totally cast ourselves upon His grace.

Ezekiel 11:9 *I will bring you out of its midst-* They had reasoned that Jerusalem would be the cauldron which would protect them from the fire of Babylonian judgment. But they were to be brought out from that apparent position of safety.

And deliver you into the hands of foreigners, and will execute judgments among you- "Deliver you" also carries the hint of salvation. It was a deliverance to the sword in many cases, but also with the hint of fuller deliverance, at least nationally, and also individually if they would heed the message of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and repent.

Ezekiel 11:10 *You shall fall by the sword; I will judge you in the border of Israel; and you shall know that I am Yahweh-* Perhaps God had in view some kind of extermination camp on the border between Israel and Babylon. It was at Riblah in Hamath, on the border, where the King of Babylon executed judgment on Zedekiah, his sons, and the chief officers and priests, and 60 men of the city (Jer. 52:9-11, 24-27; and 2 Kings 25:19-21 cp. 1 Kings 8:65, where "the entering in of Hamath" implies Hamath, where Riblah was situated, was the entering or border of the land). But note that Ezekiel defines the border of Israel as including Damascus (Ez. 47:18). Mal. 1:5 says that Yahweh would be glorified at "the border of Israel". Perhaps in their final moments they repented and glorified God; they 'knew that I am Yahweh' (:12). Or maybe the idea is that the condemnation of the wicked was still a glorification of Yahweh.

Ezekiel 11:11 *This shall not be your cauldron, neither shall you be the meat in its midst; I will judge you in the border of Israel-* See on :10 and :3. The city of Jerusalem and the temple "in its midst" was not going to be the cauldron which would preserve them from the fire of Babylonian judgment.

Ezekiel 11:12 *And you shall know that I am Yahweh-* The idea may not have to be that they personally would know Yahweh through the condemnation process (see on :10). "Yahweh is known by the judgments He executes" (Ps. 9:16). The 'making known'

would therefore have been through advertisement to the world of His ways and essential character.

For you have not walked in My statutes, neither have you executed My ordinances, but have behaved like the nations that are around you - They had specifically disobeyed Dt. 12:30,31. God saw the tendency to be like those around us and warned them specifically against it.

Ezekiel 11:13 *It happened, when I prophesied, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then fell I down on my face and cried with a loud voice, and said, Ah Lord Yahweh! will you make a full end of those remaining of Israel?* - Ezekiel seems shocked at the severity of God's judgments, just as the disciples still felt that the Pharisees were more righteous than they were. Ezekiel's falling on his face was in intercession for Israel, and as explained on Ez. 9:8, it seems that God did respond. "Pelatiah" means either 'God's remnant' or 'Whom Yah delivers'. Ezekiel therefore saw in his death the destruction of the remnant which he had assumed God would preserve. But the remnant were not going to be righteous. We too can assume that there is more spirituality in the community we know than there actually is.

Ezekiel 11:14 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying-* Ezekiel's overly high impression of Pelatiah (:13) was now going to be further challenged by news that there was far more unspirituality in his people than he had assumed.

Ezekiel 11:15 *Son of man, the people who live in Jerusalem are talking about you and those of your nation who are with you in exile. They say, The exiles are too far away to worship Yahweh. He has given us possession of the land-* The poor masses left in the land had to pay taxes and render service to the new administration (Lam. 5:12-14), typical of Babylonian policy in conquered lands; see on Ez. 5:10. The land taken from the exiled ruling classes was then redistributed to the rural poor who remained in the subjected states. This policy has been described as giving the land of the previously wealthy to "the sub-proletariat of the city and the country" (A. J. Soggin, *A History of Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984) p. 252). This is what was done by the Babylonians in Judah (Jer. 39:10; 2 Kings 25:12; Jer. 52:16 cp. Ez. 33:21-27). These poor peasant farmer masses, who were likely 90% of the population, were rejoicing at their new prosperity [relative to what they had before] and considered that God had justified them against their abusive masters, whom the Babylonians had stripped of their land and taken into captivity. The Babylonian policy regarding deportation and management of conquered lands is described in N.P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) and D.L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone, 1989). So those who remained were arrogantly assuming that those formerly wealthy Jews in captivity could not acceptably worship Yahweh outside of the land, but they could; and they were claiming that God "has given us possession of the land". They didn't want the wealthy exiles to return and reclaim the land. But in fact it was through the repentance of the humbled wealthy and powerful that God intended to rebuild His Kingdom; and that may be a lesson for many today.

Ezekiel 11:16 *Therefore say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Whereas I have removed them far off among the nations, and whereas I have scattered them among the*

countries- Judah had removed their heart far from God (s.w. Is. 29:13; Jer. 2:5). Their scattering far off was but a reflection of what they in their hearts had chosen. And this is what condemnation will be- giving people that which is where their heart really is. See on :21.

Yet will I be to them a sanctuary for a little while in the countries where they have come- God promised to "be to them [the Jews in captivity] a sanctuary for a little while in the countries [the 127 provinces of Babylon] where they are come". His intention was that they should be there, preserved by Him even in their punishment, for the "little while" of 70 years. Then they would return, and their sanctuary there in exile would become the new sanctuary which would come to the restored Zion (Ez. 37:26,28). And yet they preferred to remain there in Babylon. As noted on Ez. 1:1, Ezekiel was the priest of this "little sanctuary" in exile, a sanctuary that didn't require a temple. This was God's answer to the sneering of those who remained in the land that outside of the land, the exiles couldn't worship Yahweh as well as they could (:15). As explained on :15 and Ez. 5:10, it was the rich leadership who were taken into exile. It may seem that God has no place much for the wealthier parts of society. But His plan was to humble those wealthy exiles, having stripped them of their land and dignity, and to use them as the basis for a returned, repentant Israel who would rebuild the Kingdom.

There is some archaeological evidence for this "little sanctuary". "The fate of some exiles is now documented by a group of cuneiform contract tablets stemming mainly from two localities in the region of Nippur, one of them called "city of Judah/of the Judeans" (Al Yahudu/Yahudayu), the Babylonian name of Jerusalem. As the majority of the people appearing in the documents bear West Semitic and Judean names, it seems certain that this new Jerusalem in Babylonia had been founded by recent exiles".

Mal. 1:11 could be speaking of sanctuaries like Ezekiel's. The returned exiles, who were not worshipping properly, were reminded: "For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, My name is great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to My name, and a pure offering: for My name is great among the nations, says Yahweh of Armies". Those present tenses could lead us to read this as speaking of the Jews and Israelites who had not returned to the land. They were offering acceptable incense without the temple, throughout the Persian empire. And this was acceptable, whereas the offerings made at the temple weren't. We recall how Ezekiel had established a "little sanctuary" in exile and there likely were others. There are records of Jewish sacrifices being made in the Elephantine colony in Egypt, in Babylonia, and at the Jewish temple in Leontopolis in Lower Egypt. These and other sanctuaries may have been the referent of how "in every place" [the Hebrew often refers to a holy place] amongst the Gentiles in the territory of the land promised to Abraham, incense was being offered acceptably to Yahweh.

Ezekiel 11:17 *Therefore say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel-* Consider the use of the word *pus*, 'scatter'. It was God's intention that mankind should scatter abroad in the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28); but it required the judgment of the tower of Babel to actually make them 'scatter' (Gen. 11:4). Thus even in judgment, God worked out His positive ultimate intentions with humanity. And this word *pus* is the same word used with reference to

Judah's 'scattering' from the land into Babylonian captivity (Ez. 20:34,41; 28:25). The intention, surely, was to show the captives that they had been scattered as the people had at the judgment of Babel / Babylon, but even in this, God was working out His purpose with His people and giving them the opportunity to fulfil His original intentions for them.

Ezekiel 11:18 *They shall return, and they shall take away all the detestable things of it and all its abominations-* The exiles returned, but as Zechariah 5 and Malachi make clear, they continued in idolatry. Jer. 41:5 suggests that there was still some kind of sanctuary operating on the site of the temple even during the exile; but this too became full of idolatry which the returned exiles would need to purge.

Ezekiel 11:19 *I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh-* Israel were to return from captivity, destroy all the Gentile abominations and idols from their land, and then receive a new heart and a new covenant (Ezekiel 36 develops this more). Sitting there in captivity, God offered His people a new covenant (Ez. 11:19,20,25 cp. Heb. 10:16); they could have one mind between each other, and a heart of flesh. But Israel would not, and it was only accepted by those who turned to Jesus Christ. Their being of "one heart" after baptism (Acts 4:32) was a direct result of their acceptance of this same new covenant which Judah had rejected. In the hearing of offer of the new covenant, we are essentially in the position of those of the captivity, hearing Ezekiel's words, and deciding whether or not to remain in cushy Babylon, or make a painful and humanly uncertain *aliyah* to Zion.

The promise here is that of the new covenant, to be repeated in Ez. 20 and Jer. 31. We now are in that covenant, and it has promise of psychological transformation, a new spirit, a new worldview; a heart of flesh, open and soft toward God rather than hardened towards spiritual things. If we are intended to achieve spirituality solely by Bible reading and study, then there would be no place for such promises of a new heart and spirit.

Ezekiel 11:20 *That they may walk in My statutes, and keep My ordinances, and do them: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God-* The new spirit given in the new covenant of :19 involved an inclination and proclivity towards obedience to God's ways. God doesn't simply leave man with His laws and waits for our obedience. He is eager to grant a spirit which desires to be obedient. This is why repentance as well as forgiveness is a gift of the Spirit (Acts 3:25,26; 11:18).

Ezekiel 11:21 *But as for those whose heart walks after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their way on their own heads, says the Lord Yahweh-* As noted on :16, Divine condemnation is a giving people that which is where their heart really is. The walk of their heart is here paralleled with their 'way' in practical life. We walk as our heart walks. There is a huge emphasis in the prophets upon being spiritually minded, and the parallel between thoughts and words / actions.

Ezekiel 11:22 *Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, and the wheels were beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above-* As the cherubim lifted up their wings, so Ezekiel was lifted up (:24); he was at one with the huge, awesome system of Divine working, as Israel could also have been.

Ezekiel 11:23 *The glory of Yahweh went up from the midst of the city, and stood on the mountain which is on the east side of the city-* The mount of Olives, from where the glory was intended to return to the city in Ez. 43:2. It never did, but it will do when the Lord Jesus returns to that mount (Acts 1:9-11) and it cleaves in half as Zech. 14:4 envisages.

Ezekiel 11:24 *The Spirit lifted me up, and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to them of the captivity. So the vision that I had seen went up from me-* Note how when the cherubim lifted up, so was Ezekiel lifted up (:22). Judah should have left Jerusalem when the Spirit told them to; and they should have upped and left Babylon when the Spirit told them to. But they were out of step with the Spirit, despite Ezekiel's acted parable of literally being lifted up and going where the Cherubim went. The equivalent of this for us is surely our sense of doing all for God's glory, of having this as the final deciding factor in all our decisions. See on Ez. 1:1,20; 10:8. We note in this context that it was an Angel who described to Ezekiel the nature of the temple which the exiles were intended to build; and we even read in Ezekiel 40:14 that "He made..." [e.g. the posts of the temple]. The Angels had potentially built that temple; it was for Israel to build according to the pattern of it.

Ezekiel 11:25 *Then I repeated to those of the captivity all the things that Yahweh had shown me-* Probably Ezekiel was still under house arrest amongst the captives. He was imploring them to repent and see the possibilities there were for them. It would have required a lot of humility to release him and respond.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 12

Ezekiel 12:1 *The word of Yahweh also came to me saying-* "Came" is also translated "came to pass". God's word is so certain of fulfilment that when it 'comes', it effectively 'comes to pass'.

Ezekiel 12:2 *Son of man, you dwell in the midst of the rebellious people, who have eyes to see, and don't see, who have ears to hear, and don't hear; for they are rebellious people-* Ezekiel was living amongst the captives in Babylon. They had the potential to respond to his message as intended, and to become the repentant remnant who would restore the Kingdom of God in Israel. But they would not respond. Because of this, there would be a further captivity of the people of Jerusalem (:3). It wasn't that the people still in Judah were being punished for the sins of those in exile; it was that the sinners in Judah could have been spared further punishment by the repentance of those in exile. So much can depend upon the spirituality of third parties; see on Mk. 2:5. The same was true of the Jews in Judah- they too had eyes to see but chose not to (Jer. 5:21).

They were "rebellious" in that they refused to mentally respond to Ezekiel's message. Their rebellion, like ours so often, was a case of a sin of omission rather than commission. Those taken into captivity were the royal family and the leadership, and so the allusion would have been to Saul and his family being rejected as kings of Israel because of his 'rebellion' against God's word through Samuel (1 Sam. 15:23 s.w.).

Ezekiel 12:3 Therefore, you son of man, prepare what you need for a journey into exile and move by day in their sight. You shall move from your place to another place in their sight- As explained on :2, the rebellion of the captives meant that they were not going to be able to spare those still in Judah from further invasion and captivity. And Ezekiel as "son of man" was representative not only of God but also of the sinful people of God, again typifying the work of the Lord Jesus. Ezekiel's acted parable was to make them "consider". They had already gone on the journey into exile; the message was that they could really avert this happening for others. And they were apparently unmoved by the possibilities they had for others.

Perhaps they will consider, though they are rebellious people- God had told Ezekiel at the start that his audience would not respond. But here we see the essential hopefulness of God for human response- "perhaps" they would respond. When we do respond, we thrill the heart of the God who must be so often disappointed. "Consider" is the common Hebrew word for 'to see'. Ezekiel was to act his parable "in their sight", in the hope they would "see". We have here the two kinds of sight, alluded to several times in John's Gospel. We are to 'see' spiritually the lessons behind what we 'see' with our natural vision.

Ezekiel 12:4 You shall bring forth your belongings by day in their sight, as belongings for exile; and you shall go forth at evening in their sight, as when men go forth into exile- This was to typify Zedekiah and the remnants of the Jerusalem leadership fleeing Jerusalem by night (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Zedekiah was to be punished for his sins by the attempt to flee, his capture and judgment by the Babylonians; but the full effect of his sins could have been lightened by the repentance of the exiles. And this principle is still true; the judgment of some people can be ameliorated by the spirituality of third parties.

Ezekiel 12:5 Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry your belongings out that way- Although Zedekiah and his family fled through "the gate between the two walls", we can assume that all the main gates of Jerusalem were being watched by the Babylonian besiegers, and so this "gate" would have been dug specially for them to flee by (Jer. 39:4; 52:7).

Ezekiel 12:6 In their sight you shall carry it on your shoulder, and carry it forth in the twilight; you shall cover your face, so that you don't see the land; for I have set you for a sign to the house of Israel- The disguise was to represent how Zedekiah and the remnants of the royal family would have tried to disguise themselves as they fled (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). See on :10. It was deep humiliation for Zedekiah; he himself had to carry his few belongings on his own shoulder rather than have servants carry them. It was all part of God's attempt to bring him down, that He might exalt him in due time.

Ezekiel 12:7 I did as I was commanded: I brought forth my belongings by day, as if for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my hand; I brought it forth in the dark, and carried it on my shoulder in their sight- Ezekiel was representing Zedekiah (:10). Perhaps he himself frantically dug through the wall with his own hands. If the wall could be dug through with hands, we see how flimsy were the defences of Jerusalem against the Babylonians. And yet the Jews had argued that Jerusalem was as strong as an iron cauldron, and the fire of Babylonian judgment could therefore never reach them; see on Ez. 11:3. In Ez. 13:14, the strength of

Jerusalem is spoken of as a wall built with bad mortar that was very weak. This had a connection with the literally weak wall of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 12:8 In the morning came the word of Yahweh to me, saying- "In the morning" after Zedekiah fled Jerusalem he was arrested. The morning after Ezekiel's symbolic exile from the house of his arrest, the observing Jews ought to have figured that now, he was as it were in captivity. They ought to have figured that he represented Zedekiah. And so this was now to be stated explicitly.

Ezekiel 12:9 Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?' - This was the intention of the acted parable; to elicit this question, even though in their consciences the answer was surely clear. As in Ez. 24:19, the question "What are you doing? / What do you mean?" was elicited; but this was followed by the direct revelation of God's word. And so it is in our witness; our lives elicit questions and pique interest from those around us, as a springboard toward the declaration of God's word to them.

*Ezekiel 12:10 Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh: This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem, and all the people of Israel who are in it' - Josephus (*Antiquities* 10:7) claims that Ezekiel sent a copy of this prophecy to Zedekiah. As Jeremiah had sent a letter to the captives at the Chebar, so it would be understandable if Ezekiel sent a message to Jerusalem confirming the warnings of Jeremiah.*

*Ezekiel 12:11 Say, I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done to them; they shall go into exile, into captivity- This was not merely prediction. The group of exiles had power over the outcome; if they had repented, the implication is that this need not have happened. Therefore we have the otherwise awkward change of pronouns from "I am *your* sign" to "so shall it be done *to them*". Ezekiel was a sign to those observing him in Babylon; and they were to respond to that sign by repentance, so that the outcome for "them" could be different.*

Ezekiel 12:12 The prince who is among them shall carry his belongings on his shoulder in the dark, and shall go forth: they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby- The "them" and "they" rather than "you" remind us that Ezekiel is saying this in captivity in Babylon. See on :11.

He shall cover his face, because he shall not see the land with his eyes- This looked ahead to how Zedekiah's eyes were put out (2 Kings 25:7). The way Zedekiah is described as "the prince" lays the basis for the later prophecies about "the prince" in Ez. 40-48. Had the exiles returned and rebuilt and operated the temple system as required there, another individual called "the prince" would have arisen. Perhaps the blind, repentant Zedekiah could have returned from exile and become the prince figure; this would then solve the otherwise strange prophecy of Is. 42:19, that the restored community would have had a blind leader. Likewise the exiles could have lived under the shadow of a great leader in exile (Lam. 4:20), fulfilling the prophecies of Messiah as a great tree. But none of those involved lived up to their potential.

Ezekiel 12:13 My net also will I spread on him, and he shall be taken in My snare- The Babylonian army is likened to a net in Hab. 1:14-16.

And I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there- "O Zedekiah... Thou shalt not die by the sword: but thou

shalt die in peace: and with the burnings of thy fathers... so shall they burn odours for thee" (Jer. 34:5) mentions no conditions. But consider the words of Ez. 12:13 about the same man; he would die in Babylon and he would be made blind before arrival. The surrounding verses give an accurate prophecy of how Zedekiah was captured whilst fleeing from Jerusalem. And the same is said in Jer. 32:4; 38:17. It surely has to be recognized that the 'prophecy' that Zedekiah would die in peace was conditional upon his obedience to the word of Jeremiah- even though those conditions aren't recorded (although they are implicit surely).

Ezekiel 12:14 I will scatter toward every wind all who are around him to help him, and all his armies; and I will draw out the sword after them- His personal bodyguard would scatter from him, and Zedekiah would be captured alone. This was the ultimate humiliation for a leader. And this is the nature of condemnation- intensely personal, when absolutely all human strength has been taken away. And Zedekiah fleeing from Jerusalem towards Jericho is picked up in the parable of the good Samaritan. We are all Zedekiah, beaten and injured because of our sins, but saved by the grace of the Samaritan.

Ezekiel 12:15 They shall know that I am Yahweh, when I disperse them among the nations, and scatter them through the countries- The curse for breaking the covenant was to be 'dispersed' to the Gentile world, where they would serve other gods as a punishment for having done so in Israel (Dt. 28:64 s.w.). But it seems God amended this judgment- He envisaged they would be 'dispersed' and there would know or recognize Him as God alone. But there is ample evidence that the exiles did worship idols for the next few generations. So the original curse of serving idols in captivity was the path Israel allowed to happen. But God had provided an alternative potential.

Ezekiel 12:16 But I will preserve a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may declare all their abominations among the nations where they come; and they shall know that I am Yahweh- The righteous remnant were actually persecuted by the other Jews in Babylon, according to the testimony of the later parts of Isaiah. One significant problem which they had right from the start was that they insisted that the captivity was unfair, it was not their fault, they were righteous and were being unfairly punished for the sins of their fathers. Ezekiel 18 addresses this at length with them. God's intention was that His exiled people would "declare all their abominations among the nations whither they come", i.e. the 127 provinces of Babylon (Ez. 12:16). The intention was that they would admit to all how they had sinned. Note how confession of personal failure and testimony to God's forgiveness is actually a powerful witness to unbelievers. But instead, Ezekiel had to reason against the Jews' insistence that they had not sinned, and were being unfairly punished for their fathers' sins by an unjust God (Ez. 18). And so likewise it happens with us all too often that the potential witness which we could make simply isn't made.

Ezekiel 12:17 Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me, saying- See on :1.

Ezekiel 12:18 Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink your water with trembling and with fearfulness- The geography of Jerusalem meant that there was always a problem with water whenever the city was besieged. The "trembling and fear" refer to the psychological breakdown related to the paranoia about

condemnation which was part of the curse for disobedience. But such paranoia was ultimately the fault of those who had chosen the way to condemnation. Ezekiel, the righteous, was here to feel and act like the condemned sinners. This was what it meant to be "son of man"; and the Lord Jesus as our representative felt the feelings of sinners and the condemned, whilst being holy, harmless and separate from sinners.

Ezekiel 12:19 And tell the people of the land- The reference is to the Jews in "the land" of Babylon. They are addressed because their repentance could have affected the outcomes for the Jews in "the land" of Judah.

Thus says the Lord Yahweh concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with fearfulness, and drink their water in dismay, that her land may be desolate, and all that is therein, because of the violence of all those who dwell therein- The "violence" as in their unloving attitudes to their brethren (Ps. 107:34). In the restored Zion, the princes were to not practice "violence" but instead justice, and make no demands ["exactions"] upon others (Ez. 45:9). It is this human tendency to demand of others, often through not forgiving them (Mt. 18:28), which is seen by God as violence. And it was this which led them to the "fear" and "dismay" which were part of the psychological breakdown which they were given; see on :18. "Dismay" translates the word usually translated 'desolation' with respect to the desolation of the land by the Babylonians (Lev. 26:22,31,32,34,35,43). The land would be desolated just as they as persons would be left desolated. Ezekiel as the representative of sinful Israel had sat 'desolate' by the rivers of Babylon (Ez. 3:15 s.w.). See on :18.

Ezekiel 12:20 The cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be a desolation; and you shall know that I am Yahweh- The reference is to the cities still left habitable after the earlier Babylonian incursions. But again, in wrath God remembered mercy. Not all the cities of Judah were destroyed; Jeremiah records how Mizpah was made the new capital under a Babylonian puppet ruler. As explained on Ez. 5:10; 11:15, probably only about 10% of the population were deported, agricultural activity continued and grain offerings were still brought to the site of the temple by men from Shiloh and Shechem (Jer. 41:5). This amelioration of the planned judgments may have been because of the intercession of Ezekiel and / or the repentance of a remnant.

Ezekiel 12:21 The word of Yahweh came to me, saying- See on :1.

Ezekiel 12:22 Son of man, what is this proverb that you have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every prophetic vision fails?- God knows every bit of small talk and the phrases people use in mockery. It was God's grace which had meant that the threatened judgments had not come. But they mocked at it, to the point of joking that prophecies of judgment never come true. The Jews in the land of Israel joked like this (also in Jer. 17:15; Zeph. 1:12), and those in captivity did likewise. It is common amongst people of all ages to assume that God's apparent slowness to act means that He never will do (2 Pet. 3:3,4). Just as the exiles thought that day by day had passed without Ezekiel's words coming true.

Ezekiel 12:23 Tell them therefore, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but tell them, The days are at hand, and the fulfilment of every prophetic vision- "Days" was really

literal; any day, the news would come of Jerusalem's fall and the destruction of the temple. The false prophets had been falsely claiming that the captivity would end within two years (Jer. 28:3). The "every... vision" in view may refer to all of Ezekiel's visions so far recorded. Or the idea may be that the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon was envisaged as the final and total fulfilment of the prophetic word of God so far given; but by grace, there was to be a restoration, and when this potential failed, then further destructions of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 12:24 For there shall be no more any false vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel- As noted on :23, there was the potential for the prophetic program to come to a finality in the destruction and restoration of Jerusalem under a Messianic king. This would have meant that literally, there would never again be false prophets in Israel. But the reality was different. That potential restoration didn't happen; and false prophets did continue within Israel. They will only finally be destroyed in the last days, when all these prophecies will come to their final term.

There were many false prophets at the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel; when in fact the true word of prophecy could have 'turned away' the captivity, if the exiles and the people left in Judah had responded to it (Lam. 2:14). Indeed it could have been that Zedekiah returned as "the prince" of the restored kingdom; see on Ez. 12:12. Ezekiel prophesied to the exiles in Babylon of what was going to happen to the Jews still in the land, exactly so that the exiles' repentance might avert those in the land suffering further. An ameliorated program of judgment and events would have been possible if they had repented.

Ezekiel 12:25 For I am Yahweh. I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall be performed. It shall be no more deferred; for in your days, rebellious house, will I speak the word, and will perform it, says the Lord Yahweh- There seems to be the suggestion that God 'speaks' a word / plan / intention; and when He decides to operationalize it, then He speaks it again- presumably in the court of Heaven. "Deferred" is the word used by Nehemiah in thanking God for his 'forbearance' (Neh. 9:30). Tragically, this forbearance of God was what led some to take the impression that He was not serious about judgment and was a God somewhat distant and disinterested. See on :28.

Ezekiel 12:26 Again the word of Yahweh came to me saying- See on :1.

Ezekiel 12:27 Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he sees is for many days to come, and he prophesies of times that are far off- They now apparently accepted that Ezekiel was a prophet, but comforted themselves that it would not come true in their times. We see here a classic case of how misinterpretation of God's word has a psychological and spiritual basis. Rather than accept the plain meaning of Ezekiel's message, that destruction in Jerusalem was imminent, they decided that the visions spoke of the far distant future.

Ezekiel 12:28 Therefore tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: None of My words shall be deferred any more, but the word which I shall speak shall be performed, says the Lord Yahweh- See on :25. The word was to be "performed" or literally 'done'. The same phrase is to be found in the lament that Israel would not perform or do God's word (Ez. 33:31,32). If we do not perform God's word, then He will perform it in our condemnation. The idea is that His word is so utterly certain of fulfilment (see on :1).

It is for us to as it were be on His side by performing it ourselves, seeing He will surely perform it one way or the other.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 13

Ezekiel 13:1 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying-* See on Ez. 12:1.

Ezekiel 13:2 *Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, Hear the word of Yahweh-* "Their own heart" is here parallel with "their own spirit" (:2). The spirit is the heart or mind. It is far too simplistic to claim that 'spirit = power'. See on :17.

Ezekiel 13:3 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit, though they have seen nothing!*- See on :2. This is an alliteration, because the words for "foolish" and "prophet" are so similar: the *nabiim* are also the *n'balim*. This kind of device is often used in the Bible because the vast majority of people encountering God's word were illiterate, and therefore we find many such aids to memorization of the text.

Ezekiel 13:4 *Israel, your prophets have been like foxes in the desert places-* This would imply that the men intended and inspired to be prophets actually became false prophets (:6). Hence they are likened to foxes, characterized by deceit. Their false prophecy, when they knew God's *true* word, was therefore the more culpable and awful.

Ezekiel 13:5 *You have not gone up into the gaps, neither built up the wall for the house of Israel, to stand in the battle in the day of Yahweh-* By speaking the true prophetic word of God, the gaps in the weak wall of Israel could have been filled in. "The day of Yahweh" would have come, but the walls of Jerusalem would have been able "to stand" rather than being breached and then burnt by the Babylonians. The false prophets had wrongly taught that Jerusalem was as strong as an iron cauldron and would preserve its people from the fire of Babylonian judgment (see on Ez. 11:3,7). The idea of filling in the gaps can be taken as a metaphor for intercession. Thus Moses "stood before Him in the breach" (Ps. 106:23) and caused God to alter His plan to totally destroy all Israel. Such language of utter desolation and destruction is likewise found in the earlier parts of Ezekiel, but it seems Ezekiel's own intercession changed some outcomes. But other prophets ought to have done this; instead they became false prophets and didn't go up into the gaps.

Ezekiel 13:6 *They have seen falsehood and lying divination, they who say, Yahweh says; but Yahweh has not sent them; and they have made men to hope that the word would be confirmed-* Heb. as RVmg. "they hope to confirm their word". By deceiving others, they came to deceive themselves, and were really expecting a fulfilment. This is the trouble with any form of lying; the liar comes to believe it is true. The true "hope of Israel" was the restoration from captivity after repentance; but this was being changed into a false hope, a kind of prosperity gospel, the Kingdom right now, without the need for humility and repentance.

Ezekiel 13:7 *Haven't you seen a false vision, and haven't you spoken a lying divination in that you say, Yahweh says; but I have not spoken?*- The very form of the question seeks for an answer. The purpose of it was therefore to elicit repentance. and apparently the question was met by silence, leading to the following woe upon the false prophets. "False", AV "vain", is a word often associated with the "vanities" of the idols. Their messages were inspired by the idols they worshipped (Zech. 10:2). These "lying divinations" are specifically defined as the "untempered mortar" with which the wall of Israel, its supposed defence, had been built (Ez. 22:28 s.w.).

Ezekiel 13:8 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have spoken falsehood and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, says the Lord Yahweh-* This is yet another example of Ezekiel telling the captives the same message as Jeremiah was at the same time telling the Jews still in Judah; "I am against you" is the threat of Jer. 21:5. They had 'seen' lies in their minds; they 'saw' what they wanted to see. And in this sense the psychology of the false prophets is a warning to us all.

Ezekiel 13:9 *My hand shall be against the prophets who see false visions, and who preach lies. They shall not be in the council of My people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel-* We learn in Ezra 2:63 and Neh. 7:65 that it wasn't possible for the priests to eat of the holy things [signifying God's acceptance of His people], because there was no record of their genealogy. Their names were not written in the "register" in fulfilment of Ez. 13:9: "neither shall they be written in the writing [s.w. 'register', Ezra 2:62] of the house of Israel". Only if a priest stood up with urim and thummim could they eat of the holy things. These were two engraved stones carried in a pouch in the breastplate which flashed out Divine decisions (see H.A. Whittaker, *Samuel, Saul And David* for an excellent study of this). Zechariah 3:9 prophesies that Joshua the High Priest would have the engraved stone with seven eyes- the urim and thummim. It would thereby have been possible for a priesthood who had lost their genealogy record during the sacking of the first temple to eat the holy things, and thus fulfil Ez. 42:13, which says that then the priests would eat the holy things. In a restoration context, Is. 66:21 had prophesied that Yahweh would regather Judah, "And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD". This implies, surely, that He would accept some as Levites who could not otherwise prove they were. Zech. 6:11,13 speaks of Joshua being crowned with the High Priestly mitre and 'bearing the glory', i.e. carrying the urim and thummim in the breastplate. But all this was *conditional* on Joshua's obedience: "This shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey" (6:15). Because Joshua failed, he didn't have urim and thummim, therefore no decision could be given about who was an acceptable priest, and therefore the 'Kingdom' prophecy of Ez. 42:13 was left unfulfilled. So much depended upon that man. And likewise, the eternal destiny of many others depends on us. Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration feature "the servant"- who was a symbol of both the people and a Messianic individual. His success was bound up with theirs. Thus Isa 65:9: "And I will bring forth a seed [singular] out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor [singular] of my mountains: and mine elect [plural] shall inherit it, and my servants [plural] shall dwell there". His obedience would enable the peoples' establishment as the Kingdom.

Neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and you shall know that I am the Lord Yahweh- Ezekiel told the captives during the early stages of their captivity that the false prophets and "rebels" amongst them would receive the condemnation and

judgment of not returning to the land (Ez. 13:9; 20:38). And yet when the command came to return to the land, most of the people chose to remain in Babylon- and therefore they chose their own condemnation. They were a "rebellious house" (Ez. 2:3). For they were aware from Ezekiel's words that not returning to the land was God's condemnation. Those who will not be in the Kingdom will be those who chose not to be there- all who truly love the Lord's appearing will be accepted. The fact Ezekiel tells the false prophets amongst the captives that they would not return to the land of Israel implies that they could have done, and that that generation could have returned. This meant that the 70 years captivity period was open to negotiation; it could have been reduced, if the first groups of exiles had repented.

When Moses asked to be removed from God's book or register, he was apparently not heard. But in reality, he was not allowed to "enter into the land of Israel". That was punishment for his personal sin, but whenever his sin and punishment is mentioned, he says that it was for Israel's sake. And so the punishment of not entering the land was not solely a punishment for his personal sin; it was used as a way of Moses bearing their condemnation, in line with his request to have his name blotted out from God's register. And here we have this thought confirmed- because not entering the land is paralleled with not being written in God's book / register.

Ezekiel 13:10 *Because, even because they have seduced My people, saying, Peace; and there is no peace; and when one builds up a wall, behold, they plaster it with whitewash-* "Peace" is usually 'peace with God'. But the idea may also be that they were predicting a peace agreement with Babylon. The false prophecies of peace at this time (Jer. 6:14; 23:17) are paralleled with idols speaking peace through the false prophets (Zech. 10:2). This is another indication that there was idolatry amongst the exiles, as predicted in Dt. 28:64. Israel's rejection of idolatry after the exile didn't come for a few generations. See on :18. The whitewash plaster was the false prophecy of peace (Ez. 22:28).

Ezekiel 13:11 *Tell those who plaster it with whitewash, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing storm; and on you great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall tear it-* The physical wall of Jerusalem was so flimsy that a man could dig through it with his bare hands (Ez. 12:7), and this reflected how weak was the wall which the false prophets were symbolically building. The language of the storm causing the fall of the wall is that of the Lord's second coming (Mt. 7:24,25). These prophecies had a limited application in what happened to Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. But the full extent of what was envisaged didn't fully happen. The final fulfilment is rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord's second coming.

Ezekiel 13:12 *Behold, when the wall has fallen, shall it not be said to you, Where is the plaster with which you have plastered it?-* The wall would fall when Zedekiah himself dug through it to escape the siege. Later, the walls were breached by the Babylonians; and then the "plaster" of the false prophecies was apparent for what it was. The same word is used of the plastering of a leprous house (Lev. 14:42,48); and the temple and house of Israel was indeed leprous, but there was no real plaster applied by the priests. Instead the leprous state was covered up, in a bodge job.

Ezekiel 13:13 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will even tear it with a stormy wind in My wrath; and there shall be an overflowing storm in My anger, and great hailstones in wrath to consume it-* "Tear" is the same word used for the 'breaking up'

of the city by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:4). The stormy wind connects with the rushing sound of the cherubim in the opening vision; the Angel cherubim were going to move the Babylon army from Babylon to Jerusalem just as easily as they could move the captives both to and from Babylon, back to Zion. "Stormy wind" is s.w. "whirlwind" in Ez. 1:4; "overflowing storm" is s.w. "the day of rain" in Ez. 1:28. If they chose to like Ezekiel identify with God's massive system of movement and operation. See on Ez. 26:10. The same words are used of the storm and hailstones [literally, 'hail of God'] to be cast upon Gog; what is done to Israel shall be done to her invaders (Ez. 38:22).

Ezekiel 13:14 *So will I break down the wall that you have plastered with whitewash-* "Whitewash" of "untempered mortar" (AV) is the word used of the "foolish things" seen by the false prophets at that time (Lam. 2:14). The whitewash represented the false prophecies, as in Ez. 22:28.

And bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation shall be uncovered- The word "foundation" is often used of the foundation or bottom of the altar. This was presumably removed to the foundation, so that in Jer. 41:5 those who remained in the land could only come there to offer grain offerings and not animal sacrifice. It was the Edomite mercenaries who urged this destruction to the foundation (Ps. 137:7 s.w.).

And it shall fall, and you shall be consumed in its midst: and you shall know that I am Yahweh- In reality, Zedekiah with his own hands dug through the very weak wall of Jerusalem; see on Ez. 12:7. That was how weak it was. God broke down the wall through the Babylonians, but in reality, the Jewish leadership broke it through with their own hands. And the wall rebuilt by Nehemiah and the Jews, which apparently fixed up every breach in it, was likewise overturned by Antiochus. But the wall of Babylon was to be broken down in the same way (Jer. 50:15 s.w.); what was done to Israel would be done to her invaders.

Ezekiel 13:15 *Thus will I accomplish My anger on the wall, and on those who have plastered it with whitewash; and I will tell you, The wall is no more, neither those who plastered it-* The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve

instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

Ezekiel 13:16 *Namely, the prophets of Israel who prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and who see visions of peace for her when there is no peace, says the Lord Yahweh-* There were false prophets both in Judah as the Babylonians approached, and also amongst those of them already in exile (Jer. 6:14; 8:11; Ez. 13:16). They were assuring the sinful people that in fact they were at peace with God, and that contrary to the prophetic message of desolation at the hand of the Babylonians, they would instead have "peace". This is described in Jeremiah as "lightly" healing the great wound or illness of Judah. That wound is described ambiguously; it was a wound or breach in themselves caused by God's smiting of them in the earlier Babylonian incursions (Jer. 14:19), but also caused by them to God Almighty. "Lightly" carries with it the idea of not serious, light hearted, superficial, trifling. And we must likewise beware of this kind of religion that is pedaled in the name of Christianity; not facing our personal issues, and using a few Bible words from here and there to superficially cover over the most fundamental issues of our eternal destiny. And this was and is so attractive. But sin and its consequences are far deeper than any superficial, light hearted covering. It requires nothing less than the blood and word of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 13:17 *You, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who prophesy out of their own heart; and prophesy against them-* So often it is the state of the human heart which is presented as of paramount interest to God. There is in all of us the tendency to blur the crucial boundary between the word of God and that of men. Ezekiel was to prophecy as it were the words of *God's* heart, whereas these women prophesied from *their own* heart. The heart is the Spirit; it is in this sense that the true word of God is 'inspired', those words reflect the spirit of God, His very heart, rather than the mind / heart / spirit of men.

Ezekiel 13:18 *And say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Woe to the women who sew magic wristbands for people and make magic scarves for everyone to wear on their heads, so that they can have power over other people's lives. You want to possess the power of life and death over My people and to use it for your own gain-* The ornamentation sounds like the "divining garments" of Cassandra, and the "garlands" or "fillets" of the Pythian priestesses. As noted on :10, there was idolatry going on amongst the exiles. Israel's rejection of idolatry after the exile didn't come for a few generations. This pagan headgear was later absorbed into Jewish religion in the exile, becoming the phylacteries and tallith of later Judaism.

Ezekiel 13:19 *You have profaned Me among My people in order to get handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to kill the people who should not die, and to save the people alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies-* These priestesses were paid in small amounts of bread and barley, appropriate to the poverty of the Jews at the time. It could be that they even practiced witchcraft to the extent of actually slaying the righteous. Or the idea may be that if the true word of prophecy had been preached, then the repentant would not have died. Instead, the false message of peace with God for sinners without repentance and reconciliation meant that those who otherwise would not have died, would die.

Ezekiel 13:20 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: I hate the wristbands that you*

use in your attempt to control life and death. I will rip them off your arms and set free the people that you were controlling- The bands on the arms were associated with pagan worship (see on :10) and became the tallith of later Judaism (see on :18). "Set free" or AV "to make them fly" implies the false prophetesses had caught the other Jews as birds in the snare of a fowler. Once the people were freed from this trap, they could as it were fly, and return to the land. The language of setting free the people from the hand of these people is that of the deliverance from Egypt, after which the people could begin their journey to the promised land (Ex. 5:23; 18:10).

Ezekiel 13:21 *I will rip off your scarves and let My people escape from your power once and for all; and you shall know that I am Yahweh-* As in primitive societies today, these fortune tellers and false prophets had real psychological power over people, even over "the righteous" (:22). In illiterate societies, it's far easier to get this kind of power. "Once and for all" is another of many implications that the envisaged judgment and restoration of the Kingdom was to be final and unprecedented. But in fact this didn't happen, and the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to our last days. And so there were many periods after the exile when again, the Jews fell under the power of such false teachers and sorcerers (Acts 8:9; 19:14).

Ezekiel 13:22 *Because with lies you have grieved the heart of the righteous, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, and be saved alive-* This is the language of Ez. 3:21; 18:9,17; the false prophetesses were stopping the repentance of the people in exile, and thereby stopping the fulfilment of all the great potentials. There was clearly a group called "the righteous" with Ezekiel in captivity, who had been duped by the false prophetesses. These "righteous" were heart broken ["sad"] at the supposed words of prophecy coming from the false prophets. They ought to have had the wisdom to discern them as false prophets, but they aren't rebuked for that. Rather the false prophets are condemned for breaking the hearts of the righteous. Perhaps the breaking of their hearts was in causing them to spiritually stumble.

Ezekiel 13:23 *Therefore you shall no more see false visions, nor practice fortune telling. I will deliver My people out of your hand; and you shall know that I am Yahweh-* The condemnation of "fortune telling" was because with the Babylonians poised to attack, the false prophets and prophetesses were telling people what they wanted to hear- that actually the desolation predicted by God through Ezekiel wouldn't happen. These false prophets were to "know that I am Yahweh". This could mean that they recognized His truth all too late; or that the knowledge of God's Name was to be proclaimed through their destruction.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 14

Ezekiel 14:1 *Then came certain of the elders of Israel to me, and sat before me-* They could have been the elders from Judah sent at the time of Jer. 51:59; but probably they were the elders of the Jewish community with Ezekiel in captivity. They are called "the elders of Judah" in Ez. 8:1; 20:1. But Ezekiel seems to intentionally use the terms Judah and Israel interchangeably, because it was the prophetic intention that the restoration from exile would finally end the division between them. They were to be bound together, as we should be, by the wonder of a

common experience of repentance, entry to the new covenant, the gift of the Spirit, and participation jointly in the things of grace resulting in the restored Kingdom of God. These elders apparently came to ask things from God through Ezekiel (:3); they had recently placed Ezekiel under house arrest and bound him. But now they come seeking God's word from him. This is typical human behaviour; acting aggressively toward those whom we in another part of our lives recognize to be genuine servants of God.

Ezekiel 14:2 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying-* This was in response to the 'coming' of the elders in :1.

Ezekiel 14:3 *Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their heart, and put the stumbling block of their wickedness before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?*- As mentioned earlier, it is incorrect to assume that the Jews quit idolatry in Babylon. They did not; it took a few generations after the restoration for them to do so. The Jews in Babylon with Ezekiel had "their idols", and yet God perceived that the essence of their idolatry was in their heart, their mental attitude. They, like many today, would never make spiritual progress because those attitudes were a stumblingblock to them, and before their face in their mental vision was their idolatry. God would not be inquired of by those who psychologically were focused elsewhere, despite their apparent desire to hear His word. And this is why so many complain that the Bible 'does nothing' for them and they find God somewhat unresponsive and distant. Indeed He will be, if our mental focus is upon other gods.

Ezekiel 14:4 *Therefore speak to them, and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Every man of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his wickedness before his face, and comes to the prophet; I Yahweh will answer him according to the multitude of his idols-* God would not be inquired of by these people (:3) but instead would allow their core beliefs and psychological focus be their answers. They were to lay stumblingblocks before themselves; but the contemporary Jer. 6:21 along with Ez. 3:21 says that *God* would lay the stumblingblocks before them. He confirmed them in the path they chose. Ez. 7:19 defines the stumblingblock as being specifically their love of wealth. Ez. 44:12 says that it was the priests who caused the people to stumble upon the stumblingblocks of idols just prior to the exile. Putting this information together, we can conclude that the underlying mental, spiritual reason for their idolatry was because they thought the fertility gods would give them immediate wealth, and the avaricious priesthood encouraged the people in this. For they too stood to benefit materially from it. Although physical idols may not be our temptation in these days, the spiritual essence of idolatry as portrayed here remains; for our society is focused upon wealth, and this is the stumblingblock which blocks mental vision, it is 'before his face', it is the idol of the majority of hearts.

Ezekiel 14:5 *That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from Me through their idols-* Israel had not become atheists nor had they formally rejected Yahweh. The elders had come to Ezekiel in order to hear God's word. But the essence of their literal idolatry was a mental attitude by which they were estranged from God. "Estranged" means literally to become as a stranger or Gentile; and they had done this through giving themselves to strange gods (Jer. 3:13

s.w.) and therefore they were to be taken into an estranged or strange, Gentile land (Jer. 5:19). By doing so they had estranged themselves from Yahweh by as it were marrying other gods (Ez. 16:32 s.w.).

Ezekiel 14:6 *Therefore tell the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Return and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations-* Quitting the literal idols is paralleled with no longer having the psychological idols before their faces, as they had in :4. If they 'returned' from those idols they had in Babylon, then they would be returned to Zion. They were restored, by grace, even though they didn't return from those idols. But they refused to respond even to that initiative. The question is what we turn our faces towards, the overall direction of our lives, the passion of our hearts- rather than individuals acts of obedience or disobedience, spiritual success or failure.

Ezekiel 14:7 *For each one of the house of Israel or of the foreigners who live in Israel-* To "live in Israel" can as well be translated "who sojourn among Israel". The context refers to Jews in Babylonian captivity, and perhaps there some Gentiles had come to 'sojourn among' them. Perhaps they were Gentiles placed in the same camps by the Chebar river.

Who separates himself from Me, and takes his idols into his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet to inquire for himself of Me; I Yahweh will answer him by myself- There was to be no response from Ezekiel; God would answer these people directly by condemning them. The words of the 'answer' in :8 are in fact quotations from the law of Moses about the punishment for idolatry, so the idea may be that God will not give any fresh answer as He has already answered in His word. But the LXX has "I the Lord will answer him, according to the things wherein he is entangled". The answer would be from their idols, and they would follow that answer to their condemnation. Their 'inquiry', coming to a prophet like Ezekiel, was at variance with the fact they had separated themselves from God by their mental fixation upon other gods. They 'came to' God externally, when they had gone away from Him and separated themselves from Him. Such contradictions are common amongst those who are solely religious and not spiritual.

Ezekiel 14:8 *I will set My face against that man, and will make him an astonishment, for a sign and a proverb-* This is a quotation from Lev. 20:3,6 about what should be done to those in Israel who worshipped idols. Clearly literal idolatry was going on amongst the exiles, although the essence of idolatry is within the mind, as the preceding verses made clear. See on :7.

And I will cut him off from the midst of My people; and you shall know that I am Yahweh- Being cut off from God's people is a common threat in the law of Moses. It could mean premature death by direct Divine intervention, or at least having no descendants; or that God would remove the person from the book of life; or it may solely refer to condemnation at the last day. We note from the Leviticus passages which speak about this that it is always God who removes members from His people; and not some disciplinary process amongst the person's brethren and fellow believers. This sets an important precedent for the church today, who have no power to excommunicate anybody from the body of true believers.

Ezekiel 14:9 *If the prophet is deceived when he speaks a word, I, Yahweh, have*

deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand on him, and will destroy him from the midst of My people Israel- Angels can give those who are closing their minds to the clear truth of the word the temptation to believe wrong things, in a similar way to which God through the Angels hardened Pharaoh's heart as a result of his own already hardened heart, and also were a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets in 1 Kings 22. Jeremiah says that "O LORD Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived (mg. 'enticed') (Jer. 20:7); although Jeremiah was not actually deceived in the prophecy he was given, it seems that he sensed there was a possibility that he had been, which is backed up by the Ezekiel reference. In 1 Kings 22:22, the Angels made the false prophets of Ahab to prophesy falsely. This fact is picked up in the New Testament by Paul saying it was possible for an Angel from Heaven to preach a wrong Gospel to them (Gal. 1:8). If it was fundamentally impossible for an Angel to do this, why does Paul say it? See on 2 Thess. 2:2; 1 Tim. 4:1; Is. 19:13,14; Ez. 20; 1 Jn. 4:1.

Ezekiel 14:10 *They shall bear their wickedness-* To carry sin means to bear and experience condemnation for sin. In this sense the Lord Jesus carried our sins; His death was a representative death for all those in Him. And thereby the punishment for our sins, death, was carried by Him in His death "for us". Unique amongst men, the Lord did not sin, and therefore was raised from that death, and thereby becomes the path to death and resurrection for all who in faith are baptized into Him and abide in the spirit of His death and resurrection.

The wickedness of the prophet shall be even as the wickedness of him who seeks him- It was not simply that the people were innocent and had been misled by the false prophets. There was an unconscious mutuality between people and false prophet; for the prophet said what he knew the people wanted to hear, and they came to him for confirmation in their evil way. Therefore all sectors of society were punished.

Ezekiel 14:11 *That the house of Israel may go no more astray from Me, neither defile themselves any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be My people, and I may be their God, says the Lord Yahweh-* The Divine intention was that Israel would never again go astray because the false prophets and influences were to be destroyed. But they did; the intended restoration and reestablishment of God's Kingdom in Israel didn't happen as it could have done. Being God's people and His being their God is the language of covenant relationship; a new covenant was offered to the exiles, but for the most part they refused it.

Ezekiel 14:12 *The word of Yahweh came to me, saying-* See on Ez. 12:1.

Ezekiel 14:13 *Son of man, when a land sins against Me by committing a trespass and I stretch out My hand on it, and break the staff of its bread and send famine on it and cut off from it man and animal-* This is one of a series of allusions in this section to the curses for breaking the covenant in Lev. 26. The connections are: "trespass" = Lev. 26:40; 'breaking the staff of bread' = Lev. 26:26; "wild animals" (:15) = Lev. 26:22; animals depopulating the land (:15) = Lev. 26:22; cutting off man and animal (:13,17,19) = Lev. 26:22; the land desolate (:16) = Lev. 26:33; a sword upon the land (:17) = Lev. 26:25; the sword passing through the land (:17) = Lev. 26:6; the plague (:19) = Lev. 26:25; the four judgments of :21 = Lev. 26:21,22. The old covenant was broken, by Israel; and this paves the way for God's offer of a totally new covenant to them in Ez. 20 and elsewhere. Had they built and operated the temple system as

commanded in Ez. 40-48, they would thereby have accepted the terms of that new covenant; which was markedly different to the law of Moses.

Ezekiel 14:14 *Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would save only their own lives by their righteousness, says the Lord Yahweh-* For the sake of our prayers, in some cases sins of others can be forgiven when otherwise they wouldn't be; see on Mk. 2:5 For the sake of our conversion of our erring brethren, they can be saved from eternal death and have their sins covered. The Lord's prayer says as much- we ask God to forgive us *our* sins; not 'me my sins'. Likewise only once Israel had passed a certain level of sinfulness was Jeremiah told to cease prayer for them (Jer. 7:16 cp. 11:14). Until that point, God seems to have been willing to read Jeremiah's prayer for them as their prayer (his "cry" was seen as theirs). And Ez. 14:14,18 imply the same- Noah, Daniel and Job could have delivered Israel up to a certain point, but they were *so* hardened in sin at Ezekiel's time that even those men wouldn't have saved a nation which otherwise, for a lower level of sin as it were, they could otherwise have saved. If we have any grain of love in us, we will likewise dedicate ourselves to fervent prayer for our brethren, seeing it does have effect and validity within certain boundaries.

Daniel was contemporary with Ezekiel and would have been known for his deliverance of his friends. But he is not named chronologically last. The order of mention is therefore significant. Noah saved his three sons and their wives; Daniel saved somewhat fewer, just his three friends; but Job could not save his own sons and daughters.

In Ez. 14:14, Ezekiel [already in exile] mentions Noah, Daniel and Job as well known righteous men who saved others. The prophecy in chapter 14 was in the sixth year of Jehoiachin's exile (Ez. 8:1) and before the capture of Jerusalem five years later (Ez. 14:21). Daniel went into exile in the third year of Jehoiakim's 11-year reign (Dan. 1:1), which was followed three months later by the beginning of Jehoiachin's exile (2 Kings 23:34). This would mean that Ezekiel mentions Daniel after Daniel had been in Babylon for 14 years. His example as a young man soon became legendary amongst the exiles; although the book of Daniel doesn't mention this.

Ezekiel 14:15 *If I cause evil animals to pass through the land and they ravage it and it be made desolate, so that no man may pass through because of the animals-* See on :13. The "If I cause..." suggests that the judgments in mind were still potential; they could have been averted by the repentance of the exiles.

Ezekiel 14:16 *Though these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, they should deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only should be delivered, but the land should be desolate-* The emphasis perhaps is upon those three men being "in it", within the land. The idea seems to be that even if such righteous men were found within the land of Judah, they could not avert the judgments planned- but the repentance of the exiles with Ezekiel could do so. This would be in line with the implications of this noted so far throughout the prophecy. This was why Ezekiel was telling the captives in Babylon in such detail about the fate of Jerusalem and the Jews still in the land. The exiles could affect the potential outcomes for that group by their repentance.

Ezekiel 14:17 *Or if I bring a sword on that land and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off from it man and animal-* See on :13. As noted on :15, the "If..."

suggests that this level of destruction was still not concretely decided upon. And indeed it seems that God did to some extent relent. For not all men and animals were cut off. There is archaeological evidence that agricultural activity continued in Palestine after the sacking of Jerusalem. Indeed, the inhabitants brought grain offerings to the site of the temple (Jer. 41:5).

Ezekiel 14:18 *Though these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, they should deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only should be delivered themselves-* I suggested on :16 that the emphasis perhaps is upon those three men being "in it", within the land. The idea seems to be that even if such righteous men were found within the land of Judah, they could not avert the judgments planned- but the repentance of the exiles with Ezekiel could do so.

Ezekiel 14:19 *Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out My anger on it in blood, to cut off from it man and animal-* See on :13. As noted on :15, the "If..." suggests that this level of destruction was still not concretely decided upon. And indeed it seems that God did to some extent relent. For not all men and animals were cut off. There is archaeological evidence that agricultural activity continued in Palestine after the sacking of Jerusalem. Indeed, the inhabitants brought grain offerings to the site of the temple (Jer. 41:5).

Ezekiel 14:20 *Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, they would save neither son nor daughter; they would save only their own lives by their righteousness-* I suggested on :16 that the emphasis perhaps is upon those three men being "in it", within the land. The idea seems to be that even if such righteous men were found within the land of Judah, they could not avert the judgments planned- but the repentance of the exiles with Ezekiel could do so. It is worth noting that Ezekiel spells "Daniel" slightly differently to how the word occurs elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Some have suggested a reference to the king Daniel mentioned in Ugaritic texts who was famed for his wisdom. But the context of saving others by personal righteousness seems to point to the Biblical Daniel.

Ezekiel 14:21 *For thus says the Lord Yahweh: How much more when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and savage animals, and the plague, to cut off from it man and animal!*- See on :13. These are four similar judgements to those ministered by the four living creatures in Rev. 6 and by the four Angel chariots of Zech. 6. There is reason to think that these creatures and chariots represent Angels; so it is worth speculating that whenever a group of four judgements are mentioned, there is a reference to the four cherubim Angels bringing them. Ezek. 6:15,17 mentions the same four judgements as 14:21, and describes them as "the evil arrows" sent by God- His "Angels of evil" (Ps. 78:49)? The context in Ez. 14 is God saying that even if Noah, Daniel and Job were in the land, they would not stop the judgements coming (v. 14,20). This seems to be directly referring to the Angels deciding to bring their judgements on Sodom (which typifies Jerusalem- Is. 1:10) despite a handful of righteous being there (Gen. 18:24). It is even possible that the "noisome beasts" of Ez. 14:15 which were to spoil the land in judgement are the four beasts/ living creatures of Dan. 7 controlling the various nations used to execute these judgements.

Ezekiel 14:22 *Yet, behold, therein shall be left a few who shall be carried forth, both*

sons and daughters. They shall come forth to you, and you shall see their way and their doings; and you shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought on Jerusalem, even concerning all that I have brought on it- The prophetic message to the exiles was "Comfort My people!" (Is. 40:1). Yet this comfort is that spoken of here in Ez. 14:22,23, where we read that the exiles would be comforted when they recognized the evil of Judah's ways and recognized that the judgment upon her had been just. But Is. 40 appears to be a message of unconditional comfort to the exiles- without specifically demanding their repentance. But even then, they still failed to accept it and respond; they preferred to stay in Babylon.

Ezekiel 14:23 They shall comfort you, when you see their way and their doings; and you shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, says the Lord Yahweh- The arrival of the final group of exiles was intended to elicit repentance in the group who were already there. They were intended to quit their position that the land and people of God were suffering unjustly, and to be provoked thereby to repentance. And yet they didn't. God has so many potential plans and hopes for us His people which don't come about. This is the greatest tragedy of the cosmos; and yet we who do seek to respond, albeit in weakness, are therefore His special joy.

Ezekiel is very clear that God's judgments upon His people were not at all "without cause" (Ez. 6:10; 14:23). But just as He gave them a bill of divorce and then destroyed it as if the reasons didn't exist any more (Is. 50:1,2), so the "cause" of the judgments was taken away. They were "oppressed without cause", God says, as He seeks to persuade the exiles of how totally He has dealt with their sin (Is. 52:3).

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 15

Ezekiel 15:1 The word of Yahweh came to me, saying- See on Ez. 12:1.

Ezekiel 15:2 Son of man, what is the vine plant more than any tree, the vine-branch which is among the trees of the forest?- The false prophets, who are the subject of the previous chapter, had argued that Jerusalem was somehow inviolate, it would be a cauldron protecting them from the fire of Babylonian judgment; and Judah were God's special people whom He would not allow to be totally destroyed. The same misplaced argument is used by some Christians today who seem to think that Israel is indestructible and ultimately inviolate. But the prophetic words of judgment for sin and disbelief did and will come true. The vine, clearly a symbol of Israel, was not of itself better than any of the other Gentile nations, "the trees of the forest". They were chosen by grace alone, and not because of their goodness or peculiar ability to do work for God (:3).

Ezekiel 15:3 Shall wood be taken of it to make any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?- Rom. 3:12 speaks of how there is "none that does good"- the Greek word essentially means profitable, useful. The contrast is with how we are all become "unprofitable"- none is profitable to God. It's not that nobody ever does any good deed; rather the idea is that we are like the vine tree, not useful of ourselves to God (Ez. 15:2-6) unless He justifies us and makes us useful in His service. The word for "pin" is often used of the pins or nails which held the tabernacle together. Ezra uses the same word for "pin" to describe how the returned exiles were only a

"pin" in the sanctuary by utter grace alone (Ezra 9:8). Vine wood of itself is not strong nor reliable. And so we are within God's purpose, His sanctuary. Only by grace and Divine patience are we used, as parents may delegate a task to very small children who likely will not perform it as required.

Ezekiel 15:4 *See, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire has devoured both its ends, and its midst is burned. Is it profitable for any work?*- The fire of final Babylonian judgment had not yet fully come. The ends of the vine wood nail had been burnt by the previous invasions, and now "its midst", Jerusalem and the temple, were to be burnt. But the judgment had as good as come, so sure is God's word of fulfilment. Vines are not profitable for "work"; only for fruit. And that fruit of the spirit was lacking.

Ezekiel 15:5 *Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work. How much less, when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned, shall it yet be of any use!*- There in Babylon they the one time dwellers in Jerusalem (:6) were as the vine tree, burned up and fit for no work; and yet, still used to perform God's work, by grace alone. And these men were truly types of us, saved by grace and not works. It would seem impossible that a charred piece of vine wood could be useful for anything; but this was God's purpose, to use the apparently useless to reestablish His Kingdom in the land. The allusion is to God's manifestation in the burning bush, similar wood to that of the vine tree; and the bush was burnt but not "devoured" (Ex. 3:2 s.w.).

Ezekiel 15:6 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: As the vine plant among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem-* The vine wood nail is described as already burnt in :4, so certain was God's word of fulfilment; but here, that final burning is yet future. We need to give due weight to the fact that God's words of judgment are as good as done. The prophetic word in Jeremiah's mouth was like fire, and it was the people who were to be "devoured" by it (Ez. 15:5; s.w. Jer. 5:14; 17:27; 21:14). The amazing grace explained in Ez. 15 was in the fact that the 'devoured by fire' vine twig would be refined in Babylon and still used by God to reestablish His Kingdom.

Ezekiel 15:7 *I will set My face against them; they shall go forth from the fire, but the fire shall devour them; and you shall know that I am Yahweh, when I set My face against them-* A vine twig or nail would be easily burnt up. The preservation of this charred twig was by grace alone; see on :3. But perhaps the idea is as in the Lord's parable of the vine in Jn. 15. Some fruitless branches were cut off by the vinedresser so that better fruit would be brought forth on other branches. The hope was that the cutting off of Jerusalem would bring forth spiritual fruit in the exiles already in Babylon. But this didn't happen, and so the Lord in Jn. 15 reapplies that figure to all believers in Him who shall bring forth the required fruit.

Ezekiel 15:8 *I will make the land desolate, because they have committed a trespass, says the Lord Yahweh-* And yet by grace, the land was not totally desolated. See on Ez. 5:10; 11:15.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 16

Ezekiel 16:1 Again the word of Yahweh came to me saying- See on Ez. 12:1.

Ezekiel 16:2 Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations- Perhaps Ezekiel gave some of his prophecies in Jerusalem and others to the community of captives in Babylon, being transported between them by the cherubim. Or maybe the prophecies were taken to Jerusalem and read there. But Zech. 2:7 addresses the exiled community as "Zion who dwells in Babylon" (Zech. 2:7). They were the daughter of Zion, and should have returned there and had Zion in their hearts rather than Babylon. As Ez. 18 makes clear, the captives considered they had done nothing wrong, and God was judging Judah too harshly. So they needed the conviction of sin which powerfully follows in this prophecy.

Ezekiel 16:3 And say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh to Jerusalem: Your birthplace is in the land of the Canaanite; the Amorite was your father, and your mother was a Hittite- The idea seems to be that the Jews were [and are] quite wrong to claim that they were ethnically different from the surrounding nations, and thereby enjoyed Yahweh's special protection and interest. The Jews were not ethnically pure; Ephraim and Manasseh were half Egyptian, and they had a long history of intermarriage. They were chosen as God's special people by grace, beloved for their fathers' sakes, and not because God for some reason took a liking to their genetic structure. And morally they had acted no better than the Canaanite tribes, indeed they had done worse. They shared the same low moral culture; they were as Amorites and Hittites. And they were cast out of the land for their wickedness (Gen. 15:16). Judah now could expect the same. Jerusalem or Jebus was originally a Canaanite city; for this prophecy is specifically about Jerusalem. She was born as an Israelite city out of Canaan, as it were, and her subsequent immorality showed that she continued the similarities. She had not been reborn of the Spirit as God had intended.

The Jews would immediately have been provoked by Ezekiel's claim that their parents were not Abraham and Sarah, but a nameless Amorite and a Hittite woman, one of the "daughters of Heth" so spiritually despised by Rebekah. This was how they had acted; they lacked the faith of Abraham and Sarah and so were not their children. The Lord used a similar approach in claiming that the Jews were not the true seed of Abraham because they refused to accept his seed.

Ezekiel 16:4 As for your birth, in the day you were born your navel was not tied neither were you washed in water to cleanse you; you weren't salted at all, nor swaddled at all- Ezekiel defines Jerusalem's "birth" as of Canaan, whereas the Jews would naturally have considered it more appropriate to trace their origins of birth to Abraham. But they lacked Abraham's faith and spirituality and therefore they were likened to the Canaanites rather than Abraham when it came to origin and characteristic. This kind of intentionally shocking language and reasoning is to continue throughout this chapter. The lack of care for the newborn Israel suggests that those who ought to have cared for her, did not. And their lack of care was shocking. This speaks of how the priestly classes had not cared for Israel. It was God who had Himself cared for them.

Ezekiel 16:5 No eye pitied you to do any of these things to you, to have compassion on you; but you were cast out in the open desert, because your existence was despised in

the day that you were born- Moses is set up as example and representative of his people Israel. Israel is likened in Ez. 16:5 to a child rejected at birth, but miraculously found and cared for, and brought up with every pampered blessing. Just as Moses was. Stephen described the 'putting out' of Moses with the same word used in the LXX for what happened to Israel in Ezekiel 16 (Acts 7:21; Ex. 2:3 LXX). But the casting out of the unwanted child into the "open desert" recalls Hagar and Ishmael. As noted on :3, there was no reason to think that Israel were better than Ishmael. The seed was "called" in Isaac, but that was by grace alone; for Ishmael was as much the seed of Abraham as was Isaac, according to the flesh.

The LXX suggests that the reason why the parents of this sad baby weren't interested in it was because it was born deformed. It was usual to cast away a clearly deformed child: "Thou wast cast out on the face of the field, because of the deformity of thy person, in the day wherein thou wast born".

Ezekiel 16:6 When I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you, Though you are in your blood, live; yes, I said to you, Though you are in your blood, live- The newborn deformed child (:5 LXX) was wallowing or 'squirming' in its birth blood, apparently choking to death in it- cast out to die. And God had mercy when nobody else would, and saved it. God had the power to give life to that dying, deformed child. And He could breathe His Spirit into the dead bones of the exiles and likewise make them "live", as described in Ez. 36. He can bring beauty and usefulness to Him out of nothing, just as explained in the story of the charred vine wood in Ez. 15. He shows a grace nobody else would show, not even a mother to her newborn child. That perhaps is why at times we have trouble understanding and believing it- because it is beyond our human experience. Our greatest experience of love was that of our mother at birth. But God's love is here portrayed as far exceeding that.

Ezekiel 16:7 I caused you to multiply as that which grows in the field, and you increased and grew great, and you attained to excellent beauty; your breasts were fashioned, and your hair was grown; yet you were naked and bare- God never forgot their pathetic beginnings, and He wished them never to forget them either. Jacob entered Egypt with 70 people, but multiplied very rapidly there. If we ask what it was that was attractive about Israel, it was her religion. For the items of beautification mentioned are all allusive to the tabernacle. This deformed at birth woman was made strangely beautiful by God, so much so that He married her.

Ezekiel 16:8 Now when I passed by you and looked at you, behold, your time was the time of love; and I spread My skirt over you, and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore to you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord Yahweh, and you became Mine- This was the covenant at Sinai which was originally offered to them in Egypt (Ez. 20:5). Time and again God's love made Him re-think and alter His plans. Ez. 20:9,10 explains that God intended to destroy Israel in Egypt because of their idolatry, and so He decided to bring them out into the wilderness and destroy them there so as not to do it in Egypt and give the Egyptians a reason to mock Him. And yet according to Jeremiah and Ez. 16:5-10, it was in the wilderness that God fell in love with Israel and gave them His covenant. He is attracted to us so easily; hence His anger when we abuse this and disappoint Him. To spread the garment over was a sign of betrothal and care, as done by Boaz to Ruth.

The covenant is described as being made in Egypt (Ez. 20:5) to heighten the similarity with the exiles now in Babylon, who were being offered a new covenant, and then the possibility of leaving Babylon / Egypt and entering the land again.

Ezekiel 16:9 Then washed I you with water; yes, I thoroughly washed away your blood from you, and I anointed you with oil- This suggests the anointing of the priests. Perhaps the group known as "Jerusalem" here particularly refers to the priesthood, who along with the royal family were to be taken into captivity and judged so severely for their failures towards God's people. But there may also be an allusion to marital rites involving washing and anointing with oil such as in Ruth 3:3; the day before the wedding is described in the Ur Excavation Texts 5.636 as a "day of bathing". The washing away of blood would then refer to menstrual blood, or perhaps the bleeding after the first act of intercourse. But what the bride usually did to herself, God did to her, in this metaphor. All through, we see God taking the initiative, ever seeking to force through His love for the bride whilst she was at least vaguely willing to go through with it. And this God is our God, not passively waiting for us to jump various bars or reach certain levels before He shows any interest in us. Israel were commanded to wash their clothes before entering the covenant at Sinai, but here we read that God in fact washed them. We wonder if they were actually obedient to that commandment; but God as it were did it for them.

Ezekiel 16:10 I clothed you also with embroidered work, gave you shoes of sealskin, dressed you with fine linen, and covered you with silk- This is all the language of the tabernacle (Ex. 26:36; 27:16; 28:39; 35:35; 36:37; 38:18); "sealskins" are only spoken of in that context. Again the focus of the criticism is upon the priesthood and the abuse of the sanctuary for idolatry. Following on from the marriage or engagement allusion in :9, the idea was that the entire tabernacle system was in order to enable Israel to be the wife of God Himself. It was far from mere ritual for the sake of it.

The rabbis make the point that :10-19 list 13 things God gave Israel. Ex. 25:4-7 list 13 things He asked for in response, in order to build the tabernacle. They gave to Him and He used those things to make them spiritually beautiful before Him.

Ezekiel 16:11 I beautified you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands and a chain on your neck- The girl had been born deformed, so badly so that her mother cast her out into the scrub to die from choking on her own birth blood (:5 LXX). She therefore had to be beautified, rather than being natural beautiful from birth. It was God who beautified her. And as noted on Ez. 15, there was no place for Israel to think that they were somehow born pleasing to God, that they had some genetic inheritance which He found so attractive. Their beauty to Him is presented as being of His own creation and device, rather than arising from Israel independently by nature. All this speaks of how righteousness is imputed to us in Christ, we are clothed upon with it as in the parable of the wedding garment, having nothing of ourselves but dirty rags.

Ezekiel 16:12 I put a jewel on your forehead, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head- This recalls the high priestly attire. The Jerusalem temple was beautiful to God, the desire of His eyes (Ez. 7:20; 24:16). She was crowned... the queen of God Almighty. That she should turn to adultery and prostitution is to this day an unthinkable tragedy.

Ezekiel 16:13 Thus you were decked with gold and silver; and your clothing was of

fine linen, and silk, and embroidered work; you ate fine flour, honey and oil; and you were exceedingly beautiful, and you prospered to become a kingdom- The language so far has alluded to the tabernacle and the priesthood. It was God's intention that all Israel should become a nation or kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:5,6). A husband's duty was to provide his wife with food; and God did this excellently for His priesthood. For it was they who ate the fine flour, honey and oil of the sacrifices. Ezekiel as a priest would have been keenly touched by this condemnation of the priesthood.

Ezekiel 16:14 Your renown went forth among the nations for your beauty; for it was perfect on account of My majesty which I had put on you, says the Lord Yahweh- The high priestly clothes were for glory and beauty (Ex. 28:2). God as it were made them righteous and beautiful; He clothed them with His imputed majesty. The reference is to how the fame of Israel spread even to the queen of Sheba in Solomon's time.

Ezekiel 16:15 But you trusted in your beauty and played the prostitute because of your renown, and poured out your prostitution on everyone who passed by; his it was- The beauty which they had been given was only in God's eyes. They trusted in it in that they assumed that with such love and acceptance by God as their husband, they were free to do as they wished. This was the mentality of the false prophets of Ez. 14- they were confident that whatever they did, God would not suffer Jerusalem to fall and the temple to be destroyed. The logic of the argument and metaphor here seems to suggest that the nations were attracted to Jerusalem because of her beauty, the beauty placed upon her by God, and she slept with them in worshipping their idols. Perhaps indeed the religion of Israel was attractive and fascinating to the pagan nations; it certainly was intended to be, for Israel were to be the light of the Gentile world. But instead of showing them the light, those people were welcomed into the temple and taught Israel their ways, resulting in idol worship within Yahweh's temple.

Ezekiel 16:16 You took of your garments and made for yourselves high places decorated with various colours, and played the prostitute on them: such things shall not come, neither shall it be so- The "high places" were likened to prostitutes' tents built from the garments given by God to Israel. They mixed pagan idolatry with the things connected with Yahweh worship. For those garments given alluded to the priestly garments.

Ezekiel 16:17 You also took your beautiful jewels of My gold and of My silver which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men and played the prostitute with them- "Images of men" is literally, phallic symbols. They took the jewels associated with the breastplate of Yahweh's glory and turned them into models of a penis and worshipped them. Within God's temple. This was perhaps an insight into things Ezekiel himself was unaware of, but it was part of the program of convicting Jerusalem of her sin (:2).

Ezekiel 16:18 And you took your embroidered garments and put them on the images, and set My oil and My incense before them- The intimate gifts which were to be part of the private commitment between husband and wife were used by this wife in order to get other men to sleep with her. This speaks of how Israel, at the hands of the priesthood, mixed Yahweh worship with idolatry. They sacrificed what was to be sacrificed to Him, to the phallic symbols and idols of :17. Again we note it was the

priests who offered the incense; it is they who are particularly addressed here. It is appropriate that the appeal was made by a priest, Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 16:19 My bread also which I gave you- The sacrifices are called God's bread or food, and were given to the priesthood.

Fine flour, and oil, and honey, with which I fed you, you even set it before them for a pleasant aroma; and thus it was, says the Lord Yahweh- The fine flour, oil etc. was what was to be offered upon Yahweh's table, His altar. But the meal they provided there for God was actually given to them by God; He fed them with it. So the point was made that all we offer to God is only giving back to Him what He has given us (1 Chron. 29:14)- a powerful reason for generosity to Him.

"Pleasant aroma" is the phrase often used for the "pleasant aroma" of sacrifices to Yahweh- three times in Exodus, seventeen in Leviticus, seventeen in Numbers. As a priest, Ezekiel would have been aware of this. But instead, they offered this to the idols (Ez. 6:13). The Divine hope (see on Ez. 6:9), the desperate hope of the unrequited lover for the beloved, was that a repentant remnant would realize this and then offer "pleasant aroma" again to Him alone (Ez. 20:41). But they didn't.

Ezekiel 16:20 Moreover you have taken your sons and your daughters whom you have borne to Me, and you have sacrificed these to them to be devoured. Was your prostitution a small matter- It was the priesthood who actually performed the sacrifices. "Your sons..." become in :21 "My children". Our children are His children, and we must ever remember that. The Jews became so obsessed with idol worship that they sacrificed their baby children to the idols; when Yahweh had instead taken such pity upon them, when they were an abandoned newborn baby. The devouring of their babies was to be reflected in the devouring of their land by the invaders. The intention of this gripping passage in Ez. 16 was to convict Jerusalem of her sins (:2); because they considered their spiritual and literal prostitution "a small matter". The same word is used in accusing the priesthood of considering it "a small matter" for the flock to have been ruined by them (Ez. 34:18). This was the problem, as it is today- the real implications of attitudes and behaviour are not taken seriously. We fail to perceive how deeply we affect both God and man. Society makes us feel insignificant cogs, but we are not like that to God. This was the problem with Ezekiel's audience; they had a light hearted approach to eternal issues. To them, sin was a light thing (Ez. 8:17; 22:7). This was the role of the prophets, to convict people of the gravity of their sins and positions, and the consequences to come.

Ezekiel 16:21 That you have slain My children and delivered them up, in causing them to pass through the fire to them?- "My children" may be a reference to circumcision, the sign of the covenant. Excavations of the Elephantine community reveal that the exiled Jews mixed Yahweh and Baal worship to such an extent that they believed that Yahweh, like Baal, had a consort called Anat. Inscriptions from Qumran show the names Yahweh and Baal mixed together, including one which appears to speak of "Yahweh and his asherah". Ez. 16:21 and Ez. 23:39 are quite specific about this anyway- Israel offered sacrifice to idols in Yahweh's own temple.

Ezekiel 16:22 In all your abominations and your prostitution you have not remembered the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, and were wallowing in your blood- To remember the days of our spiritual youth is critical; if we

forget our cleansing from past sins then we lose all spiritual focus (see on 2 Pet. 1:9). They had forgotten that they once were newborn, disabled children, abandoned to death but saved by grace. And that lack of awareness of their own frailty led them to lose all conscience in how they treated others.

Ezekiel 16:23 It has happened after all your wickedness (woe, woe to you! says the Lord Yahweh)- All the other sins were nothing compared to the climax of their sin which :24 describes.

Ezekiel 16:24 That you have built for yourselves a vaulted place, and have made yourselves a high place in every street- The vaulted place refers to rooms for prostitution. These were in "every street", shrines for idol worship; but the supreme "vaulted place" was the temple, which had been turned into a centre of literal and spiritual prostitution. This "vaulted place" was to be 'thrown down' (:39), so it clearly speaks of the temple. Ezekiel had been shown the elders worshipping the sun and idols within the temple, so it could really be that the temple had been turned into a huge brothel, all the worse for it being done in the name of Yahweh worship. Ezekiel uses this term "vaulted place" for the altar (Ez. 43:13 s.w.). Prostitution was often carried out before an altar; so it could be that it was being practiced actually around the altar in the temple.

Ezekiel 16:25 You have built your lofty place at the head of every street, and have made your beauty an abomination, and have opened your feet to everyone who passed by and multiplied your prostitution- "Opening the feet" is an allusion to a lewd gesture of a prostitute in spreading her legs wide. The crudeness is shocking to us, and it must have been far more so to the far more conservative society of Ezekiel's time. These shock tactics were to achieve the aim expressed in :2, of getting Jerusalem [as well as the exiles already in Babylon, the primary audience] to appreciate the seriousness of what was going on.

Ezekiel 16:26 You have also committed sexual immorality with the Egyptians your lustful neighbours, and have multiplied your prostitution, to provoke Me to anger- Those mentioned as her partners were those with whom Jerusalem sought political alliances, rather than depending upon Yahweh. Those alliances may have been made with the agreement to worship the gods of the protecting power, as Ahaz did with the Assyrians. And those worship systems may have involved literal prostitution with women from those nations. The attempted alliance with Egypt is spoken of in Jer. 2:18,36.

Ezekiel 16:27 See therefore, I have stretched out My hand over you and have diminished your allotted portion of food, and delivered you to the will of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who are ashamed of your lewd way- We would expect God to have immediately destroyed Judah for such abominations; but He firstly just diminished their food, through the famines and lack of food that arose after the first Babylonian incursions. This "allotted portion of food" is the duty the husband had to provide food for his wife, and he was not to "diminish" it if he took another wife (s.w. Ex. 21:10). But God did diminish it; He can do what we cannot, because He is not bound by His laws in a legalistic sense.

Ezekiel 16:28 You have played the prostitute also with the Assyrians because you

were insatiable; yes, you have played the prostitute with them, and yet you weren't satisfied- None of the political / military alliances provided Judah with what she wanted; safety from the Babylonians and confident freedom. That was only possible from Yahweh Himself. Being unsatisfied was one of the psychological curses for disobedience to the covenant (Lev. 26:26); whereas eating bread "to the full", being 'satisfied' [s.w.], was the blessing of obedience to it (Dt. 6:11 and often). The life of satisfying the flesh ends in dissatisfaction, at the end of a life spent ever more desperately seeking that satisfaction and never finding it. That is the great paradox. Only going God's way leads to satisfaction.

Ezekiel 16:29 You have moreover multiplied your prostitution to the land of merchants, to Chaldea; and yet you weren't satisfied with this- They had been dishonest with the Babylonians, making agreements with them, accepting their gods and pretending sole loyalty to them, whilst doing just the same with the Egyptians and Philistines; and whilst claiming they were solely devoted to Yahweh as the one and only God. As noted on :28, this in essence is the sad way of life chosen by many today.

Ezekiel 16:30 How weak is your heart, says the Lord Yahweh, since you do all these things, the work of an impudent prostitute- Typical of the prophets, the essence is correctly perceived as the heart, the mind. The worst idolatry and prostitution is only a reflection of the state of the heart. "Weak" translates the word usually translated "languish"; the people and land were to languish physically because that was the state of their hearts (Is. 24:4; 33:9; Jer. 14:2). But this is where the power of God's Spirit can transform human behaviour in practice; because the heart or spirit is of the essence.

Ezekiel 16:31 In that you build your vaulted place at the head of every street, and make your high place in every street, and have not been as a prostitute, in that you scorn pay- Like drug addicts, what began for personal pleasure ended up a mad obsession. Instead of being paid by her paramours, she paid them. The same degeneration into sexual addiction is portrayed in Hosea, where Gomer's behaviour is that of Israel.

Ezekiel 16:32 A wife who commits adultery! Who takes strangers instead of her husband!- "Strangers" is literally 'Gentiles'. And the tragedy was that she had the best of all husbands- God Himself. The simple shock and disgust of it is shouted out in these simple words. And that is true of us if we turn to the many idols of this world, remembering the earlier observation that the idols are essentially in our hearts.

Ezekiel 16:33 They give gifts to all prostitutes; but you give your gifts to all your lovers and bribe them that they may come to you on every side for your prostitution- As suggested on :34, this payment was finally in the form of allowing the nations to have their idols in the Jerusalem temple. This was the "bribe" paid for them to offer military and political protection. And so the harlotry was not simply from the lust of the flesh; but like all sin, the essential reason was lack of faith in God.

Ezekiel 16:34 You are different from other women in your prostitution, in that no one follows you to play the prostitute; and whereas you give hire, and no hire is given to you, therefore you are different- The idols of Judah are described with this same

word, "pay", which refers specifically to the hire of a harlot (Mic. 1:7). It seems the "hire" Judah paid was in allowing the idols of the nations into the temple of Yahweh.

Ezekiel 16:35 Therefore, prostitute, hear the word of Yahweh- The prostitute was to be judged. This is the language of court proceedings.

Ezekiel 16:36 Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Because your filthiness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered through your prostitution with your lovers; and because of all the idols of your abominations, and for the blood of your children that you gave to them- This repeats the complaint of Jer. 2:34: "In thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents". God had saved the infant Israel when she was in her blood; but she had poured out the blood of her children to the idols, totally refusing to remember God's saving grace toward her in infancy. We note here again the parallel between idolatry and prostitution. There was a literal connection, in that idolatry required sleeping with the cult prostitutes; but clearly the prostitution was of the heart. The open 'uncovering' of her prostitution is in the context of this section being the court proceedings against the prostitute (see on :35). "Uncovered" is the word usually used for going into exile, as the captives were initially marched off in a state of undress. But this was to be only a reflection of what they themselves had done to themselves.

Ezekiel 16:37 Therefore see, I will gather all your lovers, with whom you have taken pleasure, and all those who you have loved, with all those who you have hated; I will even gather them against you on every side, and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness- The metaphors used to describe the anger of God with Israel are pretty awful. Her children to be slain with thirst, she was to be stripped naked by her husband (Hosea 2), gang raped by her lovers, having her nose cut off and left a battered, bleeding mess in the scrubland (Ez. 16,23), to have her skirt pulled up over her head and her nakedness revealed (Jer. 13:20-27), wishing to pluck off her own breasts for shame (Ez. 23:34). Jerusalem is to be raped, violated and humiliated, according to Ezekiel. Indeed, Ezekiel's images verge at times on what some would consider pornographic. He speaks of the woman Israel's pubic hair, breasts, menstrual cycle (Ez. 16:7,10); the gang rape by her enemies which God would bring about, leaving her mutilated and humiliated (Ez. 16:37; 23:22-49); about the size of her lovers' sexual organs and coital emissions, and how she let them fondle her breasts (Ez. 23:8,20). This is shocking language, which perhaps we skip over in our Bible reading from sheer embarrassment- and we are modern readers brutalized by exposure to this kind of stuff in the media. For early Israel, it would all have been even more shocking. It all seemed out of proportion to having 'merely' made a few political alliances with Egypt and Assyria. Was that really like a wife letting other men fondle her breasts and have sex with her, admiring their bodies as she did so? Did it all have to end in such brutality and vulgarity? Today, sex and violence are what attract attention. From lyrics of songs to advertising and movies, that's clear enough. And the prophets are using the same tactics to arrest Israel's attention, all the more so because nudity and sex were things simply not up for public discussion. There's an anxiety which any talk about sex seems to arouse in us, and it was the prophets' intention to make us likewise get on the edge of our seats, anxious, rapt, sensitive for the next word... realizing that really and truly, this is what human sin does to God. The outrageous sex talk was to bring out how outrageous and obscene are our sins and unfaithfulness to the covenant we cut with God in baptism.

Ezekiel 16:38 I will judge you, as women who break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy- Such women were destroyed by stoning, and the Babylonians catapulted stones at Jerusalem, and the burnt her with fire as a whore was to be destroyed. Let's remember that God's own law was pretty clear about adultery. The adulterous woman was to be punished with death- for one act of adultery. Even if she repented. And in any case, it was a defiling abomination [according to the Mosaic Law] to remarry a divorced wife. But Hosea doesn't keep the law. He lets his wife commit multiple acts of adultery, and he still loves her and pleads with her- even though he was a man in love with God's law. And this reflects the turmoil of God in dealing with human sin, and His sinful people. Hosea outlines his plan in Hosea 2. He will hamper her movements so she can't find her lovers; if she does find them, he will take away her food and clothing, so she appreciates his generosity to her; and if she still doesn't return, he will expose her naked and shamed in front of her lovers. But there's no evidence Hosea ever did that. He just... loved her, was angry with her as an expression of that love, loved her yet more, yet more... And this perhaps too reflects God's mind- devising and declaring judgments for Israel, which are themselves far less than what He has earlier stated in His own law, and yet the power of His love means He somehow keeps bearing with His people. Even in the context of speaking of His marriage to Israel, God says that He will punish them "as women that break wedlock are judged" (Ez. 26:38; 23:45). And yet, He didn't. His love was too great, His passion for them too strong; and He even shamed Himself by doing what His own law forbade, the remarriage to a divorced and defiled wife. Perhaps all love involves a degree of paradox and self-contradiction; and a jealous, Almighty God in love was no different. This, to me, is why some Bible verses indicate God has forsaken Israel; and others imply He hasn't and never will. Somehow, even right now, the Jews you meet... are loved still by their God. And he still fantasizes, in a way, over their return to Him. Imagine His utter joy when even one of them does in fact turn to Him! That alone motivates me to preach to Israel today.

Ezekiel 16:39 I will also give you into their hand, and they shall throw down your vaulted place, and break down your lofty places- As noted on :24, the temple had become a fornication chamber, both literally and spiritually, in that idols were worshipped there. This was to be done by the very lovers whom she had given gifts to- the Babylonians.

And they shall strip you of your clothes, and take your beautiful jewels; and they shall leave you naked and bare- The connection is with how the infant Israel as a disabled child had been thrown out unwanted, naked and bare to die in the wasteland (:4-6). Now she was to return to that state. The symbols of her religion were to be taken away from her; she had broken the covenant with her God, and He was going to ensure that the symbols of that covenant were taken away. Hence the ark disappeared at that time. And yet as at the first, God was going to take pity upon her, in that there was the hope of restoration to beauty for the naked, bare and bleeding exiled community. A new covenant was being prepared to replace the one that was now broken. But yet again, they despised and abused that grace.

Ezekiel 16:40 They shall also bring up a company against you- The same words for "bring up a company against you" are used of how Babylon shall be destroyed (Jer.

50:9). What was done to Israel by Babylon would be done to Babylon, as we find in Revelation.

And they shall stone you with stones and thrust you through with their swords- Prostitutes were to be slain by stoning, and here we are reading the legal judgment against a prostitute (see on :35). But thrusting through with the sword was not stipulated in the law of Moses. This reflects the anger of the nations against Judah. That anger was surely because she had promised sole loyalty to each of them, and instead they found she was saying the same to others too, and her temple was full of various idols and not only theirs. This would explain their particular wrath against the temple.

Ezekiel 16:41 They shall burn your houses with fire, and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women; and I will cause you to cease from playing the prostitute, and you shall also give no hire any more- We expect to read that the prostitute has been stoned to death. But although that was to be the case, we have the implication in these words that somehow the prostitute still lives, but she will not again be a prostitute or hire lovers. This was God's hope for the remnant of His people; and they would never again leave Him, the covenant they would enter with Him was to be "eternal" in that they would never break it and neither therefore would He. But this was not to be, and finally God has to take another wife, the Gentiles, and start over. After so much effort to make it work with Israel. See on :43.

Ezekiel 16:42 So will I cause My wrath toward you to rest, and My jealousy shall depart from you, and I will be quiet and will be no more angry- The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

Ezekiel 16:43 Because you have not remembered the days of your youth- This is a repeated criticism of them. They had not remembered the utter grace shown to them, the abandoned, disabled newborn child (see on :5). It is a clear reminder to ourselves never to forget God's grace to us and to ever be awed by it.

But have raged against Me in all these things- The real sense of the Hebrew is that they had made God rage by "all these things"; and the word means to shake with rage. The God of such love and grace is going to have another pole to that grace; and His anger is fearsome. Yet they treated their sins lightly; see on :20. But that lighthearted attitude produced quaking in rage within Almighty God. This is how sensitive He is. It's not that He is so far distant that the behaviour of a few bags of water and dust on this planet cannot really touch Him. He *is* touched, both positively and negatively, to the very core of His almighty being.

Therefore, behold, I also will bring your way on your head, says the Lord Yahweh: and you shall not commit this lewdness with all your abominations- As noted on :41, it was not that they would simply be punished by death. There was the hope within God that somehow a phoenix would arise, the dead bones would come together again, and they would not in future commit this lewdness.

Ezekiel 16:44 Behold, everyone who uses proverbs shall use this proverb against you, saying, As is the mother, so is her daughter- The Jews proudly considered themselves the children of Sarah (Is. 51:2). But as explained on :3, God had purposefully subverted that idea by saying that their behaviour displayed the characteristics of their Hittite mother. Clearly even at this stage, fleshly descent meant nothing to God; His people were defined by spiritual characteristics and not those of the flesh.

Ezekiel 16:45 You are the daughter of your mother, who loathes her husband and her children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their children: your mother was a Hittite, and your father an Amorite- The implication could be that as Jerusalem hated Yahweh her husband, so the Hittites and Amorites had. Perhaps they too had had the opportunity of relationship with God and yet had turned away from it to their gods. And Jerusalem had now turned to the same gods from the same one true God. They would never said that they hated or loathed God nor their children; but the prophets see to the essence of what is implied by our attitudes and positions. Their sacrifice of their children to the idols was likely done with pangs of sorrow rather than loathing of those children; but God read it as loathing their own children. None of us are merely caught up the flow of life and situations, victims of circumstantial ethics. We can make some concrete election.

Ezekiel 16:46 Your elder sister is Samaria, who dwells at your left hand, she and her daughters- "Daughters" may refer to the towns around (as Num. 21:25 Heb.).

And your younger sister, who dwells at your right hand, is Sodom and her daughters- Sodom is seen as Judah's sister in that Lot's children, Moab and Ammon, were born near Sodom and were thus identified with it. The Orientals faced the East in marking the directions of the sky; thus, the North was "left," the South "right".

Ezekiel 16:47 Yet have you not walked in their ways, nor done after their abominations- This could be quoting the words of the false prophets. The claim is to be utterly deconstructed.

But, as if that were a very little thing, you were more corrupt than they in all your ways- As noted on :20, they considered their sins to be little things; and yet they made God tremble with rage (see on :43). We too can so easily shrug off sin as mere surface level behaviour, when in fact it touches the heart of God Himself. Judah was more corrupt than Israel (Samaria, the ten tribes), and yet they went into captivity well

before Judah did. This of itself reflects God's special grace, and yet that grace was so abused by them to self-righteously consider Israel to be so far worse than themselves.

Ezekiel 16:48 As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, Sodom your sister has not done, she nor her daughters, as you have done, you and your daughters- "As I live" is a strong term; God is insistent that the sins of Judah were worse than those of Sodom. The sexual perversions of Sodom were nothing compared to those of Judah, both literally and in the sense that Judah were so unfaithful to God. The children of Sodom could refer to Moab and Ammon (:49) or to the cities around her. But God's grace in being patient with Judah had been so far greater. The connection with Sodom may imply that there was also the possibility of the salvation of Jerusalem for the sake of the intercession of a tiny minority.

Ezekiel 16:49 Behold, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: pride, fullness of bread, and prosperous ease was in her and in her daughters; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy- I suggested that "Sodom" is put for Moab and Ammon the sons of Lot who were born near there, and who were therefore as it were the brothers of the seed of Abraham. They too were proud (Is. 16:6; Jer. 49:4) and refused to help the needy (Is. 16:3,4; Jer. 48:27). The "fullness of bread" in Sodom was due to the fertile land there (Gen. 13:10). The obvious sin of Sodom was sexual sin, but this singular "iniquity" was seen through by the Divine analysis to its core- which was pride, prosperity, self-focus and laziness. Rome and other societies have likewise been led by these things into gross sexual sin, just as western society has been today.

Ezekiel 16:50 They were proud and committed sexual abomination before Me: therefore I took them away as I saw good- "Before Me" recalls the comment that the men of Sodom were "sinners before the Lord" (Gen. 13:13). "As I saw good" refers to how God "saw" their sin and responded appropriately to it (Gen. 18:21).

Ezekiel 16:51 Neither has Samaria committed half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and have justified your sisters by all your abominations which you have done- This quotes Jer. 3:11. The sinful ten tribes were even made to appear righteous, justified, by the gross sins of Judah. Again this is an example of how the Bible describes things as they might appear from a human perspective; for Samaria was not righteous. God had a special love and grace for Judah; for they were not destroyed until well after Samaria. And they abused that grace.

Ezekiel 16:52 You also bear you your own shame, in that you have given judgment for your sisters; through your sins that you have committed more abominable than they- Judah judged Samaria and Sodom in judging them as sinners, thinking they had therefore been punished. So often we see this- sinners are wont to harshly condemn other sinners. This is because they unconsciously transfer their conscience of their sins to others, and punish them with the punishment they realize subconsciously that they also deserve.

They are more righteous than you: yes, be also confounded, and bear your shame, in that you have justified your sisters- This is typical of how the Bible presents things as they seem to secular man; she was not righteous, but appeared that way. Yet

the fact she was not actually righteous but just seemed so is not footnoted, just as there is no footnote attached to the usage of the language of demons in the NT.

Ezekiel 16:53 I will turn again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and the captivity of your captives in their midst- The vision was that the daughters of Sodom, which I suggested above were Moab and Ammon, along with the ten tribes, would return from captivity along with Judah. They had all been taken captive by Assyria or Babylon, and the prophetic vision was that the Gentiles would return with a repentant Judah and Israel; all racial and interpersonal divisions would be overcome by a common experience of grace, forgiveness and the bonds of the new covenant. But instead of repenting, the restored exiles of Judah became arrogant and exclusive towards others.

Ezekiel 16:54 That you may bear your own shame, and may be ashamed because of all that you have done- Shame for sin is a major theme with Ezekiel. The days of shame would come to an end (Ez. 16:54; 34:29; 36:15; 39:26)- if Jerusalem accepted shame for her sins. But Ez. 44:13 says that the sins of the Jerusalem priesthood were such that in the restored temple, they would bear their shame in that they would never again minister in it. Likewise the Jewish priesthood who persecuted Jeremiah at this time were to bear a shame that would last for ever (Jer. 20:11). And yet the hope of Israel was that they would eternally be unashamed, world without end (Is. 45:17). The resolution of this may be in God's willingness to count them totally righteous by grace, upon their repentance. And Ezra "blushed" [s.w. "ashamed"] because of Israel's sins (Ezra 9:6), and Jeremiah at this time cast himself down in shame because of them (Jer. 3:25). This representative intercession for Judah had some effect. Just as the Lord Jesus bore the shame of Israel and all sinners on the cross (Is. 50:6), and yet because of that He would not be ashamed eternally (Is. 50:7). He was to become representative of the repentant Israel of God; for the same words are used of how they too would have unashamed faces eternally (Is. 54:4). But the Jerusalem priesthood refused to take shame, they were unashamed of their whoredoms (Jer. 3:3; 8:12). Ezekiel's appeal in Ez. 16 was so that they would recognize their sins, and be ashamed (Ez. 16:2). There was time for them to do so right up until they were led captive, in the final attempt to make them realize their shame. For when they went into captivity, then God intended that they would be "ashamed" (Jer. 22:22). The final vision of Ezekiel, of the potential that was possible in a restored Zion, was in order to make the exiles ashamed of their sins when they realized the possibilities they had wasted and yet which were still possible by grace (Ez. 43:10,11). But they didn't respond to that vision, they refused to build and operate such a temple system; because they refused to be ashamed in exile, although it was God's intention that they should be. And so it is for us as a new Israel to be ashamed for our sins, and identify with the Messiah figure who would bear Israel's shame and thereby emerge eternally unashamed.

In that you are a comfort to them- The Hebrew for "comfort" is that usually used for repentance. The idea may simply be that they would all repent together; see on :55.

Ezekiel 16:55 Your sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate; and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate; and you and your daughters shall return to your former estate- This implies that both Samaria [the 10 tribes] and Judah would 'return to their former estate' at one and the same time. And this passage is clearly in a restoration context. It was potentially possible

for the 10 tribes to have returned at the same time as Judah. But somehow, that potential was never made possible by them. The message as heard by the inhabitants of Judah wouldn't have been that attractive- that their only hope of restoration was together with Samaria and the children of Sodom whom they despised.

Ezekiel 16:56 For your sister Sodom was a byword to you in the day of your pride- The sin of the Jerusalem priesthood, which is whom Ezekiel is specifically addressing here, was compounded by their spiritual arrogance. They used proverbs which mocked the wickedness of Sodom (Moab and Ammon) and the ten tribes (Samaria), thereby exalting themselves spiritually in their own eyes. We note that God is aware of and sensitive to our throwaway expressions and words.

Ezekiel 16:57 Before your wickedness was uncovered, as at the time of the reproach of the daughters of Syria, and of all who are around her, the daughters of the Philistines, who do despite to you all around- The GNB helps with "Now you are just like her- a joke to the Edomites, the Philistines, and your other neighbors who hate you". As the Jerusalem priesthood had mocked Sodom and Samaria, now they were mocked- by the very ones whose idols they had accepted, as "hire" or payment for having military protection from those peoples. The uncovering or exposure of Jerusalem was when the various nations she had made alliances with in return for sole devotion to their gods realized that they were being two timed. And worse. It became known that the Jerusalem temple was a house of all manner of gods, the symbol of her relationship with multiple nations, all of whom she had promised total allegiance to in return for their military and political help. Hence the anger and mockery of all of them, when their mercenaries confederated with Babylon to totally destroy that temple.

Ezekiel 16:58 You have borne your lewdness and your abominations, says Yahweh- To carry sin is a metaphor for carrying the punishment for that sin. That punishment was still future (:59) and yet the secret was out, the nations knew they had been deceived, and now there was only a very narrow window of opportunity for Jerusalem to repent. Their only way out was to throw themselves solely upon their only true defence, Yahweh. But they refused.

Ezekiel 16:59 For thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant- See on Zech. 11:10,11. As explained on :57, they had broken not only their covenant of exclusive loyalty to Yahweh, but their covenants with multiple nations and their gods. As noted on :28 and often, they had broken the covenant which Yahweh made with them at Sinai. And the curses for disobedience to it were now to come.

Ezekiel 16:60 Nevertheless I will remember My covenant made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish to you an everlasting covenant- Here is amazing grace. They had broken the covenant (:59), but God would still be faithful to that covenant. Yet it was a broken covenant; and so He would make a new and everlasting one with them. That covenant was "everlasting" in that God hoped and envisioned that they would never again break it. See on :41,43. This was His hope, the hope of the desperate lover, but it was not to come true. Zechariah some time later was to speak of God breaking the covenant with His people. And so He has made the new covenant with us, a new Israel.

Ezekiel 16:61 Then you shall remember your ways, and be ashamed, when you shall receive your sisters, your elder sisters and your younger; and I will give them to you for daughters, but not by your covenant- This implies a new covenant would be made with the exiles, as explained in Jer. 31, Ez. 36 etc. That new covenant involved acceptance of the ten tribes on an equal footing with themselves, as well as with the people of Sodom, whom I have suggested refer to the children of Lot born near there, Moab and Ammon- in other words, the reconcillation of all the seed of Abraham. Given their spiritual pride and elitism, that was perhaps not a great prospect for the Jerusalem leadership at Ezekiel's time. And after the restoration, their elitism continued, despising the Samaritans and indeed all Gentiles, rather than welcoming them into the covenant of grace. Acceptance of the new covenant, then as now, required reconcillation with God to be reflected in reconcillation with our brethren. They preferred the old covenant at Sinai; but they had broken that, and this acceptance of their apparently spiritually weaker brethren was to be "not by your covenant", the covenant made exclusively with Israel at Sinai, but by the new covenant. The way the Jews tenaciously held on to that old covenant merely reflected their refusal of this new way, this new covenant of grace. Whilst that covenant was fully ended by the Lord's death on the cross, in effect it had ended at Ezekiel's time; for here it is pronounced broken, and a new covenant offered- which they refused to enter. So from now onwards, their covenant relationship with God was effectively over.

Ezekiel 16:62 I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall know that I am Yahweh- They would "know" Him through the utter grace of this new covenant. They deserved death, the death of a whore, to be eternally forgotten after how they had treated their husband- the God of all grace and patience.

Ezekiel 16:63 That you may remember, and be confounded, and never open your mouth any more because of your shame, when I have forgiven you all that you have done, says the Lord Yahweh- The not opening their mouth again could refer to not using the language of spiritual superiority against others referenced in :56. But we can also read it as meaning that they will be so ashamed that they will feel as if they are dumb; and yet they will speak, but only of God's grace, and with a deep humility.

In the future, God will use a repentant Israel to achieve great things in terms of converting this world unto Himself; but that was possible for the captives in Babylon who could have converted the world of their time to the God of Israel. They will walk up and down in His Name, witnessing to Him as He had originally intended them to (Zech. 10:12); men will cling to their skirts in order to find the knowledge of their God (Zech. 8:23). "In that day will I cause the horn of the house of Israel to bud forth, and I will give thee (Israel) the opening of the mouth in the midst of them (the surrounding nations, see context); and *they* shall know that I am the LORD", in that Israel will preach to them from their own experience of having recently come to know Yahweh (Ez. 29:21). But at the time of the Lord's return, when Israel repent and enter the new covenant with Him, they will remember all their past sins "and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame... for all that thou hast done" (Ez. 16:63). They will be so ashamed that they *will feel as if* they can never open their mouth. But Yahweh will open their mouth, and they will witness. In some anticipation of this, Ezekiel as the "son of man" prophet, a representative of his people just as the Lord was to be, had his mouth shut in dumbness, and he only had

his mouth opened when Israel came to know [to some degree] that “I am the LORD” (Ez. 24:27). In all these evident connections something marvellous presents itself. Those who feel as if they just cannot open their mouths in witness are the very ones whom the Father will use; He will open their mouths and use them exactly because they are ashamed of their sins! And so it should be with us.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 17

Ezekiel 17:1 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying-* Chapters 17-22 form an ABABAB structure. Chapters 17,19 and 21 speak of Babylon, and chapters 18,20 and 22 of Judah's sins which warranted the Babylonian involvement.

Ezekiel 17:2 *Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel-* A "riddle" is Heb. 'that which is sharp'. This was now a painful riddle, but as the crude language of Ez. 16 was intended to grab their attention and elicit repentance, so this parable was intended to be "sharp". And indeed it is so- that a parable, a story expressing a challenge, can be sharper than bald statements.

Ezekiel 17:3 *And say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: A great eagle with great wings and long feathers, full of feathers of various colours-* Literally, the great eagle, a symbol of Babylon (Jer. 48:40; 49:22), perhaps alluding to their god Nisroch, the eagle. The great wings spoke of his armies, the long wings / feathers of the extent of his empire. The feathers of various colours refer to the nations confederate with her.

Came to Lebanon- Eusebius says that the temple at Jerusalem was called 'Lebanon' by the Jews, because its woodwork was of cedars of Lebanon.

And took off the top of the cedar- King Jeconiah, then only 18 years old, and many of the leaders with him (2 Kings 24:8, 12-16). They were taken as hostages to Babylon, whilst Zedekiah became the puppet king under covenant with Babylon.

Ezekiel 17:4 *He cropped off the highest of its young twigs and carried it to a land of commerce where he set it in a city of merchants-* Babylon was famous for its transport traffic on the Tigris and Euphrates; also, by its connection with the Persian Gulf, it traded even with India.

Ezekiel 17:5 *He also took the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful soil. He placed it beside many waters and set it as a willow tree-* We must remember that Ezekiel was teaching this parable to the depressed exiles as they sat by the rivers / waters of Babylon by the Chebar river. What seemed a hopeless, dead end situation was in fact fruitful soil for their spiritual growth and the development of God's purpose. The "seed of the land" were the royal family. The implication is that the kingly line would revive; "the prince" of Ez. 40-48 could have been literally in the line of David, and Zerubbabel was just such a candidate, although it seems he didn't live up to the potential. "Willow" can be "vine", which would connect with the parable of the destroyed, useless vine of Ez. 15. Those charred, useless branches were to be enabled by the spiritually fruitful soil of Babylon to miraculously revive. If we insist upon "willow", then we see the connection with Ps. 137:2, where the depressed captives sit by the waters of Babylon under willow trees. But they were to realize that their apparently hopeless situation was in fact upon spiritually fruitful soil. And we

can perceive dead end situations in life the same way. Indeed it could be that the willow tree, symbol of their mourning in Babylon, became a vine.

Ezekiel 17:6 It grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned toward him, and its roots were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and young shoots- It "became a vine" in that it was planted a willow tree; see on :6. This speaks of the power of the Spirit to transform the most depressive situations into spiritual fruitfulness. The "low stature" may refer to the humility there would be in the revived community. But it was deformed, just as Israel had been at their birth (see on Ez. 16:5)- its branches turned inwards, and the roots did not spread far out, accounting for its low height. This vine would be humble. Or we can read the "him" as referring to the eagle of Babylon. Zedekiah and the royal seed of the land (:5) were to be loyal to Babylon. His roots were under "him", Babylon.

Ezekiel 17:7 There was also another great eagle with great wings and many feathers. This vine bent its roots toward him, and shot forth its branches toward him, from the beds of its plantation, that he might water it- This is interpreted later in that chapter as Egypt (:15). The partially revived vine looked to Egypt for help to throw off the Babylonians; we see here how in their hearts, God's people always yearned toward Egypt. It could be that it was from exile in Babylon that the royal seed sought to reach out to Egypt and make a covenant with them to throw off the Babylonian yoke. They refused to accept Ezekiel's message, that exile there was required and was part of their spiritual reformation. The reference is to the Nile being made to water the fields by means of small canals or AV "furrows;" these waters are the figure of the auxiliary forces wherewith Egypt tried to help Judah.

Ezekiel 17:8 It was planted in a good soil by many waters that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine- This laments how it was really possible that the exile in Babylon could have quite quickly brought forth spiritual fruit to God. The apparently bad situation was ideally suited to their becoming "a goodly vine". Fruit bearing is what God seeks of us; contrary to what we often think, He places us in situations which are optimal for our spiritual development. And yet by seeking a better material situation we can ruin all that potential.

Ezekiel 17:9 Say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Shall it prosper?- Spiritually, the vine would not prosper, just as we will not spiritually prosper if we refuse to accept the situations God places us in for our spiritual good. Nehemiah uses this same word "prosper", as if he realized that the exiles had not prospered as intended, but he wished to put that right at the restoration (Neh. 1:11; 2:20). The plan of God didn't ultimately prosper at that time, but it will in the hands of the messiah Jesus, the fulfilment of the twig which becomes a cedar later in the chapter (Is. 53:10). Jeremiah's parable of the girdle demonstrated that the Jews would not "prosper" (Jer. 13:7,10) even when taken into captivity at the Euphrates (i.e. Babylon), using the same word as in the parable of the vine in Ez. 17:9. Babylon, according to Ez. 17:8, was potentially fruitful soil for their spiritual revival. But they would not "prosper", Jeremiah says, because of their deep seated love of idolatry and lack of true repentance. The parable of the vine has just stated that the burnt and charred vine tree is not "suitable for any work", using the same word translated here "prosper" (Ez. 15:4). Only Divine grace could make it prosper and be useful to Him.

Shall he not pull up its roots, and cut off its fruit, that it may wither; that all its fresh springing leaves may wither? and not by a strong arm or many people can it be raised from its roots- Even a small Babylonian army could do the job of destroying Judah (Jer. 37:10). The withering of the fruit is emphasized because the whole idea was that the vine could have brought forth spiritual fruit in the early days of the exile, even whilst Zedekiah was still puppet king in Jerusalem. But that was all to be destroyed by the uprooting.

Ezekiel 17:10 *Yes, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? Shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind touches it? It shall wither in the beds where it grew-* For "prosper", see on :9. The focus is not so much upon the physical destruction, but upon the withering of the fruit and the tragedy of the loss of potential spiritual fruit. Babylon is likened to the east wind, coming from the north east to destroy that which had been planted.

Ezekiel 17:11 *Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me, saying-* The apparent gap between the riddle and the interpretation was to encourage them to work it out for themselves.

Ezekiel 17:12 *Say now to the rebellious people, Don't you know what these things mean? Tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, and took its king, and its princes, and brought them to him to Babylon-* The parable is not hard to interpret. They surely saw the point. But apparently they acted dumb, as if it was all a mystery; and so the obvious interpretation is given. This shows that apparent intellectual failure to understand God's word, or at least His moral demands, has a moral basis. They refused to understand the parable because they were a "rebellious people", not because of some purely intellectual block.

Ezekiel 17:13 *He took of the seed royal, and made a covenant with him. He also brought him under an oath, and took away the mighty of the land-* These were the very people who were with Ezekiel in captivity in Babylon. The parable was highly relevant to them. "The seed royal" were as it were hostages in Babylon.

Ezekiel 17:14 *That the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping his covenant it might stand-* The idea may be that it was God's plan that through keeping the covenant, the royal family and leadership would be humbled, and this would bring about God's favourite paradox- the brought down could then be exalted, "that... it might stand". See on :24. But they refused to repent, to be humbled, to be ashamed, and instead sought to wriggle out of the covenant by making agreements with Egypt to attack the Babylonian forces, liberate Jerusalem and perhaps later themselves from Babylon itself. Yet all these things had been explicitly promised to Judah; God would do all these things, if they repented. But instead of doing so, they sought by all manner of desperate means to bring about this liberation in the strength of Egypt. This is so typical of human behaviour. It is for us to learn the lesson.

Ezekiel 17:15 *But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors to Egypt that they might give him horses and many people. Shall he prosper?-* For "prosper", see on :9. We wonder whether it was yet public knowledge in Babylon that Zedekiah and the

royal family had sent these ambassadors and had these plans. If not, Ezekiel's message would have been tantamount to a betrayal of serious secrets which would have directly led to the Babylonian invasion and fury with the royal family who were already with Ezekiel in captivity in Babylon. It would have been a very hard message for Ezekiel to deliver, and would have made him hated and at risk for his life amongst the captives.

Shall he who does such things escape? Shall he break the covenant, and yet escape?- This is the language of Judah breaking covenant with God, just used in Ez. 16:59. God had designed the covenant between Zedekiah and the Babylonians, for the spiritual growth and repentance of the Jews. To break it was therefore to effectively break covenant with God. Or we could instead perceive that covenant breaking with God is reflected in covenant breaking with men. Our attitude to God becomes our attitude to men.

Ezekiel 17:16 *As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he broke, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die-* The very opposite would happen to that which Zedekiah hoped. He is presented in Jeremiah as wanting to do the right thing before God, earnestly seeking God's word, yet fearing the opinion of his princes. But here Ezekiel sees to the essence; that fear of the opinion of others was effectively a despising of covenant relationship with God.

Ezekiel 17:17 *Neither shall Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company help him in the war, when they cast up mounds and build forts, to cut off many people-* The "they" appears to be the Babylonians. No amount of human might could alter the purpose of God, which required repentant trust in Him rather than hope in the human strength of Egypt. The Egyptian forces were destroyed and had to return to Egypt (Jer. 37:7; 44:30).

Ezekiel 17:18 *For he has despised the oath by breaking the covenant; and behold, he had given his hand, and yet has done all these things; he shall not escape-* To give the hand was a metaphor for making a covenant agreement. Jeremiah appears to justify the way Judah had done this by saying that they did it "for bread" (Lam. 5:6), as if the famine sent by God to bring about their repentance was so severe that the alliances were not just for political and military protection, but for basic food. This was how low the one time beautiful prostitute of Ez. 16 had fallen; just "for bread" she made the agreements which meant that she had to have the idols of these people in the Jerusalem temple. Clearly these 'givings of the hand' were wrong, and yet Jeremiah laments as if they were somehow justifiable. But Ez. 17 clearly condemns them as immoral acts. For God as Judah's husband would surely provide her with bread. The lack of it was to bring her back to Him, but instead she responded by madly making more spiritually adulterous covenants. We too can respond to God's chastening hand either by total repentance and casting ourselves upon Him, or by madly seeking to get around His chastisement by yet further sin and unfaithfulness.

Ezekiel 17:19 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: As I live, surely My oath that he has despised, and My covenant that he has broken, I will even bring it on his own head-* This is the language of Judah breaking covenant with God, just used in Ez. 16:59. God had designed the covenant between Zedekiah and the Babylonians, for the spiritual growth and repentance of the Jews. To break it was therefore to effectively

break covenant with God. Or we could instead perceive that covenant breaking with God is reflected in covenant breaking with men. Our attitude to God becomes our attitude to men. Judah were light hearted in their attitude to everything; they "gave the hand" in :18 in order just to get "bread" (Lam. 5:6). They were in need, and instead of turning to God in repentance, they madly made promises of total loyalty to various peoples and their gods. It is this light hearted, not serious attitude, seeking for the immediate for the total sacrifice of principle, which dominates our age today.

Ezekiel 17:20 *I will spread My net on him, and he shall be taken in My snare, and I will bring him to Babylon and will enter into judgment with him there for his sins that he has committed against Me-* Zedekiah was to be taken by the net of the Babylonian armies. We marvel that he was not immediately slain by God. But there in Babylon God says in the AV that "I will plead with him there". In his blindness, God appealed to him. We marvel at God's continual effort to save this man; it is the loving initiative of the shepherd who searches for the lost with the attitude that He will search until He finds it. God doesn't give up with people, and neither should we.

Ezekiel 17:21 *All his fugitives in all his bands shall fall by the sword, and those who remain shall be scattered toward every wind: and you shall know that I, Yahweh, have spoken it-* The prophecy would be written down, and would be later seen to have fulfilled exactly. Zedekiah's accompanying soldiers were slain, but his life was preserved. This would surely have been reflected upon by him; it was part of God's special pleading with that man to realize His grace (see on :20).

Ezekiel 17:22 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also take of the lofty top of the cedar, and will set it. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain-* When Zedekiah was taken into captivity (Ez. 17:20), it was prophesied that "a tender one" (Messiah- Is. 11:1; 53:2) would be planted "upon an high mountain", and grow into a tree in whose shadows all animals would live (Ez. 17:21,22). This is clearly the Messianic Kingdom (Lk. 13:19). This young twig at the time of the captivity [when Zedekiah was taken into captivity, :20] was surely Zerubbabel, and the "high mountain" upon which his Kingdom could have been established is surely the "high mountain" of Ez. 40:2 where the temple could have been built. Yet the prophecy had to suffer a massive deferment until its fulfilment in Christ. See on Zech. 6:12.

Ezekiel 17:23 *In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar. Under it shall dwell all birds of every wing; in the shade of its branches shall they dwell-* The parable opened by describing the various nations within the Babylonian empire as wings and feathers (:3). The potential was that the Babylonian empire would be converted to Yahweh by the repentant exiles, and would come to dwell under the shadow of the reestablished Messianic kingdom of God in Israel. So much potential was wasted by Zerubbabel and the exiles.

Ez. 17:22,23 had spoken of how at the restoration, Babylon would fall and a "tender one" arise, who would grow into a tree under whose branches all the birds would find shelter. This is the very language of the Kingdom of Jesus in Mt. 13:32. The Kingdom of Babylon- also likened in Daniel to a tree with birds beneath it- could have been replaced with God's Kingdom when it fell soon after the restoration of

Judah. But no Messiah figure arose (see on Ez. 37:25- Zerubbabel could have fulfilled it), and so the prophecy had a changed fulfilment- the tree that was abased and then lifted up could have been Israel, but it was re-applied to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate “servant” of Yahweh. Ezekiel 19:13,14 help us perceive this more clearly- Judah in Babylon were as it were “planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty ground”. She had “no [Messianic] strong rod to be a sceptre to rule”, and this was “for a lamentation”. But the prophecy was fulfilled in another way- for the Lord Jesus was the root out of a dry ground who sprang up and *did* fulfil God’s intention (Is. 53:1).

Ezekiel 17:24 *All the trees of the field shall know that I, Yahweh, have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish. I, Yahweh, have spoken and have done it-* In the first context, the high tree was that of Babylon. The low tree was the deformed vine of :6 (see note there). This humiliated kingdom could have arisen to eclipse the Babylonian empire. As explained on Dan. 2, the vision of the image can be understood as a sequence of kings rather than kingdoms which could have been destroyed by the little stone of restored Judah under a Messianic ruler. But this was precluded by Judah's lack of repentance and spiritual vision, and so the prophecies were rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord Jesus. He was to be the root out of a dry ground who through the humiliation of the cross was to establish the Divine kingdom of :23.

It was God's plan that through keeping the covenant, the royal family and leadership would be humbled, and this would bring about God's favourite paradox- the brought down could then be exalted, "that... it might stand" (see on :14).

This lack of humility led to the prophecy being reapplied to the Lord Jesus. And His mother seems to have perceived this. The humility of Mary was the pattern for the Lord’s self-humiliation in the cross. Here above all we see the influence of Mary upon Jesus, an influence that would lead Him to and through the cross. Her idea of putting down the high and exalting the lowly (Lk. 1:52) is picking up Ez. 17:24: “I have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish”. And yet these very words of Ezekiel were quoted by the Lord in His time of dying. With reverence, we can follow where we are being led in our exploration and knowing of the mind of Christ. His dear mum had gone around the house singing her Magnificat. He realized that she felt the lowly who had been exalted [and perhaps in some unrecorded incident before her conception she had been recently humbled?]. And Jesus had realized her quotation of Ez. 17:24. And He had perceived His linkage and connection with her, and how she saw all that was true of Him as in some way true of her, and vice versa. And now, in His final crisis, He takes comfort from the fact that like His dear mother, He the one who was now humbled, would be exalted. How many other trains of thought have been sparked in men’s minds by the childhood instructions of their mothers...?

The Lord’s words as He carried the cross "If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" is packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). His preceding words to the women were likewise; his quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel...? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out of place

quotations flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit of the Father's word and its' intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 18

Ezekiel 18:1 *The word of Yahweh came to me again, saying-* The righteous remnant were actually persecuted by the other Jews in Babylon, according to the testimony of the later parts of Isaiah. One significant problem which they had right from the start was that they insisted that the captivity was unfair, it was not their fault, they were righteous and were being unfairly punished for the sins of their fathers. Ezekiel 18 addresses this at length with them. God's intention was that His exiled people would "declare all their abominations among the nations whither they come", i.e. the 127 provinces of Babylon (Ez. 12:16). Note how confession of personal failure and testimony to God's forgiveness is actually a powerful witness to unbelievers. But instead, Ezekiel had to reason against the Jews' insistence that they had *not* sinned, and were being unfairly punished for their fathers' sins by an unjust God (Ez. 18). And so likewise it happens with us all too often that the potential witness which we could make simply isn't made. 1 Kings 8:47-50 had predicted that God would give the exiles compassion in captivity *if* they repented. They didn't repent, as passages like Ez. 18 make clear (they blamed everything on their fathers and protested their personal innocence)- and yet still God gave them compassion in the eyes of their captors, through the amazing decrees of Cyrus enabling them to return to their land and rebuild the temple at his expense.

Ezekiel 18:2 *What do you mean, that you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge?*- Note that God is aware of even the throwaway language and phrases used by us.

It's apparent that Judah in captivity weren't repentant; and yet God granted them His forgiveness so that they might repent. Indeed, the Jews were bitter with God. They claimed that they were suffering unfairly as a result of their fathers' sins, and that Yahweh was unfair (Ez. 18:25)- when He was showing them a grace so wonderful that all that is within us fights against perceiving it! The lack of perception of God's grace was terrible- and yet many of us have lived for decades doing just the same! Some of the comments of the Jewish religious leaders during the captivity are preserved for us in the Babylonian Talmud. It's interesting to see the development of their commentaries upon the prophets (See H. Freedman, *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Mo'ed* (London: Soncino Press, 1938). Hosea clearly taught that he represented God, and Israel were likened to a prostitute, unfaithful to Him. Time and again, Hosea appeals for Israel to "return", the same Hebrew word being used about 'returning' to the land of Judah. But Israel would not. And they obviously found Hosea hard to grapple with. And so the Talmud condemns Hosea for marrying a promiscuous woman (See *Peshitta 87b* in the Babylonian Talmud; and H.L. Ginsberg, 'Hosea, Book of' in G. Roth and C. Wigoder, eds, *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Macmillan, 1971) Vol. 18 col. 1011). By so doing they were refusing to let the prophetic word bite as it was intended to; their interpretations, like many false exposition today, was intended to justify them. And

thereby they effectively condemned the God who loved them so freely. Even those who did return were impenitent. The sins of those who returned are styled "the transgression of those that had been carried away" (Ezra 9:4). Yet those who returned to the land weren't mainly the generation who had been carried away. The intended confusion is surely to suggest that those who returned committed the same sins as had led Judah into captivity a generation earlier. And Ezra comments on this fact in his subsequent prayer (Ezra 9:7).

The exiles blamed the exile on their fathers, but Ezekiel seeks to show them that they are acting just like their fathers. And they need to repent of that. Psalm 68 is not a prayer; rather is it an appeal to the exiles in the spirit of Ezekiel to make a clean break from their fathers' attitudes. And to perceive God's grace all through their history, and to trust in it. The exiles "used this proverb concerning the land of Israel saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge?" (Ez. 18:2). They were asked to stop saying that, and accept their situation was because they were sinning themselves. These same people who were blaming everything on their fathers' sins were asked: "Cast away from you all your transgressions in which you have transgressed; and make yourself a new heart and a new spirit" (Ez. 18:31). This is the new covenant. It was a requirement of the new covenant that they would stop thinking like this: "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Jer. 31:29). The appeal of many scriptures such as Ps. 78 is to get the exiles to a point where they would "say no more" that they were suffering unfairly, for the sake of their fathers' sins.

Ezekiel 18:3 *As I live says the Lord Yahweh, you shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel-* In Ez. 16:56,63 we noted that God wished to stop Israel using certain proverbs. He paid attention to their sayings, their language, their throwaway expressions. All language is significant to God, and He aimed to reform even the kind of language they spoke. This is part of being in the new covenant- Jer. 31:29 had specifically stated this, contemporary with Ezekiel. So Ezekiel is so labouring the point in Ez. 18, because he wants them to accept the new covenant in exile, and to live and speak according to it. And yet Jeremiah himself seems to say that God has in fact punished the children for their fathers' sins (Lam. 5:7). He was contradicting his own message in Jer. 31:29. We would therefore have in this an example of a man who in depression says things which are wrong, struggling with God, as Job did; and yet still finally accepted.

Ezekiel 18:4 *Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine-* The idea may be that God created all people and therefore He will judge each individually. But the allusion is surely to Lev. 20:26: "You [all Israel] shall be Mine", out of all the families of the earth. All Israel were indeed God's people, but this did not mean that the person ["soul"] who sinned would not be punished with death. For the contrast is with the righteous who would "live" (:19) and in that sense, not die. And perhaps specifically the reference is again to the priesthood, who appear to be the subject of much of Ezekiel's criticisms; for it was they and the royal family who were taken into captivity rather than the common masses. For "the Levites shall be Mine" (Lev. 3:12; Num. 8:14). This would explain the male reference, to "the son"; for the priesthood was male. The phrase is used again in

Mal. 3:17, of the repentant remnant amongst the exiles. But even amongst them, those who sinned would die.

The soul who sins, he shall die- Proof enough that "the soul" simply means 'the person' and is not immortal. The death in view is death at the hands of the Babylonians, in the context. For some souls / people implicitly didn't commit the sin which led to death. It is judicial death which is in view, rather than the death which is common to all men.

Ezekiel 18:5 *But if a man is just, and does that which is lawful and right*- The things listed as exemplifications of this are all from the second table of the ten commandments. Doing justice and right was the characteristic of Abraham's true seed (s.w. Gen. 18:19). Those who did not do so were therefore not the true Israel of God. Again, the Jewish assumption of salvation from the Babylonians on account of their fleshly descent is being deconstructed.

Ezekiel 18:6 *And has not eaten on the mountains, neither has lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither has defiled his neighbour's wife, neither has come near to a woman in her impurity*- The sexual immorality is bracketed together with the idolatry, because as made clear in Ez. 16, the two went together. The sexual aspect of idolatry was not solely in sleeping with the cult prostitutes but with other women who had come to worship, even your neighbour's wife. The idol cults apparently had no restrictions regarding sleeping with menstruous women. And so at the very time when her husband could not sleep with her due to the Mosaic prohibitions about this, she could go to the idol worship and sleep with her neighbour's husband. Thus the inability of compromise between God's law and idolatry is emphasized, whereas the priests were teaching that the idolatry was being performed as part of Yahweh worship.

Ezekiel 18:7 *And has not wronged any but has restored to the debtor his pledge, has taken nothing by robbery, has given his bread to the hungry and has covered the naked with a garment*- Such sensitivity and generosity to the poor is not a mere optional extra in the spiritual life; it is in fact part of being basically "just" and committed to social justice (:5), part of 'dealing truly' (:9).

Ezekiel 18:8 *He who has not given forth on interest neither has taken any increase, who has withdrawn his hand from iniquity, has executed true justice between man and man*- These issues suggest that the person addressed is in a position of power; to lend to others, and to judge between persons. This strengthens the impression that Ezekiel is addressing specifically the leadership; it was the priests and ruling classes who had been taken into exile at that time, and they were his audience. 'Executing true justice' was appealed for again by Zechariah after the restoration (Zech. 7:9 s.w.). Clearly the community addressed by Ezekiel were still failing in this as they had before the exile, and continued to do so after the restoration. The captivity didn't produce the reformation intended. But by grace, God still restored them, in the hope that this further outpouring of grace would motivate them to repentance; and yet it didn't.

Ezekiel 18:9 *Has walked in My statutes, and has kept My commandments, to deal truly: he is just-* See on :7. Dealing truly is a phrase often used of keeping covenant promises. By not doing these things, Israel had ended their covenant with God.

He shall surely live, says the Lord Yahweh- "Surely live" isn't necessarily an offer of eternal life; it could refer to how those who repented in Jerusalem would be spared the destruction and death which would otherwise come.

Ezekiel 18:10 *If he fathers a son who is a robber, a shedder of blood, and who does any one of these things-* These were all things going on at the time of Ezekiel. The exiles needed to repent of these things. Perhaps he is viewing coveting as theft, and hatred of brethren as murder. But there is strong reason to suspect that these actual things had been practiced by the ruling classes who were now in exile with Ezekiel. The same word is used to express how the Jerusalem temple had been turned by the priests into a "den of robbers" (Jer. 7:11). Again we have the impression that Ezekiel as a priest is addressing the leaders of the priests and their children who had been taken into captivity. One reason Judah was destroyed was because Manasseh was a 'shedder of blood' (2 Kings 21:16; 24:4). Perhaps this was being focused upon by the exiles, complaining that God was unfairly punishing them for Manasseh's sins. But the reality was that in essence, his descendants and wider family had done the same as he had done. For they too had been involved in the shedding of the innocent blood of their own children to the idol cults (Ps. 106:38). Indeed Jer. 7:6 says that this innocent blood was shed in the temple; it was there that the idols were worshipped and child sacrifice made. This is in proximity to the description of that temple as a den of robbers (Jer. 7:11), which is the same word used here in Ez. 18:10.

Ezekiel 18:11 *And who does not any of those obligations-* The idea of "obligations" may be that the theft and shedding innocent blood in child sacrifices (:10) were performed as part of their religious obligations to the idols of the surrounding nations whom they had contracted to worship, in return for material and political help.

But even has eaten on the mountains and defiled his neighbour's wife- There was perhaps the idea amongst some of the exiles that they had not performed child sacrifice nor theft in the Jerusalem temple (:10), and were therefore acceptable. But they had eaten idol sacrifices elsewhere, and in that context slept with their neighbour's wife; see on :6 for the connection.

Ezekiel 18:12 *Has wronged the poor and needy, has taken by robbery, has not restored the pledge and has lifted up his eyes to the idols, has committed abomination-* Lifting up the eyes can be understood as meaning to trust in, to look towards for help. Judah's leadership, whose children were now in exile and formed Ezekiel's first audience, had made deals with other nations, trusting in their gods to help them against the Babylonians; instead of looking to Yahweh.

Ezekiel 18:13 *Has given forth on interest, and has taken increase: shall he then live? He shall not live. He has done all these abominations. He shall surely die; his blood shall be on him-* Nehemiah makes it clear that this lending to brethren on interest was going on amongst the restored exiles, and clearly they were just continuing to live how they had done in exile. For those whom Ezekiel is addressing in captivity were apparently doing this, just as they had done before their exile. The experience of restoration by grace had not affected their behaviour. We too must allow ourselves to be challenged by this.

The prohibition of taking interest was so that "your brother shall live by / with you" (Lev. 25:36). By having done so, those now in exile were separated from their poorer brethren. They had placed personal material gain before the unity of God's people. Again, that is a timeless warning. This taking of interest specifically happened in the temple, according to Ez. 22:12; suggesting the priesthood had become a financial racket which exploited the poor. It is the priesthood and ruling classes whom Ezekiel addresses, for they were those in exile with him.

"He shall surely die" sounds like a legal pronouncement of death at judgment. "He shall not die... live" is an allusion to the words of the serpent, who had taught that God's people would not "surely die" for their sins. The Jews faced the same test, from false teachers acting as the serpent in Eden, the sanctuary of God at that time.

Ezekiel 18:14 *Now, behold, if he fathers a son, who sees all his father's sins which he has done, and sees, and does not such like-* Ezekiel was especially addressing the children of the priesthood, royal family and ruling classes. He was inviting them to repent. Those young people were the ones who could have brought about the repentance required to trigger God's amazing plan of restoring His Kingdom in Israel. So often young people have great potential in God's plan. But we get the impression that Daniel and his friends were the only truly faithful young men amongst the exiles.

Ezekiel 18:15 *Who has not eaten on the mountains, neither has lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, has not defiled his neighbour's wife-* The idols are described specifically as belonging to "the house of Israel". The reference may be to the temple, where Ezekiel had seen the idols being worshipped. Or perhaps the sense is also that it took a strong individual to refuse to worship the idols of his house / family. The gods of the nations were now those of the people of Israel.

Ezekiel 18:16 *Neither has wronged any, has not taken anything to pledge, neither has taken by robbery, but has given his bread to the hungry and has clothed the naked-* The times of the exiles were those of famine, as God tried to bring Judah to repentance. Bread was to be removed from them (Ez. 4:17; 5:16). For the righteous to share their bread with those lacking bread was therefore tantamount to saying that they would pity sinners in their judgment, and not simply leave them to their sufferings because they had brought those sufferings upon their

own heads. If a man digs a pit and falls into it, he is still in the pit and deserves our compassion. This is at the heart of God's compassion towards His sinning people.

Ezekiel 18:17 *Who has not oppressed the poor, who has not received interest nor increase, has kept My commandments, has walked in My statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live-* The 'death' in view here is the judicial death threatened at the hands of the Babylonians; see on :4. 'Living' means being spared those judgments. These warnings take on especial relevance if indeed Ezekiel was preaching the message to the literal, exiled sons of those who had oppressed the poor in Judah. "Not oppressed [the poor]" in Ez. 18:17 is literally 'to turn back the hand from'. God did not turn His hand back from destroying Jerusalem (Lam. 2:8 s.w.) because the people of Judah and those already in exile had not responded to Ezekiel's call to 'turn back their hand' from oppressing the poor. Their attitude to their poor brethren was to become God's attitude to them. And that is taught by the Lord Jesus in His parables as being the principle by which we too shall be judged.

Ezekiel 18:18 *As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, robbed his brother, and did that which is not good among his people, see, he shall die in his iniquity-* "Robbed" is 'plundered', exactly as Jerusalem and the temple was to be plundered, along with the houses of the wealthy. How they treated their brother was how they were to be judged; they were plundered because they plundered their brother. And that is the principle upon which we too shall be judged.

Ezekiel 18:19 *Yet you say, Why doesn't the son bear the iniquity of the father?-* The Hebrew is ambiguous, maybe purposefully so. It could be read as a complaint about the children bearing the result of their father's sins, as AV: "Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father?". Or it could be read as a statement that the children who had gone into exile were bearing the punishment of their father's sins, and therefore, their fathers shouldn't suffer any more. Even though their fathers continued sinning.

When the son has done that which is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes, and has done them, he shall surely live- The emphasis upon "When..." would suggest that the sons, the young people in exile, were not doing what was lawful and right. If they did, then they would "live", be spared the judgment which was threatened to come upon them even in Babylon. But they were powerless to alter the outcomes for their parents, unless their parents personally repented.

Ezekiel 18:20 *The soul who sins, he shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be on him-* As noted on :19, this bearing sin, or the punishment for sin, was thought to work in that a sinful son could have his punishment carried by the suffering of his father, and vice versa. God doesn't operate such a substitutionary system of atonement. The Lord Jesus bore the punishment for our sins in that

He was representative of those who are willingly "in" Him and identify with Him in order to seek forgiveness of their sins which they fully acknowledge. This is different to substitutionary atonement.

Ezekiel 18:21 *But if the wicked turn from all his sins that he has committed, and keep all My statutes and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die-* "Turn" is the word also used for the 'return' of the exiles. Their repentance would lead to their return. They didn't repent, yet by grace God took the initiative and returned them anyway. Yet most didn't want to return and preferred the soft life in Babylon / Persia, and those who did, as the later prophets make clear, didn't repent.

Ezekiel 18:22 *None of his transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him: in his righteousness that he has done he shall live-* "Remembered" is one of a series of Bible verses which could imply that there will be a 'going through' of the sins of the rejected at judgment day, and a 'going through' of the good deeds of the righteous, the water and clothing provided as it were to the Lord Jesus. "Whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord" (Eph. 6:8)- at judgment day. Not in this life, when the righteous often suffer for their goodness. *Every* good deed will then have its recognition; but their sins have been dealt with, and these will not be 'gone through' with them.

"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked (at the second coming): for there is a time there for *every* purpose and for *every* work...for God shall bring *every* work into judgment, with *every* secret thing, whether it be good or bad" (Ecc. 3:17; 12:14). Note the emphasis on "*every*". Even what we have spoken in the ear will be shouted out (Lk. 12:3) -implying others will somehow observe our judgment, cp. Mt. 12:41. If the judgment is merely a yes/no statement which has been worked out taking our whole life into consideration, then this emphasis on every work having a time for consideration and judgment "there" is pointless. God will "require" the flock at the hand of the pastors (Ez. 34:10), or, as the NT puts it, the ecclesial elders must give an account at judgment day for their flock. The Hebrew word translated "require" in the above passages has the sense of to search / enquire- which suggests a process of discussion during the judgment process. Paul prayed that the fact the brethren in Rome hadn't stood with him in his court case "may not be laid to their charge" (2 Tim. 4:16). This sounds as if he expected their behaviour in this specific matter to be something which could be brought up with them in the last day and possibly be the cause of their rejection.

"I will never forget any of their works" (Am. 8:7) was God's judgment against the wicked in Israel. Their works would be mentioned to them again at judgment day. Nehemiah several times asks God to "remember unto me" the good deeds he had done for Judah (Neh. 5:19 RV), and to likewise "remember" the bad works of the wicked (Neh. 6:14 RV). He clearly perceived judgment day as featuring the good deeds of the righteous being as it were listed, and the sins of the wicked being likewise recounted. Perhaps his prayer was heard in that in a restoration context, Mal. 3:16 comments that a book of remembrance was written by God to record the good deeds of the faithful at that time.

For those who suffer persecution, prison etc. for the Lord's sake, "it shall turn to you for a testimony" (Lk. 21:13). When? How? Surely in that these things will be 'gone through' with them at judgment as a testimony to their faithfulness. At judgment God "shall bring forth thy righteousness (good deeds) as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day" (Ps. 37:6). The sins of the rejected and the good deeds of the righteous will be publicly declared at the judgment, even if they are concealed from men in this life (1 Tim. 5:24,25). This is how men will receive "praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:7; Rom. 2:29). The wicked will see the generous deeds of the righteous rehearsed before them; and will gnash their teeth and melt away into condemnation (Ps. 112:9,10).

Ezekiel 18:23 *Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? says the Lord Yahweh; and not rather that he should return from his way, and live?*- The desire of God for repentance is stronger than His need to punish sin. Hence LXX "Shall I at all desire the death of the sinner, saith the Lord, as I desire that he should turn from his evil way, and live?". This is why He hangs on so long with sinful people, and Israel are the parade example. His desire for repentance, His passion for human reformation, is active and huge. It's not that He has set a bar which must be jumped over, and is passive toward us until that is achieved.

Ezekiel 18:24 *But when the righteous turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? None of his righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered: in his trespass that he has trespassed, and in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die-* As explained on :22, the good deeds of the righteous will be 'gone through' at judgment day. But if they turn away, then those good deeds will not be remembered or gone through, but rather his sins.

Ezekiel 18:25 *Yet you say, The way of the Lord is not fair. Hear now, house of Israel: Is My way not fair? Aren't your ways unfair?*- Is. 40:3, which is quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of "Prepare ye the way of the Lord", whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of "Prepare ye the way of the people". Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25). We are not only Jesus to this world but also effectively we are the witness to God Himself. We minister His care to others; to the extent that Paul could write both that he was a minister of God, and also a minister of the church (2 Cor. 6:4; Col. 1:24,25).

Ezekiel 18:26 *When the righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity and dies therein; in his iniquity that he has done shall he die-* This was perhaps a warning to the righteous remnant who had so far repented in exile; they were liable to be dragged back into sin by the other exiles and the depressive situation they found themselves in.

Ezekiel 18:27 *Again, when the wicked man turns away from his wickedness that he has committed and does that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive-* "Save his soul alive" implies that judgment is about to come, the death penalty already passed, but his

repentance just about averts this at the last moment. It is the term used in Gen. 19:19 of how Lot was just about saved by grace out of Sodom, which was a symbol of Jerusalem under judgment, as Ez. 16 has made clear. This was the desperate urgency of Ezekiel's appeal; and yet he was seen at best as a singer of fairy tales or old time love songs (Ez. 33:32).

Ezekiel 18:28 *Because he considers and turns away from all his transgressions that he has committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die-* "Considers" is literally 'see'. Part of our spiritual blindness is in refusing to see that our current path will lead to death and not life. They were to 'see' their situation and turn back, literally, 'return'. Their return from captivity was to be associated with their return from sin. But God took the initiative and returned them anyway, despite their impenitence. And even that initiative of grace was refused by the majority. The same words are used of Ezekiel being bidden both to 'consider [see]' and to 'turn' (Ez. 8:6,13,15;47:6). He was set up as their pattern, as the parade example of how the remnant ought to be.

Ezekiel 18:29 *Yet the house of Israel says, The way of the Lord is not fair. House of Israel, aren't My ways fair? Aren't your ways unfair?-* The majority of the captives insisted, according to Ez. 18, that they hadn't sinned, and they were suffering unjustly because of the sins of their fathers; whereas this righteous remnant in Babylon were intended to admit that "we have sinned. Equally with them of old time have we transgressed" (Is. 64:5). They took the message of Ezekiel to heart- unlike the majority. And thus this was the sad end of the great plan developed by the God of all grace for His people in Babylon. They rejected it, and hated His servants who brought that good news to them. The complaint that God is unfair is answered by reminding them that they have sinned. And this finally is one aspect of the answer to 'the problem of suffering'.

Ezekiel 18:30 *Therefore I will judge you, house of Israel, each one according to his ways, says the Lord Yahweh. Return, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin-* Time and again the prophets judged Israel according to their "ways", rather than according to their theological or academic knowledge. "Each one" was a reminder to the exiles that not one of them were mere victims of some group judgment whilst being personally innocent. They had sinned, but the appeal was not to allow that iniquity to be their "stumblingblock", which is how the Hebrew for "ruin" is usually translated. We all sin, but we are not to allow that sin to become a stumblingblock which plunges us headlong into further sin. And that involves a conscious attempt to turn themselves. God lay a stumblingblock before those who had sinned (Ez. 3:20) in that He psychologically confirmed them in the way they chose to go. He confirmed them in how they had laid the stumblingblock themselves before their own faces (Ez. 14:3,4), blocking their mental vision with a desire to do wrong, specifically to attain or retain personal wealth (Ez. 7:19). All these passages use the same word for "ruin" as here, but translated "stumblingblock". This again is the urgency of our situation; we have sinned, but we must urgently repent. Otherwise, that sin

becomes entrenched in our mental vision, and will stumble us into the mire of sinful being and thinking.

Ezekiel 18:31 Cast away from you all your transgressions in which you have transgressed; and make yourself a new heart and a new spirit: for why will you die, house of Israel?-

Elsewhere in Ezekiel, God promises to give them a new heart and spirit (Ez. 11:19; 36:26). This was part of the new covenant God was offering the exiles, seeing they had broken the old covenant. On one hand, God can give the new psychology, the new pair of eyes, the heart of the Spirit... just like that. But to simply do so regardless of human volition would be to turn man into a mere puppet of an almighty psychological controller. There must be a desire for that new heart and spirit, and then God will confirm it. This offer of a new spirit due to the work of God's spirit on human hearts is just as much part of the same new covenant which God has given to all who accept it in Christ today.

Ezekiel 18:32 For I have no pleasure in the death of him who dies, says the Lord Yahweh:

therefore turn yourselves, and live- God is not passive to human repentance. He wants us to repent and wills us to do so. Those who refuse to turn or repent will die, and He has no satisfaction or pleasure or will for that to happen. The exiles could have repented, both individually and collectively ["turn yourselves" in Hebrew carries that collective implication], and averted the death which was otherwise planned for them and their brethren back in Judah at the hand of the Babylonians. Peter alludes to these words in saying that for all time, God is not willing ["pleasure" in Hebrew can mean 'will'] that any should perish but that all should repent (2 Pet. 3:9). His work of judging insistent sinners is in this sense for Him a "strange act... a strange work" (Is. 28:21). His passion is for our repentance and salvation, not our condemnation.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 19

Ezekiel 19:1 *Moreover, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel-* Chapters 17-22 form an ABABAB structure. Chapters 17,19 and 21 speak of Babylon, and chapters 18,20 and 22 of Judah's sins which warranted the Babylonian involvement.

Ezekiel 19:2 *And say, What was your mother? A lioness: she couched among lions, in the midst of the young lions she nourished her cubs-* The lions represent the leaders or princes; the lioness is the state of Judah or perhaps the Jerusalem leadership specifically (Lam. 1:1; Gal. 4:25), who "couched among [the other] lions" of the nations, one with them through making alliances with them. And she raised her cubs, the princes of Judah, amongst the lions of the surrounding nations, with their mentality. Babylon and Assyria are both likened to lions; although Jerusalem was "the lion of God" in Is. 29:1 (also Gen. 49:9; Num. 23:24; 24:9). But she was to 'couch among' the good pastures of Israel as a repentant sheep rather than as a lion once she had repented (Ez. 34:14,15; Zeph. 3:13). The mother however may refer to Hamutal, the literal mother of the princes mentioned, and whose unGodly ambitions for her sons led them to tragic ends.

Ezekiel 19:3 *She brought up one of her cubs: he became a young lion, and he learned to catch the prey; he devoured men-* The reference is to Jehoahaz, son of Josiah [called Shallum in Jer. 22:11], taken captive from Riblah to Egypt (:4) by Pharaoh-necho (2 Kings 23:33). His devouring others must refer to an aggressive kind of behaviour simply called doing evil in the Lord's eyes (2 Kings 23:32), just like his father. He was raised in this way and continued; and Ezekiel was appealing to the young people of the royal family and Jerusalem leadership to not go in the way of their fathers.

Ezekiel 19:4 *The nations also heard of him; he was caught in their pit; and they brought him with hooks to the land of Egypt-* The aggression of Jehoiachin was to such an extent that he was seen as a threat and somehow entrapped by the Egyptians.

Ezekiel 19:5 *Now when she saw that she had waited and her hope was lost, then she took another of her cubs and made him a young lion-* This could refer to Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:15), although it could also be Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:6,7); both were taken to Babylon (:9). The stress on the same mother (:2,3,5) would then highlight how the mother of Jehoahaz and Zedekiah had raised them in such a way that led both of them to make dishonest alliances as part of a crazy bid for power, which ended both of them in captivity.

Ezekiel 19:6 *He went up and down among the lions; he became a young lion and he learned to catch the prey; he devoured men-* He didn't learn from the mistakes and judgment of Jehoahaz. Sometimes parallel people are brought into our lives from whom we are intended to learn, and avoid the path they took.

Ezekiel 19:7 *He knew their palaces-* This is s.w. "widows", hence RVmg. and Keil "he knew, i.e. outraged, the widows of Israel". He knew (i.e. eyed with satisfaction) his palaces" from which he had ejected their former owners (Jer. 22:15). If we stay with "palaces", then the idea would be that he visited the palaces of the local rulers of

the nations. But he hardly "laid waste their cities". Perhaps his plan to do so was counted as having been as good as done, which is why the nations saw him as a threat.

And laid waste their cities; and the land was desolate, and its fullness, because of the noise of his roaring- The idea may be that the land was made desolate because of his singular failures, just as was to happen with Zedekiah (see on :14). But the idea may be that he wasted the land for his own benefit, and therefore the land was to be desolated by the invaders.

Ezekiel 19:8 *Then the nations set against him on every side from the provinces; and they spread their net over him; he was caught in their pit-* He was seen as a dangerous lion, a potential threat, and caught. The nations are called "the provinces" to stress that Babylon was the empire to which they all belonged. They used their own limited autonomy in order to depose the aggressive princes of Judah.

Ezekiel 19:9 *They put him in a cage with hooks and brought him to the king of Babylon; they brought him into strongholds, that his voice should no more be heard on the mountains of Israel-* And Ezekiel in captivity in Babylon was prophesying to him and his family.

Ezekiel 19:10 *Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard planted by the waters. It was fruitful and full of branches because of the many waters-* This is the language already used in Ez. 17. It uses the prophetic perfect tense, talking of that which was yet to happen as if it has happened. They had wasted all the potential to become a fruitful vine by seeking to establish the kingdom in their own strength. The chapter at least from :here onwards is a funeral dirge (:17). It could have been for Hamutal the mother of Zedekiah who died in Babylon (Jer. 29:2), or perhaps for Zedekiah himself. Part of the reason her sons made the alliances they did was due to her ambitions, which were clearly not based upon faith in God.

Ezekiel 19:11 *It had strong rods for the sceptres of those who bore rule, and their height was exalted among the thick boughs, and they were seen in their height with the multitude of their branches-* We perhaps have an intensive plural here, referring to Zedekiah; or perhaps all 22 of the kings of Judah from David to Zedekiah are in view. And yet if the reference is to Zedekiah, we note that he appears to have been weak and under the control of Babylon, and finally his sons were slain before his eyes. The strength therefore refers to the potential strength and possibility there was to become the rulers of God's revived Kingdom- if they had totally repented.

Ezekiel 19:12 *But it was plucked up in fury, it was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up its fruit. Its strong rods were broken off and withered; the fire consumed them-* The vine was not completely destroyed; only its branches were. It was plucked up by the Babylonians, but replanted in Babylon. The imagery reflects God's grace in not totally destroying the vine. The east wind refers to the Babylonian invasion from the north east, and how the royal family withered to nothing in Babylon.

Ezekiel 19:13 *Now it is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land-* The "dry ground" is Babylon, and the new "planting" indicates the deportation of Jehoiachin and the chief men of Judah. It was out of this dry ground that a Messianic figure could

have arisen, as predicted in Is. 53. But Zerubbabel and others failed in this, and so the predictions were reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 19:14 *Fire is gone out of the rods of its branches, it has devoured its fruit, so that there is in it no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule-* This is the same figure as in Jud. 9:15; Zedekiah's refusal to repent at Jeremiah's preaching brought forth the fire of destruction upon the entire vine. Just one man's repentance could have averted so much damage.

Ez. 17:22,23 had spoken of how at the restoration, Babylon would fall and a "tender one" arise, who would grow into a tree under whose branches all the birds would find shelter. This is the very language of the Kingdom of Jesus in Mt. 13:32. The Kingdom of Babylon- also likened in Daniel to a tree with birds beneath it- could have been replaced with God's Kingdom when it fell soon after the restoration of Judah. But no Messiah figure arose (see on Ez. 37:25- Zerubbabel could have fulfilled it), and so the prophecy had a changed fulfilment- the tree that was abased and then lifted up could have been Israel, but it was re-applied to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate "servant" of Yahweh. Ezekiel 19:13,14 help us perceive this more clearly- Judah in Babylon were as it were "planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty ground". She had "no [Messianic] strong rod to be a sceptre to rule", and this was "for a lamentation". But the prophecy was fulfilled in another way- for the Lord Jesus was the root out of a dry ground who sprang up and *did* fulfil God's intention (Is. 53:1).

This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation- The chapter at least from :10 onwards is therefore a funeral dirge. It could have been for the literal mother of Zedekiah who died in Babylon (Jer. 29:2), or perhaps for Zedekiah himself. Part of the reason her sons made the alliances they did was due to her ambitions, which were clearly not based upon faith in God.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 20

Ezekiel 20:1 *It happened in the seventh year, in the fifth month, the tenth day of the month, that some of the elders of Israel came to inquire of Yahweh and they sat before me-* At this time, Zedekiah was planning to revolt from the king of Babylon and under the influence of his mother (see Ez. 19) was planning to gain independent power through making alliances with other nations. The elders who come to Ezekiel may have been from within the community of Jewish captives already in Babylon, or from Jerusalem. The enquiry may have been because they wanted to know Ezekiel's take on how long they would have to remain in captivity, considering how the false prophets were speaking of an immediate return and victory against Babylon. It seems they came to Ezekiel wanting to hear this message, which is why God would not be inquired of by them (:3,31).

Ezekiel 20:2 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying-* Chapters 17-22 form an ABABAB structure. Chapters 17,19 and 21 speak of Babylon, and chapters 18,20 and 22 of Judah's sins which warranted the Babylonian involvement.

Ezekiel 20:3 *Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Is it to inquire of Me that you have come? As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, I will not be inquired of by you-* The allusion may be to Dt. 4:29, where the

same word for "inquire" is used. Israel would find God if they "seek" or "inquire" for Him "with your whole heart". And their apparent interest in God's word was not wholehearted but like many today, they came to His word with their own already decided agenda as to what they wanted the answer to be. The word is also used of seeking other gods (Dt. 12:30; Jer. 8:2 and especially see on Ez. 14:3,7,10). Idolatry was clearly a problem amongst them; if they were 'seeking to' other gods then they could not expect a response from Yahweh, if they treated Him as just one of many options available. The elders who came to Ezekiel are in the same category as those in Judah who did not seek / inquire of Yahweh, although they did externally (Jer. 10:21). We can pray and come to God's word, when in reality we are not doing so from our whole heart and are doing this simply on the level of religious interest rather than wholehearted devotion. They would only 'find' God if they 'sought' with their whole heart (Jer. 29:13).

Ezekiel 20:4 *Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Cause them to know the abominations of their fathers-* Judgment is here paralleled with being caused to know the sins of their fathers which they were in denial of, and which they apparently were continuing in. For Ez. 18 had appealed for them to repent of the sins of their fathers. This is the purpose of judgment; to elicit in men an acknowledgment of their sins and thus coming to 'know Yahweh'.

Ezekiel 20:5 *And tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In the day when I chose Israel, and swore to the seed of the house of Jacob, and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, when I swore to them saying, I am Yahweh your God-* "Swore" is 'to lift up the hand' as AV. It is fitting that the Lord Jesus Christ died with hands and arms lifted up above his head, rather than spread out in a crucifix form, seeing that uplifted hands is a symbol of God's promises being confirmed (Ez. 20:5,6,15; 36:7; 47:14), as well as intense prayer (Lam. 2:19; 1 Tim. 2:8; 2 Chron. 6:12,13; Ps. 28:2), which Christ was engaged in on the cross (Heb. 5:7). The covenant is described as being made in Egypt (Ez. 20:5) to heighten the similarity with the exiles now in Babylon, who were being offered a new covenant, and then the possibility of leaving Babylon / Egypt and entering the land again. Judah are also being reminded that the covenant was made with all Israel, the seed of Jacob, and not just Judah. For it was God's intention to regather them to the land together with Judah.

But although God had chosen Israel as His unique people, they had chosen other gods (Jud. 5:8), and at Ezekiel's time they were doing this in order to get political and military protection from those various gods and nations whom they were choosing. God's choosing of Israel is associated with God placing them in their own land (Is. 14:1; 41:8,9). At the restoration they would therefore be as it were chosen again (Is. 49:7). Yet by grace God restored them, even though they had not uniquely chosen Him again. And they still didn't respond to that grace.

Ezekiel 20:6 *In that day I swore to them, to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands-* Likewise our place in God's Kingdom will have been carefully prepared for us. Just as God "searched out" Canaan for His people. And yet the spies sent to search out Canaan were not in step with God's searching out of the land. Indeed instead of trusting that He had searched out Canaan, they insisted on sending their own spies to do so, and stumbled because of this.

Ezekiel 20:7 *I said to them, Throw away every man the abominations of his eyes, and don't defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God-* This was apparently a condition of God saving them from Egypt (:8). Later when in the wilderness the command was required again because they had brought the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea, as Am. 5:26 states clearly. We too can smuggle the idols of the world through the waters of baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2). The parallel was with the exiles in Babylon, who were to quit idolatry before they could enter the land in restoration. Yet it seems God restored them anyway, so eager was He to restore them. The idols were abominations of their eyes in the sense of Ez. 14- they had placed their idols before their eyes and faces, they were a mental block to them, because the essence of idolatry is within the worldview and mind of people.

Ezekiel 20:8 *But they rebelled against Me, and would not listen to Me; they didn't throw away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt-* And yet all the same God led them out of Egypt and He again led them from Babylon at the restoration despite the spiritual preconditions not being met. Ezekiel is told from the start that the exiles were 'rebellious', just as Israel from the start had been rebellious by not casting away their idols. The idols of Egypt may refer to the literal idols, and the abominations of their eyes to their mental blockage and obsession with these things; see on :7.

Then I said I would pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt- The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

Ezekiel 20:9 *But I worked for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among which they were, in whose sight I made Myself known to them in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt-* Time and again God's love made Him re-think and alter His plans. Ez. 20:9,10 explains that God intended to destroy Israel in Egypt because of their idolatry, and so He decided to bring them out into the wilderness and destroy them there so as not to do it in Egypt and give the Egyptians a reason to mock Him. And yet according to Jeremiah and Ez. 16:5-10, it was in the

wilderness that God fell in love with Israel and gave them His covenant. He is attracted to us so easily; hence His anger when we abuse this and disappoint Him.

God's salvation of Israel from Egypt and Babylon was very public, in the sight of the nations. Our baptism and deliverance from this world is likewise intended to be a public declaration, intended to encourage others to come with us.

Ezekiel 20:10 So I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness- This 'causing' to go forth was by grace, because they had not met the required spiritual preconditions- in that they had not in fact cast away their idols (see on Ez. 20:6-8). And it was to be the same in the exodus from Babylon. This Divine 'causing to go forth' was by the Spirit, for those who left captivity did so because their minds were stirred up by the Spirit to do so, even though they were not spiritually qualified for the restoration (Ezra 1:5). They had been commanded to "go forth" from Babylon (Is. 52:11 s.w.) but it was God who caused them to do this by the grace of His Spirit's operation on their hearts. The same is true of our exodus from this world through the water of baptism. It is all of grace and confirmation of the smallest desire to do so; and so this causing to go forth was by God's "mighty hand" (Ez. 20:34 s.w.).

Ezekiel 20:11 I gave them My statutes and showed them My ordinances, which if a man does, he shall live in them- The context here has been of God entering a covenant with Israel by grace. They had not quit the idols of Egypt, which was a condition of the covenant. So the gift of God's statutes and the revealing to them of His ordinances was far from a burden placed upon them, but rather a parade example of Divine grace in entering further into a relationship with a people who were not prepared or worthy of it.

Ezekiel 20:12 Moreover also I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies them- The Sabbath was specifically "a sign between them (Israel) and Me (God), that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them" (Ez. 20:12). As such, it has never been intended to be binding on Gentiles (non-Jews). "... the Lord has given *you* [not all mankind] the Sabbath (Ex. 16:29); "... You [God] made known to them [Israel] Your holy Sabbath" (Neh. 9:14).

As noted on :11, this law was not a burden but a gift of grace, to remind them that they had been sanctified by grace, not on the basis of their works, but by God's grace. For He had entered a covenant with them despite their refusal to meet the vital precondition of having quit the idols of Egypt. This resting from their own works was intended to teach them that they were sanctified, counted righteous and able to enter covenant with God, by grace and quite apart from their works.

Ezekiel 20:13 But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness- Ezekiel's ministry began with the revelation that the house of Israel of Ezekiel's time were still a rebellious house.

They didn't walk in My statutes and they rejected My ordinances, which if a man keep, he shall live in them; and My Sabbaths they greatly profaned- The refusal to accept justification by grace and not by works was a great profanation. Keeping God's commandments is intended to elicit a way of life. They are designed and structured to be lived in. There was no promise here of eternal life in return for obedience, but

rather the point is that the commandments were given in order to provoke an upward spiral of spirituality, life lived within them. When Divine commandments are singled out and analyzed alone, with tokenistic obedience to them demanded, then they will not achieve that which they are designed for. The sum of Divine commandments were intended together to produce a life lived within them. This is why partial obedience or obedience only in the letter was not going to be helpful.

Then I said I would pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to consume them- This surely refers to the time of the golden calf incident when God says He would destroy Israel and make of Moses a great nation to replace them (Ex. 32:10).

Ezekiel 20:14 But I worked for My name's sake that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I brought them out- This gives an insight into God's internal struggles. His grace as it were worked against His judgment. His mercy rejoiced against His judgment. But that struggle was motivated by the appeal of Moses for Him not to consume Israel. And that same struggle was ongoing over the question of whether to totally destroy Judah in captivity. Perhaps there is the implication that He would have done were it not for the intercession of a Moses like figure- perhaps Ezekiel and / or Jeremiah. God "worked" so that His Name would not be further profaned amongst the nations. It was His people who profaned that Name. But He worked through His Spirit to preserve them from further profaning His Name.

Ezekiel 20:15 Moreover also I swore to them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands- The swearing of a covenant now becomes swearing to destroy them by not bringing them into the land which potentially had been given to them. And so the exiles in Babylon were in a similar situation. Whilst their idolatry continued, they could not hope to be 'brought into the land', which is what the elders were presumably asking for (:2,3).

Ezekiel 20:16 Because they rejected My ordinances, and didn't walk in My statutes, and profaned My Sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols- Typical of the prophets, the essential reason for disobedience is perceived as being that their heart, their mind, was elsewhere rather than with God. The phrase 'the heart going after...' is used by the contemporary Jeremiah of the heart going after its own imaginations and also of the heart going after idols; their heart walked after their own imaginations [literally, their own images] and also after Baalim (Jer. 3:17; 9:14; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12). The essential reason for their literal idolatry was in their lack of spiritual mindedness, their following of the mental images they allowed themselves to internally worship. And this is why the essence of idolatry is so relevant to us today, we who live as never before in an age of visual images and mental pictures and all consuming perceptions. Judah's heart went after their own covetousness (Ez. 33:31), and that was why effectively their heart went after idols which promised them material blessings and fertility, and political and military support from those nations identified with those idols.

Ezekiel 20:17 Nevertheless My eye spared them and I didn't destroy them, neither did I make a full end of them in the wilderness- see on Ez. 7:14; 9:1; Ex. 34:9. There are passages which speak of how God's eye would not spare at Ezekiel's time, and also of how His eye would spare. This is not the meandering of an unstable God; rather is this God in passion, His pity and mercy struggling against the pole of judgment which is

also within His same personality. He had gone through the same feelings with Israel in the desert.

The idea of two Angels being present with Israel is found here in Ez. 20:17,22; God's "eye", which is definitely Angelic language, spared them from being destroyed- by the destroyer Angel. And therefore God "withdrew mine hand", also Angelic language, in order not to destroy them. The "eye" Angel limited the action of the "hand of destruction" Angel, just as on Passover night. Note too how it is the Angelic "eye of the Lord" which is paralleled with God's mercy in Ps. 33:18,22.

Ezekiel 20:18 *I said to their children in the wilderness, Don't walk in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their ordinances, nor defile yourselves with their idols-* This call to radically break from their fathers' example was exactly that being made to the younger exiles who first heard Ezekiel's words. This is why this description of God's appeal to the young people in the wilderness is not a verbatim quote from anywhere in the Pentateuch; it is expressed in terms which are appropriate to Ezekiel's audience. We note that the historical record gives little clue that idolatry was such a major problem with the Hebrews; God's record is so gracious. For in Ez. 16 He says that He fell in love with these people- despite all their idolatry.

Ezekiel 20:19 *I am Yahweh your God. Walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them-* The conflict is between walking in the statutes of their human fathers (:18) and those of their Heavenly Father. And there was a radical difference. It was so difficult for people in such strongly family-based societies to reject their human fathers for another. But this was the call of God to that generation in the wilderness; and now the royal family and priesthood were in exile in Babylon, it was equally necessary that their children likewise broke from their fathers' ways.

Ezekiel 20:20 *And make My Sabbaths holy; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am Yahweh your God-* It was not that the Sabbath wasn't being kept. The issue was that the significance of it was being lost. The sabbath was to remind them that they had been sanctified by grace, not on the basis of their works, but by God's grace. For He had entered a covenant with them despite their refusal to meet the vital precondition of having quit the idols of Egypt. This resting from their own works was intended to teach them that they were sanctified, counted righteous and able to enter covenant with God, by grace and quite apart from their works. But the Jews in exile as well as those in Judah were madly scheming by their own works and device as to how to overcome the Babylonian threat and achieve a kingdom on their own terms rather than God's.

Ezekiel 20:21 *But the children rebelled against Me; they didn't walk in My statutes, neither kept My ordinances to do them, which if a man do, he shall live in them: they profaned My Sabbaths-* The younger generation on the wilderness journey were assured that they would enter the land / Kingdom, although the older generation would die in the wilderness. Despite that wonderful assurance, and seeing the carcasses of their parents falling in the desert... they still refused to be obedient. Just as the younger generation of Ezekiel's audience were a rebellious house, despite all and every evidence and reason to live differently to their fathers.

Then I said that I would pour out My wrath upon them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness- See on :8.

Ezekiel 20:22 *Nevertheless I withdrew My hand-* The idea could be that as Abraham withdrew his hand from sacrificing Isaac, so God relented. But "swore" in Ez. 20 is literally 'to lift up the hand', so to withdraw the hand could mean that God rescinded the oath which was the basis of the covenant relationship with Israel- because they themselves had broken the covenant.

And worked for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I brought them forth- God had said He would destroy Israel and make of Moses a new nation. But He relented of that, and here in Ez. 20:22 we see the picture of His internal struggle, working for His Name's sake, for the sake of the principles incorporated within His Name. So it is an intrinsic part of His Name and essential personality that He changes His judgments from pity. When the Psalmist of Ps. 109:21 asks for God's grace, He asks God to "do" or "work" for the sake of His Name, and not bring about a threatened judgment. Jeremiah likewise understood this and asks God to still be gracious to Israel despite their lack of repentance- through working for His Name's sake (Jer. 14:7). To save by grace was therefore working or doing according to His Name's sake, rather than according to human merit (Ez. 36:22). Thus by working for His Name's sake, the repentant exiles would come to 'know Yahweh' (Ez. 20:44), they would come to see who He essentially is. And He is revealed as the very opposite of a stone faced, unchanging, insensitive God, which was then the standard conception of a deity.

We enquire why it was that God refused to destroy Israel for the sake of His Name, lest that Name be profaned and misunderstood. His Name included both gracious salvation and also judgment for sin. But there was a struggle within His very self, as a result of which the pole of saving grace came out as dominant. to simply destroy Israel would therefore have resulted in a misrepresentation of Him, as being merely a God of judgment. And for that reason, rather than Israel's repentance, He chose to not destroy them. The decision was for the sake of His Name, and we could say it was for the sake of His love and grace which are finally the dominant pole of that Name. Their salvation is therefore repeatedly presented as for the sake of His Name rather than anything on their side.

Ezekiel 20:23 *Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations, and disperse them through the countries-* The reference may be to this threat at the end of the wilderness journey (Dt. 28:64). But more likely it alludes to an unrecorded curse made during the journey. However, if indeed it does refer to Dt. 28:64, this was stated just prior to their entry into Canaan, on the last day of Moses' life. And yet despite this curse of being scattered, they then soon afterwards entered the land of promise. This grace would then have special relevance to Ezekiel's exiles, who were located spiritually although not geographically "in the wilderness", and whom God intended to restore to the land by grace even though they were unworthy of it.

Ezekiel 20:24 *Because they had not executed My ordinances but had rejected My statutes and had profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols-* This is a sad commentary upon the real state of the Israelites in the wilderness. Truly they were saved and brought into the land by grace. And the restoration from Babylon was to feature a similar grace. The wilderness generation who entered Canaan were not as faithful as some think; if indeed the reference of :23 is to Dt. 28:64, then they

entered Canaan still worshipping the Egyptian idols which their parents had worshipped in Egypt. They took them across the Jordan as their fathers took them across the Red Sea. And the law of Moses and Sabbath regulations were not observed by them in the wilderness. And we know that circumcision was also not practiced by them- thus they despised the covenant (Josh. 5:5).

Ezekiel 20:25 *Moreover also I gave them statutes that were not good, and ordinances in which they should not live-* In the Hebrew Bible, God is often said *to do*, what He only *permits* to be done. So it is here; He allowed them to be given bad laws from their religious leaders, which led them further into sin. God confirms people in the path they choose; this is the work of the holy Spirit positively, and negatively, an "evil spirit from the Lord" (1 Sam. 16:14) confirms sinners in the path they choose. It is God who is the dynamic in both these scenarios; there is no place for a superhuman, cosmic being called Satan.

Ezekiel 20:26 *And I polluted them in their own gifts, because they caused their children to pass through the fire, that I might make them desolate; to the end that they might know that I am Yahweh-* We marvel at how God does not turn away from sin but instead seeks to work through it, so that even through the horror of child sacrifice, people were intended to come to know Yahweh through their repentance. They desolated themselves by offering their children to their idols, the fire and smoke of the burning bodies supposedly transporting those children to the gods in heaven. But God worked through that to desolate them. He only did to them what they had done to themselves. "Their children" is as AV "all that openeth the womb", the firstborn, which were intended to be Yahweh's in memorial of how He had saved the firstborn at the Passover. They were willfully ignorant of their past salvation and the implications that should have had upon them for all time. We too can forget our spiritual past, and the grace shown to us then.

Ezekiel 20:27 *Therefore son of man speak to the house of Israel and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In this, moreover, have your fathers blasphemed Me, in that they have committed a trespass against Me-* Ezekiel now moves on as it were to a new subsection in this description of Israel's historical sins. They had sinned in the wilderness and now the history moves on to how they continued sinning once they entered Canaan. This surely gives us reason to reevaluate the idea that the generation who entered Canaan were the most faithful of all Israel's generations- an idea taught by Rabbis to this day. We note however the present tenses- the fathers "have committed a trespass...", as if to make the audience of Ezekiel realize that the essence of those historical sins was continuing in their literal fathers and in their own generation.

Ezekiel 20:28 *For when I had brought them into the land which I swore to give to them, then they saw every high hill and every thick tree, and they offered there their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering; there also they made their pleasant aroma, and they poured out there their drink offerings-* Such apostasy apparently happened as soon as they entered Canaan. The great victories given to the people under Joshua were therefore given to a people who also worshipped idols.

Ezekiel 20:29 *Then I said to them, What does the high place where you go mean? So*

its name is called Bamah to this day- The implication is that they should have renamed such places. But "to this day" they called their high places "Bamah" just as the Canaanites had. "Bamah" appears to be a Canaanite term for the high places; it is the term found for them on the Moabite stone. They ought to have immediately destroyed the Canaanite high places (Dt. 12:1-5) but instead they eagerly used them for worship, and still did. All the recorded reforms of the faithful kings of Judah had not therefore been that far reaching.

Ezekiel 20:30 *Therefore tell the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Do you pollute yourselves in the way of your fathers? and do you play the prostitute after their abominations?*- The emphasis is upon the word "you". Now the recounting of history ends, and the rhetorical question is asked- 'Are you really any better than your fathers?'. Ez. 16 and Ez. 23 clearly state that Judah were right then prostituting themselves to other gods- even the exiles with Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 20:31 *When you offer your gifts, when you make your sons to pass through the fire, do you pollute yourselves with all your idols to this day?*- "To this day" means that the exiles in captivity were offering their children to Moloch. And yet they came asking for Yahweh's word to be revealed to them. No wonder God refused to sympathetically respond.

Shall I be inquired of by you, house of Israel? As I live says the Lord Yahweh, I will not be inquired of by you- This is not so much God refusing to respond, but a function of their lack of 'inquiry'. The elders who came to Ezekiel are in the same category as those in Judah who did not seek / inquire of Yahweh, although they did externally (Jer. 10:21). We can pray and come to God's word, when in reality we are not doing so from our whole heart and are doing this simply on the level of religious interest rather than wholehearted devotion. They would only 'find' God if they 'sought' with their whole heart (Jer. 29:13). See on :3.

Ezekiel 20:32 *And that which comes into your mind shall not be at all, in that you say, We will be as the nations, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone*- Their attitude was that they would leave Yahweh worship and be as the nations who worshipped idols. This was the thought which God perceived in them, even though they likely had not articulated this in so many words. For after all, they had come before Yahweh to hear His word (:31). But God wouldn't let His beloved leave Him so easily. Despite this, He wanted to have them as His own, still.

The theme of the new covenant is that God will mentally, psychologically almost force His love through with Israel. In their heart they didn't want His covenant, but He wants to make it work. Here He addresses their unspoken thought deep in their heart, that they wanted to just assimilate into the Gentile world and forget Yahweh. But God's love is such that despite judging them, He will change even that internal desire: "That which comes into your mind shall not be at all, in that you say, We will be as the nations, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone". He will stop their idolatry.

Ezekiel 20:33 *As I live says the Lord Yahweh, surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out will I be king over you*- As explained on :32, the inner thought of the exiles was that they would just quit Yahweh worship and

worship idols like the other nations. But God's mighty hand would rescue them even from that, and through His judgments He would still become their exclusive king- even if only of a remnant. We see here the same tenacity God shows with us, searching for the lost until He finds us. But to again be king over Israel, with them subservient to Him as His kingdom, under His Kingly dominion, He would have to first pour out His wrath. But there was a purpose in that wrath- to establish again His Kingdom over them.

To be king over Israel meant that they would be His people. As noted often in commentary on Hosea, to be "king" was a metaphor also for being a husband. God was intent on pushing through His plan to be Israel's husband, for the covenant to be fulfilled so that they would indeed be "His", His people, His woman, over whom He would be "king". He was going to force this through, despite "wrath" associated with judging their whoredom, and with huge expenditure of mental and personal effort to achieve this. The side of His saving grace had to struggle against and overcome the pole of His wrath and judgment.

Ezekiel 20:34 *I will bring you out from the peoples, and will gather you out of the countries in which you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out-* The mighty hand and stretched out arm of God was available to bring Judah out of Babylon- but most of them preferred to stay there. God was not sanctified before the heathen. The wonderful possibility of a new covenant went unrealized- to be deferred until the true Israel of God are gathered home in our last days. The scenario here envisaged didn't fully come about, because Israel were unwilling to participate. The idea was that He would with anger bring them out of Babylon, and then judge them (:35), and a minority would then form the remnant who would then be the kernel of His Kingdom reestablished in Israel under a Messianic ruler.

This language of bringing His people out and into the wilderness (:35) recalls the exodus from Egypt. There again, He did it by His initiative, by His love and grace, because He wanted them. But they took the idols of Egypt with them, and told Moses to leave them alone to serve the Egyptians. In this sense, as Jer. 31 says, they found grace in the wilderness. That most of Israel and Judah refused this massive effort from Yahweh to bring them out of captivity... is an essay in how stubborn man can be in refusing the most amazing power of grace. But that same huge will to save by grace is now extended to all who accept the new covenant and are willing to come out of Egypt. We note that this prophecy is in the seventh year after the first exiles had been taken; Jerusalem didn't fall until the twelfth year after the first exile, Ez. 33:21. So the idea was that the relatively few exiles who had been taken, along with Ezekiel, could have returned. All God's efforts were set up for this. But they preferred to mope by the Chebar river, refusing to take guilt and repent, instead blaming their situation on their fathers and justifying their "poor me" story (Ez. 18), just as so many do today. Worse still, it seems these exiles had taken the idols with them (:39), just as Israel did when leaving Egypt. The potential plan was to purge out the "rebels" from the group of exiles, purify the rest in the wilderness, and then they would triumphantly enter the land of Canaan. All this potential was wasted at the time. But Ez. 36 will show that God would force through that plan of salvation by grace, in the end; and if not with Israel, then with us who have accepted the new covenant. So we have here yet another carefully planned process of redemption that was refused, by short termism, sinking in the mire of mediocrity, refusal to seriously repent. The very things that stymie the

same careful plans God has made for the redemption of... probably billions who have likewise refused it for the same reasons.

Ezekiel 20:35 *And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there will I enter into judgment with you face to face-* . Ez. 20:30-33 contains God's response to the elders in captivity wanting Ezekiel to pray for them. They were committing whoredom, idolatry etc. Ez. 36:20 likewise comments how they "profaned My holy name" during the Babylonian captivity. They were not enabling God's plan of restoration to be realized. Ez. 20:35-40 therefore goes on to outline what was perhaps another possibility- that God would take the entire captive people into the wilderness at the end of the 70 years captivity, and purge out the rebels, and then bring them into the land, where they would have a temple and worship God (Ez. 20:40)- presumably in the temple outlined in Ez. 40-48. But it seems this alternative didn't work out either. The "face to face" meeting recalls that when the old covenant was made in Dt. 5:4. The judgment was to not merely punish them, but to enter into another covenant with them. "The wilderness of the peoples" was not the same as the lands of their captivity (:34). Those lands were the equivalent of Egypt (:36), and the "wilderness" was a period in which they would be judged and yet again enter covenant with God.

Ezekiel 20:36 *Like as I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I enter into judgment with you, says the Lord Yahweh-* This judgment however was to result in a new covenant and a remnant entering the land (:34,35). The Hebrew for 'entering into judgment' is literally "to plead" (as AV). The experience of judgment was not mere punishment, but a pleading to enter totally into covenant relationship. This pleading or judgment of the exiles is likewise associated with their salvation and restoration in Is. 43:26; 51:5. God would plead with or judge the exiles "because you say, I have not sinned" (Jer. 2:35). This was the purpose of the judgment envisaged- to elicit in the exiles repentance. Ezekiel was trying to achieve that by his ministry, he was to judge them so that they recognized their abominations (Ez. 20:4; 22:2), but they were a rebellious house. And so this idea of bringing them out of Babylon into some situation of judgment was envisaged (Ez. 20:34-38), so that they might repent. Zedekiah personally was to be judged or pleaded with in Babylon concerning his sin (Ez. 17:20), i.e. to make him recognize it and repent of it.

Ezekiel 20:37 *I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant-* This alludes to the custom of *tithing* the *sheep*. The shepherd stood at the door of the fold, where only one sheep could come out at a time. He had in his hand a rod dipped in red dye [cp. the blood of Christ], with which he branded every tenth sheep as the Lord's tithe portion. This apparently was known as 'causing to pass under the rod'. The implication would be therefore that only a tenth would survive, and come into the new covenant relationship with God. The size and proportion of the projected remnant differs between prophecies; so many different potential scenarios were possible, all depending upon the freewill repentance of His people. The intention was that having been brought out of Babylonian captivity and judged, those who were repentant would accept the new covenant. But this didn't happen. Something similar will happen in the last days, when the essence of these prophecies will again come true.

Ezekiel 20:38 *And I will purge out from among you the rebels and those who disobey*

against Me; I will bring them forth out of the land where they live, but they shall not enter into the land of Israel; and you shall know that I am Yahweh- The idea as explained on :34-36 was that the exiles would be brought out of exile forcibly, "the land where they live" (Babylon) into a "wilderness" situation, where they would be judged. The rebellious house would be purged; and thus Is. 52:11 would be fulfilled, which speaks of the purged ["clean"] exiles returning to the temple in Zion. Yet this scenario didn't quite work out, because the people were so unwilling to participate. Ezekiel told the captives during the early stages of their captivity that the false prophets and "rebels" amongst them would receive the condemnation and judgment of not returning to the land (Ez. 13:9; 20:38). And yet when the command came to return to the land, most of the people chose to remain in Babylon- and therefore they chose their own condemnation. They were a "rebellious house" (Ez. 2:3). For they were aware from Ezekiel's words that not returning to the land was God's condemnation. Those who will not be in the Kingdom will be those who chose not to be there- all who truly love the Lord's appearing will be accepted.

Ez. 20:38 says that the rebels in the wilderness "shall not enter into the land", with reference to how when Moses called the people "rebels" and beat the rock, he was disallowed entry into the land. Because he called them rebels, i.e. unworthy of entry to the Kingdom, he also was treated as a rebel. If we condemn others, we likewise will be condemned. On another level, he was simply barred for disobedience; and on yet another, his prayer to the effect that he didn't want to be in the land if his people weren't going to be there was being answered; and on yet another and higher level, his offer to be blotted out of the book of inheritance for Israel's sake was also being heard. Thus God works within the same incident in so many ways!

Ezekiel 20:39 As for you, house of Israel, thus says the Lord Yahweh: Go, serve each one his idols, and hereafter also, if you will not listen to Me; but My holy name you shall no more profane with your gifts and with your idols- As noted on :25, God is often said *to do*, what He only *permits* to be done. So it is here; He allowed them to be given bad laws from their religious leaders, which led them further into sin. God confirms people in the path they choose; this is the work of the holy Spirit positively, and negatively, an "evil spirit from the Lord" (1 Sam. 16:14) confirms sinners in the path they choose. It is God who is the dynamic in both these scenarios; there is no place for a superhuman, cosmic being called Satan. God wanted to bring an end to the miserable situation whereby His people professed to worship Him but also worshipped idols. His plan therefore was to purge out the rebels, and only those who were repentantly dedicated wholly to Him would return to the land and restore the Kingdom. But the truth was that there were none of them.

Ezekiel 20:40 For in My holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, says the Lord Yahweh, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them, serve Me in the land. There will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the first fruits of your offerings, with all your holy things- God's vision for the restoration was that the ten tribes would also come out of captivity and join with Judah in repentant, acceptable worship of Him in the one and only high place He recognized, mount Zion. But they were unwilling to leave, and so this prophecy or project will have its final fulfillment in the last days. But such prophecies will be reapplied and only fulfilled in their essence, not in their detail. Hence we are not to imagine them offering literal offerings. For the one acceptable offering for all time was to be that of the Lord Jesus, whom they will then accept.

Ezekiel 20:41 *As a pleasant aroma will I accept you when I bring you out from the peoples-* "Pleasant aroma" is the phrase often used for the "pleasant aroma" of sacrifices to Yahweh- three times in Exodus, seventeen in Leviticus, seventeen in Numbers. As a priest, Ezekiel would have been aware of this. But instead, they offered this to the idols (Ez. 6:13). The Divine hope (see on Ez. 6:9), the desperate hope of the unrequited lover for the beloved, was that a repentant remnant would realize this and then offer "pleasant aroma" again to Him alone. But they didn't. The idea of God 'accepting' Israel is found later in Ez. 43:27; when the temple was built and the sacrifices offered, "I will accept you"- if they passed through the program here envisaged, of coming out of Babylon and being purged by a meeting for judgment in "the wilderness". But this scenario didn't happen, and so neither was the temple vision fulfilled as planned. If Judah had later resumed building the temple according to Ezekiel's plan in penitence, then they could have even then been accepted: "I will take pleasure" in it, God offered (Hag. 1:8).

And gather you out of the countries in which you have been scattered- Consider the use of the word *pus*, 'scatter'. It was God's intention that mankind should scatter abroad in the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28); but it required the judgment of the tower of Babel to actually make them 'scatter' (Gen. 11:4). Thus even in judgment, God worked out His positive ultimate intentions with humanity. And this word *pus* is the same word used with reference to Judah's 'scattering' from the land into Babylonian captivity (Ez. 11:17; 20:34,41; 28:25). The intention, surely, was to show the captives that they had been scattered as the people had at the judgment of Babel / Babylon, but even in this, God was working out His purpose with His people and giving them the opportunity to fulfill His original intentions for them.

And I will be sanctified in you in the sight of the nations- As explained on :34-36, God's intention was to forcibly bring His people out from captivity, the ten tribes as well as Judah, into a "wilderness" situation, where there would be some kind of public judgment of them. The wicked would be purged (:38) and the remnant accepted into a new covenant. This would be done "in the sight of the nations", in the hope that Gentiles would also enter that covenant. But this scenario didn't happen in the form envisaged.

Ezekiel 20:42 *You shall know that I am Yahweh when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country which I swore to give to your fathers-* Their knowledge of Yahweh would be in terms of relationship, walking in covenant with Him, in awe at His grace towards them and their experience of salvation by grace. This was and is to know Yahweh; academic knowledge of theological propositions is not in view. The new covenant is based upon the promises to Abraham, hence the frequent reference to their receiving the land sworn to the fathers.

Ezekiel 20:43 *There you shall remember your ways and all your doings, in which you have polluted yourselves; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that you have committed-* It is the experience of grace and salvation by grace which elicits an awareness of our sins. The idea originally had been that the remnant would repent in exile and then be restored. But they didn't. And so the Divine hope was that by restoring them in impenitence, they would remember their sins and loathe what they had done. It's the same reason why Jesus broke His bread with as yet impenitent sinners- because He as a doctor was trying to bring sinners to repentance. We note that it was the exiles with Ezekiel who were to loathe themselves for their

pollutions, or that was the intention. It was they there in exile who were still offering their children to their idols, "to this day" (:31). Their self loathing uses the word translated "grieve" regarding God's grieving for Israel's idolatry in the wilderness (Ps. 95:10). They would come to see their sins as God saw and felt them; that is part of repentance. But initially it had been God's plan that they would grieve or loathe their sins whilst in captivity in Babylon (s.w. Ez. 6:9). But now the plan was different; seeing they had not done so, they would be forcibly brought out from Babylon into the undefined "wilderness" situation, where God would purge the rebels from the rebellious house, and then the remnant would be allowed to return to the land; and only then would they loathe themselves for their sins. But then in Ez. 36:21 the grace was extended even further- it was after the restoration of the kingdom conditions in the land that they would be thus provoked to loathe their former sins. God's grace is such that He amends His plans if by any means He might save some. He has that same passion for human salvation today.

Ezekiel 20:44 *You shall know that I am Yahweh when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, you house of Israel, says the Lord Yahweh-* See on :22. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23) but we see here how God's earnest passion to save people leads Him to devise means whereby He can all the same save from death (see on 2 Sam. 14:14). It is appreciating this breathtaking grace which is to "know Yahweh", rather than any cold assent to theological propositions, no matter how true they are.

Ezekiel 20:45 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying-* This final addendum may be an explanation of the otherwise mysterious "wilderness" situation into which God envisaged bringing the people when He had released them from Babylon and before He brought the remnant back into the land of Israel.

Ezekiel 20:46 *Son of man, set your face toward the south and direct your word toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the field in the south-* "The south" could refer to the area south of the Chebar river where Ezekiel was located with the captives. This short prophecy may explain area the otherwise mysterious "wilderness" situation into which God envisaged bringing the people when He had released them from Babylon and before He brought the remnant back into the land of Israel.

Ezekiel 20:47 *And tell the forest of the south, Hear the word of Yahweh: Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree in you and every dry tree. The flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burnt thereby-* This may be the explanation as to how Israel would be released from captivity. "The north", Babylon itself, to the area south of Babylon which is in view (see on :45,46), would be burnt by the fire of God's wrath. It was that wrath which was to lead to Israel being able to leave Babylon (:33,34).

Ezekiel 20:48 *All flesh shall see that I, Yahweh, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched-* The wilderness in which Israel was to meet their God in judgment was to be observed by all the nations (:41). Hence the reference here to "all flesh" observing.

This scenario didn't work out at the time because Israel were so utterly rebellious; had the rebels were purged from the rebellious house, there would have been no remnant. For Ezekiel's ministry began with the comment that all Israel were in totality a rebellious house. But something similar in essence shall happen in the last days.

Ezekiel 20:49 *Then I said, Ah Lord Yahweh! they say of me, Isn't he a speaker of parables?*- It was tragic for the prophets that the people were so indifferent. They portrayed the tragic, passionate love of God to His people, they sung of it, wrote of it, made poetry about it [for much of the prophetic writing is poetry]. And yet they passed this off as mere "allegory" in a mocking way (Ez. 20:49), Ezekiel was "to them like one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice... for they hear what you say, but they will not do it" (Ez. 33:32). They were like buskers singing songs in the subway, which we may listen to with half an ear, even admire them for a few moments, and then walk on in our busy lives. But the prophets were speaking forth the words of passionate love of God Almighty for His people... truly as Paul Simon put it, with an uncanny appropriacy to our train of thought, "the words of the prophets are written on the subway walls". They thought that "the Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill" (Zeph. 1:12); "the Lord does not see us" (Ez. 8:12; 9:9); "my way is hidden from the Lord" (Is. 40:27; 29:15). This of course is the attitude with which we daily live. The question is, will we perceive it as the prophets did?

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 21

Ezekiel 21:1 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying-* Chapters 17-22 form an ABABAB structure. Chapters 17,19 and 21 speak of Babylon, and chapters 18,20 and 22 of Judah's sins which warranted the Babylonian involvement.

Ezekiel 21:2 *Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, and drop your word toward the sanctuaries and prophesy against the land of Israel-* The plural "sanctuaries" may refer to all the high places, or it could be an intensive plural for the great sanctuary, the temple. We recall that Ezekiel was with the exiles in Babylon, hence he looks towards Jerusalem and Israel.

Ezekiel 21:3 *And tell the land of Israel, Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, and will draw forth My sword out of its sheath-* For "Israel" to be told of these prophecies, Ezekiel's words must have been published and taken there in some form; see on :13. Or perhaps the cherubim transported him there to give this message to them in person. However the threatened destruction of Judah is being told to the exiles because their repentance could have altered the outcome for the Jews still in Judah. We note Ezekiel's continual reference to Judah as "the land of Israel" because of God's intention to restore both Judah and the ten tribes in the Kingdom He wished to reestablish in the land.

And will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked- The allusion is clearly to Abraham's pleading with God not to destroy both righteous and wicked in Sodom (Gen. 18:23,25). Jerusalem was no better than Sodom, a point already made in Ez. 16. Perhaps the implication was that there was no intercessor like Abraham to stop this eventuality happening; and that the "righteous" were not even as righteous as 'righteous Lot' (2 Pet. 2:7), who himself was weak spiritually and only counted

righteous by faith. Ez. 20 has painted a very bad picture of the spiritual state of things in Judah, with sacrifice of children to idols ongoing at that very time.

Ezekiel 21:4 *Seeing then that I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked, therefore shall My sword go forth out of its sheath against all flesh from the south to the north-* I have often noted that God speaks His judgments, but there is a gap between the statement and its fulfilment. During that gap, there is the possibility of repentance. Hence Nineveh was to be destroyed after 40 days, but in reality it wasn't because there was repentance. This idea of a gap is represented here by the sword of judgment being still in its sheath. If there was no repentance then it would be drawn out of the sheath. Likewise the implication of the Sodom and Abraham allusion could be that the sword would have remained in its sheath if there had been an Abraham type intercessor. Although maybe the state of affairs was such that God saw total destruction as the only way to move forward.

Ezekiel 21:5 *And all flesh shall know that I, Yahweh, have drawn forth My sword out of its sheath; it shall not return any more-* The judgment of Israel in the wilderness spoken of in Ez. 20:36-38 (see notes there) was to also be the judgment of "all flesh". This scenario didn't come about, but it will do so in essence in the last days. The judgment of "all flesh" around Israel and that of the Jews is described in Revelation as being part and parcel of the same series of events. The threatened judgments would not again be delayed or rescinded, the sword would no more return to its sheath. This speaks of a final judgment, such as will only be seen in the last days, but which could have come about in Ezekiel's time had the preconditions been met.

Ezekiel 21:6 *Sigh therefore, you son of man; with the breaking of your thighs and with bitterness you will sigh before their eyes-* We have the impression of the exiles standing around Ezekiel. Perhaps he was still under house arrest. He was personally involved in his message, feeling for the tragedy of it all, and not merely a relay of information from God; as the GNB expresses the Hebrew, "groan as if your heart is breaking with despair". Just as any preaching work is not merely the imparting of information, but the word has to become flesh in the preacher of it. The despair was for the fact that had the exiles repented, the awful judgment need not have come. "Thighs" is literally "sides", as if his heart had burst and the blood was issuing through his side- yet another way in which he prefigured the ultimate "son of man", the Lord Jesus. "Bitterness" again reflects how Ezekiel was to feel their bitterness, as their "son of man" representative. But GNB offers "sorrow" for "bitterness".

Ezekiel 21:7 *It shall be, when they tell you, 'Why do you sigh?' that you shall say, Because of the news, for it is coming. Every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, every spirit shall faint and all knees shall be weak as water. It is coming, and it shall be done, says the Lord Yahweh-* Because Israel's heart would melt and be feeble "Because of the tidings" which Ezekiel taught, therefore *his* heart sighed and broke because he identified with how they would later feel when his words came true (Ez. 21:6,7). See on Ez. 3:15. There would be a psychological paralysis- evidence that God can work directly on the mind of people, positively [through the "holy spirit"] and negatively [an "evil spirit from the Lord"]. This had been threatened in Ez. 7:17 and Jer. 6:24 in the same words as used here; the point is now made that the words of the prophets were to really come true, and they must be taken seriously.

Ezekiel 21:8 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying-* There may or may not have been a gap between the prophecies, but the sword which was about to be taken from its sheath has now been prepared by sharpening and polishing (:9,10).

Ezekiel 21:9 *Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says Yahweh: Say, A sword, a sword, it is sharpened, and also polished-* This speaks of the preparation of the Babylonians by God. They were His sword, and would be wielded by His hand.

Ezekiel 21:10 *It is sharpened that it may make a slaughter; it is polished that it may be as lightning-* This is again an allusion to the opening vision of the cherubim, from whom flashed lightning. This huge system of Divine operation was to use the Babylonians in order to destroy His own people.

Shall we then laugh?- As noted on Ez. 20:49, the response to Ezekiel's words was mirth and refusing to take seriously the issues of eternal judgment, just as we see today.

The rod of My son condemns every tree- LXX "be sharpened that thou mayest be bright, ready for slaughter, slay, set at nought, despise every tree"; GNB "There can be no rejoicing, for my people have disregarded every warning and punishment". This would take "my son" as Israel (as in Hos. 11:1). The rod to fall upon Israel would also be the condemnation of every nation or tree, a figure just used in Ez. 20:46,47.

Ezekiel 21:11 *It is given to be polished, that it may be ready for use: the sword, it is sharpened, yes, it is polished, to give it into the hand of the killer-* The sword of Babylon was in fact being prepared by the Jews trying to deceive Babylon by entering into alliances and loyalty agreements with other nations. This was what provoked the sharpness of Babylon's final fall upon Judah. But God worked through that; thereby Judah were preparing their own judgment.

Ezekiel 21:12 *Cry and wail, son of man; for it is on My people, it is on all the princes of Israel: they are delivered over to the sword with My people; strike therefore on your thigh-* The princes were to be judged parallel with the masses of "My people". This is a point often made in the prophets. It wasn't that the masses suffered because of the failures of the minority in leadership. The leaders acted as the people wanted, so that even without democracy, a people effectively get the leadership they subconsciously desire. And so all Judah were to be judged.

Ezekiel 21:13 *For I am putting My people to the test, and if they refuse to repent, all these things will happen to them, says the Lord Yahweh-* The message of Ezekiel, perhaps particularly of this chapter, was to be published in Judah itself; see on :3. It was a call to repentance, and if they failed to respond, then these things would happen. Jeremiah's prophetic words to Judah were likewise to be their "test" (Jer. 6:27 s.w.). The same word is used of how the fire of the invaders' judgment would "test" the people (Zech. 13:9). But they could have avoided this if they had responded to God's word ahead of time. The call to repentance we hear today is likewise a foretaste of the fire of final judgment; and now is the time to respond and not then when it is too late.

Ezekiel 21:14 *You therefore, son of man, prophesy and strike your hands together;*

and let the sword be doubled the third time, the sword of the deadly wounded: it is the sword of the great slaughter which surrounds them- The sword doubled the third time may simply be an idiom meaning as GNB "the sword will strike again and again". The LXX has "take a second sword: the third sword is the sword of the slain, the great sword of the slain: and thou shalt strike them with amazement, lest the heart should faint". Perhaps the first sword refers to the "test" of :13; the sword point is held at Jerusalem in the hope they would repent on the cusp of Divine judgment. The second sword is repeated twice, in that Jerusalem was to fall and suffer from the sword, and then the exiles also were to suffer the sword in Babylon. The ESV has "let the sword come down twice, yes, three times"; and this would be using the same idiom as "for three and for four" in Amos 1:3 etc. The triple coming of the sword would then connect with the triple 'overturning' of Zion to be spoken of in :27.

"The deadly wounded" refers to Zedekiah, "You, deadly wounded wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come" (:25). The intention was that Zedekiah would die by the sword, but in fact he didn't. He was blinded, but died peacefully in prison (Jer. 52:11). The wound that ought to have been unto death was in fact not unto death- because God wanted him to be moved by His grace to repent.

Ezekiel 21:15 *I have set the threatening sword against all their gates, that their hearts may tremble, and their ruins be multiplied: ah! it is made as lightning, it is pointed for slaughter-* The sword was a "threatening sword" because it was part of the "test" of :13. It was as if the people of Jerusalem were being held at sword point by Ezekiel's words, telling them that the sword was about to pierce them. If they repented, then it would be withdrawn. That sword was fully prepared for actual slaughter, and the similarity with lightning [from being so highly polished and therefore glinting] was to forge connection with the cherubim vision. God was in and behind and above and controlling the Babylonian invasion; His huge system of operation was involved.

Ezekiel 21:16 *Gather yourselves together, go to the right, set yourselves in array, go to the left, wherever your face is set-* GNB sees this as addressed to the sword, in what could be described as "the song of the sword": "Cut to the right and the left, you sharp sword! Cut wherever you turn". Right and left could return to 'north and south'.

Ezekiel 21:17 *I will also strike My hands together-* Just as Ezekiel had done (:15). Ezekiel was not merely imparting information on God's behalf, but was emotionally caught up in the message as God's representative. And any true preacher of God's word should be likewise.

And I will cause My wrath to rest: I, Yahweh, have spoken it- The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the

restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

Ezekiel 21:18 *The word of Yahweh came to me again saying-* This further prophecy is also about the sword; but the point is that the Babylonian sword is in fact in God's hand.

Ezekiel 21:19 *Also, you son of man, appoint two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come; they both shall come forth out of one land. Mark out a place, mark it out at the head of the way to the city-* Ezekiel as God's prophet is helped to see that he and his prophetic word are in fact the controllers of the movements of the Babylonian army. Ezekiel was to as it were draw a road coming out of Babylon and then split it into two ways (:21), one going to Rabbah and the other to Jerusalem (:20).

Ezekiel 21:20 *You shall appoint a way for the sword to come to Rabbah of the Ammonites, and to Judah in Jerusalem the fortified-* Perhaps the Jewish false prophets claimed that the Babylonian army advancing from the north was in fact heading for Rabbah and the Ammonites and not for them. But Ezekiel was to prophesy that the same Divine sword was to attack both cities, and the apparent choice exercised by Nebuchadnezzar was in fact all overruled by God.

Ezekiel 21:21 *For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use fortune telling. He shook the arrows back and forth, he consulted the images, he looked in the liver-* The king had a choice as to whether to attack Rabbah first, or Jerusalem. He would have taken two arrows, presumably with the names of the two cities upon them, and shaken them back and forth in his quiver, believing that whichever he withdrew first after a certain ritual would be the one to attack first.

Ezekiel 21:22 *In his right hand was the forecast for Jerusalem, to set battering rams, to open the mouth in the slaughter, to lift up the battle cry, to set battering rams against the gates, to cast up mounds, to build forts-* The battering rams are exactly those depicted by Ezekiel (Ez. 4:2);

Ezekiel 21:23 *It shall seem to them as a false forecast in their opinion-* Perhaps the Jewish false prophets claimed that the Babylonian army advancing from the north was in fact heading for Rabbah and the Ammonites and not for them.

They have sworn solemn oaths, but he brings their guilt to remembrance, that they may be caught- The Jews had solemnly promised total allegiance to Babylon, when in fact they had been making such solemn oaths to others, in the hope of assembling enough political and military might to overcome Babylon. This was how the Babylonian sword was so sharpened against Israel; they were angry that they had

been lied to, and that the Jerusalem temple was not merely the shrine of their gods, but of the gods of other nations too. In all this they were used by God to express His anger regarding how Judah had treated *Him*.

Ezekiel 21:24 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have made your wickedness to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered so that in all your doings your sins appear; because you have come to memory, you shall be taken with the hand-* The way the Jews had made alliances with other peoples was an uncovering of their sins. Their previous infidelities to Babylon now were also remembered by the Babylonians; and again, God was manifest through Babylon. Because their feelings of hurt and anger at the deception experienced were exactly those of God- with whom Judah had also entered a covenant of total loyalty, and promised the temple as His sole sacred space.

Ezekiel 21:25 *You, deadly wounded wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come-* "The prince" of Ezekiel 40-48 is hard to understand as an immortal being such as the Lord Jesus. "The prince" of Ezekiel 21:27 was Judah's last ruler- so "the prince" later in Ezekiel would appear to be a promise of a restored monarchy. Yet tragically, the royal family chose to remain in Babylon. See on Ez. 37:25. "The deadly wounded" of :14 refers to Zedekiah, "You, deadly wounded wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come" (:25). The intention was that Zedekiah would die by the sword, but in fact he didn't. He was blinded, but died peacefully in prison (Jer. 52:11). The wound that ought to have been unto death was in fact not unto death- because God wanted him to be moved by His grace to repent.

In the time of the iniquity of the end- This phrase could imply that this was the time when Judah's iniquity would be finally punished. It is the same idea as in Dan. 9:24, when after the 70 weeks there was to be an end of Judah's sin, in that the punishment for it would be completed. But as noted there, the 70 years prophecy had become reapplied to a 70 weeks prophecy. So this "end" envisaged didn't in fact come when expected, neither in the death or deposition of Zedekiah, neither at the end of the 70 years, neither at the end of 70 weeks, but only in the last days in the final "time of the end".

Ezekiel 21:26 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Remove the mitre and take off the crown; this shall be no more the same-* It seems that Zedekiah had worn both the crown and the high priestly mitre, declaring himself to be the Messianic king-priest. But "this shall be no more the same", he was not to be a king-priest any more.

Exalt that which is low, and abase that which is high- Zedekiah the high, the proud, was to be abased- blinded and then left to die in prison. But a "low" one was to be exalted to take his place. This would have been possible at the time of the restoration. But the various possibilities didn't work out, and so the prophecy was reapplied and rescheduled to the Lord Jesus, the low one who was made high, as Phil. 2 exults.

Ezekiel 21:27 *I will overturn, overturn, overturn it. This also shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him-* The triple 'overturning' of Ez. 21:25-27 can refer to the three invasions made by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Remember that Ezekiel was primarily speaking to the captives in Babylon who had been taken there after the first and second Babylonian invasions. One more was yet to come. We have here an example of how the kingdom of God and its king

can be treated as parallel; Zedekiah's overthrow was that of God's kingdom. Thus God's kingdom as it was in the nation of Israel ended: "I... will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel" (Hos.1:4). "It shall be no more, *until...*" carries the implication that the kingdom would revive when "he come whose right it is; and (God) will give it him". God will "give (Jesus) the throne of his father David... and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32,33) - at Christ's return. This, therefore, is when the promise of the kingdom's restoration will be fulfilled. There is a tremendous theme throughout the Old Testament prophets of the *restoration* of God's Kingdom on Messiah's return. Christ's disciples were well tuned in to this: "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt you at this time *restore again the Kingdom to Israel?*" i.e. 'Will Ezekiel 21:27 be fulfilled now?' Jesus replied by saying that the exact time of his second coming they would never know, although the angels immediately afterwards assured them that he would, indeed, return at some point (Acts 1:6-11).

And yet the triple overturnings, perhaps parallel with the triple smiting with the sword of :14, could refer to three overturnings of Zion; once by Babylon, then by Rome, and then finally a third time in the last days, which will be the final signal for the Lord Jesus to come and revive the throne.

Ezekiel 21:28 *You, son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh concerning the children of Ammon, and concerning their reproach; and say, A sword, a sword is drawn, for the slaughter it is polished, to cause it to devour, that it may be as lightning-* This is the language of the same sword which was to come upon Judah as described earlier in this chapter. Judah had tried to make an alliance with Ammon so that together they could resist the Babylonian advances against them. But this was not to succeed, and Ammon also was to be destroyed by the same Divinely directed Babylonian sword as Judah. But Ez. 25:3-6 describes the Ammonites rejoicing with Babylon at the destruction of the temple. Clearly they were not sincere in their agreement with Judah; like Judah, they were promising loyalty whilst making the same promise of loyalty to Babylon. The deceivers were deceived by each other.

Ezekiel 21:29 *While they see for you false visions, while they forecast lies to you, to lay you on the necks of the wicked who are deadly wounded, whose day has come in the time of the iniquity of the end-* Ammon like Judah had its false prophets. The "deadly wounded" earlier referred to Zedekiah (:14,25), and the time of the end of the iniquity to the final judgment for Israel's sins (:25). So the idea may be that Ammon was to be judged together with Judah- far from the false prophecies that "No, actually this Babylonian advance is not in fact headed for us, but it's aiming for Rabbah... for Jerusalem". They would perish as it were together, even if they didn't do so chronologically.

Ezekiel 21:30 *Cause it to return into its sheath-* This can be translated as a rhetorical question: "Shall I cause it to return into its sheath?". And the answer was that no, God was really going to bring about this destruction, and the prophets claiming that the sword of judgment was going to return into its sheath at the last moment were going to be shown utterly false.

In the place where you were created, in the land of your birth, will I judge you- Ammon was born of an incestuous relationship in the land of Sodom. Sodom has been associated with apostate Judah in Ez. 16. The idea is that Ammon and Judah would

share a similar judgment because their origins and mentality were similar. Jerusalem's birthplace was therefore defined as being in Canaan, where Ammon's was too (Ez. 16:3). The false prophets were quite wrong to claim that the Babylonians would only judge Ammon and not Judah; and it seems the false prophets of Ammon were saying similarly that Babylon would judge only Judah and not themselves.

Ezekiel 21:31 *I will pour out My indignation on you; I will blow on you with the fire of My wrath; and I will deliver you into the hand of cruel men, skilful to destroy-* The idea is that these men had been educated or trained up for this destruction, just as in an earlier analogy the sword of Babylon had been sharpened and polished.

God had previously threatened to judge His people by gathering their enemies together to destroy them by acting like a smith blowing fire upon them. But we will read that the judgment / condemnation of His people which He had planned- would now no longer come about. He would count them righteous, so this would not happen: "they may gather together, but not by Me... Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and brings forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against you will prevail; and you will condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgement... their righteousness is of Me, says Yahweh" (Is. 54:15-17).

It is another way of saying that His people would be free from the condemnation from Him which on one hand was just. We will now read of the smiths making weapons with which to destroy Israel, and the allusion is clearly to the threat against the exiles made in Ez. 21:31: "And I will pour out upon you My indignation; with the fire of My wrath I will blow upon you; and I will give you into the hands of fiery men, smiths of destruction". God likens Himself to a smith, gathering materials and blowing fire upon them in judgment of Judah: "As they *gather* silver, brass, iron, lead and tin into the midst of the furnace to blow the fire onto it to melt it; so will I gather you in My anger and in My wrath, and I will lay you there, and melt you. Yes, I will gather you, and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst" (Ez. 22:20,21). God is now saying that this will not in fact happen. He would not be in this 'gathering'. The weapons He had formed / sharpened against His people would not in fact prosper. We too "are saved from [God's] wrath through Him", the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 21:32 *You shall be for fuel to the fire; your blood shall be in the midst of the land; you shall be remembered no more: for I, Yahweh, have spoken it-* If Ammon were but fuel on the fire, the implication is that the fire is burning something else. And according to Ezekiel's pictures of Jerusalem as a pot, that something was Jerusalem. Clearly it was utterly foolish for the false prophets of both Rabbah and Jerusalem to claim that the Babylonian judgment was solely intended for the other party.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 22

Ezekiel 22:1 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying-* Chapters 17-22 form an ABABAB structure. Chapters 17,19 and 21 speak of Babylon, and chapters 18,20 and 22 of Judah's sins which warranted the Babylonian involvement.

Ezekiel 22:2 *You, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the city of blood? So now cause her to know all her abominations-* Ezekiel's initial audience were in denial of their sins and that of their families. The Hebrew for 'entering into judgment' is literally "to plead" (as often in AV). The experience of judgment was not mere punishment, but a pleading to enter totally into covenant relationship. This pleading or judgment of the exiles is likewise associated with their salvation and restoration in Is. 43:26; 51:5. God would plead with or judge the exiles "because you say, I have not sinned" (Jer. 2:35). This was the purpose of the judgment envisaged- to elicit in the exiles repentance. Ezekiel was trying to achieve that by his ministry, he was to judge them so that they recognized their abominations (Ez. 20:4; 22:2), but they were a rebellious house. And so this idea of bringing them out of Babylon into some situation of judgment was envisaged (Ez. 20:34-38), so that they might repent. Zedekiah personally was to be judged or pleaded with in Babylon concerning his sin (Ez. 17:20), i.e. to make him recognize it and repent of it.

Ezekiel 22:3 *You shall say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: The city sheds blood in the midst of her so that her time of judgment may come, and makes idols against herself to defile herself!*- The starting point of the 70 or 40 years (see on Ez. 4:6) was somewhat flexible- for Ez. 22:3,4 records Ezekiel's prophecy that the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians [the starting point of the time periods] was actually being hastened, brought forward, by the terrible behaviour of the Jews living there after the initial Babylon invasion of the land. See on :30. God worked through their sins; it was they who were bringing on their time of judgment, rather than God of Himself.

The shedding of blood was done "in the midst of" Jerusalem, presumably in the temple. Jer. 7:6 likewise laments that innocent blood was shed there, in connection with idol worship. The reference seems to be to the sacrifice of children to other gods in the temple. Lam. 4:13 states that it was the priests, perhaps Ezekiel's relatives, who had shed this innocent blood in the temple. Jerusalem gave the blood of her children to the idols rather than dedicating the firstborn to Yahweh (Ez. 16:36). The ideas of shedding blood and idolatry are again found in Ez. 22:4; 33:25. We may recoil at this awful practice, but to dedicate our children to careers and the idols of this world rather than to Yahweh is in essence the same abomination, and it can likewise be done in the temple of Yahweh.

Ezekiel 22:4 *You have become guilty in the blood that you have shed, and are defiled in your idols which you have made-* "The blood" is AV "Thy blood"; as explained on :3, the reference is to their sacrificing their own children to their idols of their own hands. We must ask what are the equivalents in this age of sacrificing our children to our idols. "Guilty" is the same word sometimes translated "desolate" (Is. 24:6; Ez. 6:6). The desolation of the land was directly their fault. But it may also mean that they were legally now pronounced guilty for the sacrifice of their children- hence after doing it, they 'became guilty'. In the gap between their sin and the execution of judgment for it, they could have repented. We too live in such a gap, giving intensity to the life we live and our response to the calls for repentance.

And you have caused your days to draw near, and have come even to your year of judgment. Therefore have I made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all the countries- See on :3. The idea is that their time of judgment was hastened by their awful behaviour.

Ezekiel 22:5 *Those who are near and those who are far from you shall mock you, you infamous one and full of tumult-* "Tumult" refers to the psychological breakdown of those under Divine condemnation. Shame and mockery were a fate worse than death in the ancient world, and therefore it is so often mentioned that Israel and Jerusalem would become a mockery to the world. God deals with people within the frameworks of their self-understanding and worldviews.

Ezekiel 22:6 *Behold, the princes of Israel, each according to his power, have been in you to shed blood-* The initial audience of Ezekiel would have included members of the royal family. These words were therefore a direct rebuke to them and / or their families. I explained on :3 that the shedding of blood referred to child sacrifices. The princes of Israel, the royal family of Judah, had apparently done this too- with the royal seed.

Ezekiel 22:7 *In you have they set light by father and mother-* The intention of the gripping passage in Ez. 16 was to convict Jerusalem of her sins (Ez. 16:2); because they considered their spiritual and literal prostitution "a small matter". The same word is used in accusing the priesthood of considering it "a small matter" for the flock to have been ruined by them (Ez. 34:18). This was the problem, as it is today- the real implications of attitudes and behaviour are not taken seriously. We fail to perceive how deeply we affect both God and man. Society makes us feel insignificant cogs, but we are not like that to God. This was the problem with Ezekiel's audience; they had a light hearted approach to eternal issues. To them, sin was a light thing (Ez. 8:17; 22:7). This was the role of the prophets, to convict people of the gravity of their sins and positions, and the consequences to come.

In the midst of you have they dealt by oppression with the foreigner; in you have they wronged the fatherless and the widow- Sin brings an appropriate judgment. As they oppressed foreigners, so now Ezekiel's audience were being oppressed by foreigners. And yet all that follows in this section is exemplification of how the princes had "shed blood" (:6), which I have argued on :3-6 was in the context of idolatry and human sacrifice, with distinct sexual overtones (:9 "lewdness"). We wonder if their sexual perversions extended to masochism and the murder of their sex objects, as in cases of extreme sexual violence today. And their victims led to the exploitation of the most vulnerable in society, including Gentiles. It's all so similar with cases we encounter in the news today.

Ezekiel 22:8 *You have despised My holy things, and have profaned My Sabbaths-* This implies a conscious defilement, a using of the sabbath regulations and holy things as part of idol worship and sexual lewdness (:9). Again, this kind of extreme blasphemy, sexual perversion and masochism is known today, and it seems the princes of Israel, whose relatives and children were before Ezekiel in exile as he uttered these words, were doing the same kind of awful things. And doing them in Yahweh's temple. The same word is used how even after the restoration, the returned exiles "despised" God's Name and offerings ["holy things"] (Mal. 1:6,7,12). They didn't learn the lesson.

Ezekiel 22:9 *Slandering men have been in you to shed blood; and in you they have eaten on the mountains: in the midst of you they have committed lewdness-* Typical of the prophets, there is a juxtaposition between slandering and shedding blood. The Lord Jesus taught the same- that hatred in the heart was murder. To slander is to murder. And yet slander is here listed along with the grossest sexual immorality imaginable, apparently involving the murder of vulnerable people in the process of it. See on :12.

Ezekiel 22:10 *In you have they uncovered their fathers' nakedness; in you have they humbled her who was unclean in her impurity-* The sexual lewdness (:9) involved with the idol worship involved sleeping with family relatives and sexual perversions with menstruating women. This was all a conscious denial of Yahweh worship. And yet they claimed loyalty to Him.

Ezekiel 22:11 *One has committed abomination with his neighbour's wife, another has lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law; and another in you has humbled his sister, his father's daughter-* These sexual perversions with close relatives were, in the context, performed in the temple and as part of idol worship. "Abomination" is elsewhere used in that sense. And thereby the most basic moral teachings of the Law of Moses, Israel's covenant with God, were broken.

Ezekiel 22:12 *In you have they taken bribes to shed blood. You have taken interest and increase, you have greedily gained from your neighbours by oppression and have forgotten Me, says the Lord Yahweh-* The prohibition of taking interest was so that "your brother shall live by / with you" (Lev. 25:36). By having done so, those now in exile were separated from their poorer brethren. They had placed personal material gain before the unity of God's people. Again, that is a timeless warning. This taking of interest specifically happened in the temple, according to Ez. 22:12; suggesting the priesthood had become a financial racket which exploited the poor. It is the priesthood and ruling classes whom Ezekiel addresses, for they were those in exile with him.

As noted on :9, we have here a powerful juxtaposition. Sexual perversion in the temple as part of idol worship, even involving masochism and the murder of the women they abused, is mentioned along with taking bribes and lending on interest to their brethren. These things might seem insignificant compared to those apparently far grosser sins. But not to God through the prophets. We note that the bribes were "to shed blood", and there seems no reason to doubt that literal murder was in view.

Ezekiel 22:13 *Behold, therefore, I have struck My hand at your dishonest gain which you have made, and at the blood which has been shed in the midst of you-* As noted on :9 and :12, some "dishonest gain" here and there might appear not at all on the same scale as sexual perversion / idolatry in the temple, even involving murder of those sexually abused as sacrifices to the idols. But to God, such sin is in fact in the same league. There are degrees of sin, as the regulations of the Law of Moses itself reflected; but all sin against persons, especially abuse of God's people, is seen as within the same league- be it deceiving them financially or murdering them. For hatred is murder, in the Lord's book.

Ezekiel 22:14 *Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with you? I, Yahweh, have spoken it, and will do it-* The implication is that

they had psychologically strengthened and desensitized themselves to perform the gross abominations just discussed. That was surely the only way they could have committed murder as part of a sexually perverted session of idol worship, performed within Yahweh's temple. But in the day of judgment, all such hardening of themselves would collapse, and even they would face God's judgment with weak hands and broken hearts. It is for us to soften ourselves before Him now, and never become hardened in sin. See on :22.

Ezekiel 22:15 *I will scatter you among the nations and disperse you through the countries; and I will consume your filthiness out of you-* This didn't actually happen; the captivity didn't reform them. And yet the essence of the prophecy will come true in the last days. This suggests that as the day of the second coming approaches, Israel will be progressively purged and move closer and closer towards repentance. We marvel too at God's desire to ultimately save; for the perversions listed previously are so disgusting that we would assume that such persons should just be destroyed and forgotten eternally. But God's intention was as ever to punish with a view to reformation. We must never forget this in any discipline we may be called upon to minister.

Ezekiel 22:16 *You shall be profaned in yourself, in the sight of the nations; and you shall know that I am Yahweh-* This was perhaps the Divine hope; that the filthiness would be consumed from out of them in captivity (:15) and thus they would know Yahweh, coming into a relationship with Him. But this didn't happen; they refused to be cleansed, and so they didn't come to know Yahweh. And nationally, they even went on to slay His begotten Son. But this shall ultimately come true in the last days.

Ezekiel 22:17 *The word of Yahweh came to me, saying-* This next prophecy seeks to develop the idea of how God hoped to consume the filthiness out of His people (:15). He hoped to achieve that by their exile, and yet here we have the hope that this might be achieved by the judgment of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The hopefulness of God comes through powerfully.

Ezekiel 22:18 *Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me: all of them are brass, tin, iron and lead in the midst of the furnace; they are the dross of silver-* God's intention was that the fire of Babylonian judgment would somehow purge His people in Jerusalem. Impurity had become so mixed with purity that only this crisis could separate them. It seems this was true both in the hearts of individuals, and in society- in that not a single person was found with a pure heart (:30).

Ezekiel 22:19 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have all become dross, therefore, behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem-* As noted on :18, they "all" were dross. Impurity was apparently inextricably mixed with purity, and only the fire of the Babylonian holocaust could possibly divide the righteous from the wicked, and also purify the hearts of even the righteous.

Ezekiel 22:20 *As they gather silver, brass, iron, lead and tin into the midst of the furnace to blow the fire onto it to melt it; so will I gather you in My anger-* The gathering of the impure metals into the furnace was fulfilled through the peasant masses fleeing into Jerusalem in the face of the Babylonian advance. Again we see that it was not just the leadership who were corrupt, but the masses too.

And in My wrath, and I will lay you there, and melt you- "I will lay you" uses the word usually used about the resting of God's wrath. And that seems the preferable translation. The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

Ezekiel 22:21 *Yes, I will gather you, and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst-* As noted on :20, the gathering of the impure metals into the furnace was fulfilled through the peasant masses fleeing into Jerusalem in the face of the Babylonian advance. Again we see that it was not just the leadership who were corrupt, but the masses too.

Ezekiel 22:22 *As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so you will be melted in its midst; and you will know that I, Yahweh, have poured out My wrath on you-* "Melted" is often translated "poured out", so there is a play on ideas here. The intention of the pouring out of wrath was to pour them out. We noted on :14 the psychological hardening of the people to do the abominations which they did. The intention of the fire of judgment was to soften them. But the Divine hope and intention didn't come about. Instead of softening them and purging them, the fire consumed them (:31). They were not cleansed of their dross.

God had previously threatened to judge His people by gathering their enemies together to destroy them by acting like a smith blowing fire upon them. But we will read that the judgment / condemnation of His people which He had planned- would now no longer come about. He would count them righteous, so this would not happen: "they may gather together, but not by Me... Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and brings forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against you will prevail; and you will condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgement... their righteousness is of Me, says Yahweh" (Is. 54:15-17).

It is another way of saying that His people would be free from the condemnation from Him which on one hand was just. We will now read of the smiths making weapons with which to destroy Israel, and the allusion is clearly to the threat against the exiles made in Ez. 21:31: "And I will pour out upon you My indignation; with the

fire of My wrath I will blow upon you; and I will give you into the hands of fiery men, smiths of destruction". God likens Himself to a smith, gathering materials and blowing fire upon them in judgment of Judah: "As they *gather* silver, brass, iron, lead and tin into the midst of the furnace to blow the fire onto it to melt it; so will I gather you in My anger and in My wrath, and I will lay you there, and melt you. Yes, I will gather you, and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst" (Ez. 22:20-22). God is now saying that this will not in fact happen. He would not be in this 'gathering'. The weapons He had formed / sharpened against His people would not in fact prosper. We too "are saved from [God's] wrath through Him", the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 22:23 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying-* This prophecy follows on from the fact just presented that the fire of Babylonian judgment would not in fact cleanse Judah of their dross. Hence :31 concludes that the fire would not purge but rather consume them.

Ezekiel 22:24 *Son of man, tell her, You are a land that is not cleansed nor rained on in the day of indignation-* As noted on :23, the intention of the "day of indignation" was that it would be a fire which would cleanse the land. But it didn't, the dross was not removed, and the rain of blessing intended therefore didn't come.

Ezekiel 22:25 *There is a conspiracy of her prophets in its midst, like a roaring lion tearing the prey: they have devoured souls; they take treasure and precious things; they have made her widows many in its midst-* The reason as to why the land was not cleansed by the fire of judgment in the "day of indignation" (:24) is now given. The people allowed the false prophets to devour them. It was the ordinary peasant masses who were to be gathered in to the furnace of Jerusalem and judged (:20). They were equally culpable; for the false prophets had spoken and acted as they perceived the masses wanted them to. And so the prophets became like the Babylonians, as a roaring lion, the symbol of Babylon. They were to be identified with Babylon; the Babylonian judgment was what they had done to themselves, as :31 makes explicit. Perhaps the valuable items of the peasants fleeing into Jerusalem was taken by the false prophets. The souls and widows they devoured may refer, as earlier in this chapter, to vulnerable women whom they killed during perverted sex acts as part of their worship of idols. And this was done in the "midst" of the city, in the temple.

Ezekiel 22:26 *Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things: they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they caused men to discern between the unclean and the clean and have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, and I am profaned among them-* See on :8. The priests were those who actually performed the human sacrifices (Jer. 2:34; 19:4). But the root cause of their gross abominations was because they had failed to recognize and teach a distinction between holy and common, clean and unclean. The Mosaic regulations about these things were intended to teach a clear separation in the conscience between sin and righteousness. But when the line between sin and righteousness is blurred into so many shades of grey... then the awful abominations mentioned in this chapter are committed. And this is our abiding challenge, in a world which increasingly cannot tell right from wrong.

Ezekiel 22:27 *Her princes in its midst are like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood and to destroy people so that they may get dishonest gain-* The attitude of the princes to the people is described in terms appropriate to the Babylonians, who were to act as wolves in devouring the people (Jer. 5:6; Hab. 1:8). By so doing, and with the people tacitly supportive of the whole system, they had brought about the Babylonian judgment; for this would be but an extension of their own attitudes (:31). 'Getting dishonest gain' characterized the entire society, from the poor to the rich (Jer. 6:13; 8:10). See on :29.

Ezekiel 22:28 *Her prophets have plastered for them with whitewash, seeing false visions and foretelling lies to them, saying, Thus says the Lord Yahweh, when Yahweh has not spoken-* The gross immorality spoken of earlier in this chapter was justified by false claims that Yahweh in fact sanctioned it. The scary thing was that such gross immorality was performed in His temple; the people involved would have subconsciously wished to have Yahweh's sanction of it in order to ease their bad conscience, and so the false prophets complied. Again we see that as in the New Testament, the false prophets or teachers were not simply genuinely mistaken over abstract theological issues; the false teaching of false teachers in the Bible is nearly always in a moral context, justifying sin as righteousness.

Ezekiel 22:29 *The people of the land have used oppression and committed robbery; yes, they have troubled the poor and needy and have oppressed the foreigner wrongfully-* Again we see how the judgment to come was not just because of the sins of the leadership, the princes and false prophets (:27,28). The ordinary people had in their turn also abused the weak and vulnerable. And so it was appropriate that now foreigners were to oppress them. 'Getting dishonest gain' (:27) characterized the entire society, from the poor to the rich (Jer. 6:13; 8:10 s.w.).

Ezekiel 22:30 *I sought for a man among them, who should build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none-* See on :3. If a person had been found who would have powerfully interceded for Jerusalem, 'stood in the gap', God wouldn't have destroyed Jerusalem - "that I should not destroy it" is an allusion to Abraham interceding for Sodom in Gen. 18:28. But there was not such a person, because they were "all" dross (Ez. 22:18,19). Jeremiah was in the land at the time and was surely righteous, but he had been told not to intercede for the people (Jer. 11:14; 14:11). It seems that if another like him had been found, in addition to Ezekiel in exile, then the judgments could have been averted. There were simply so many possible scenarios! And this is what we must expect if even time periods can be shortened or extended in response to human behaviour. And yet Jeremiah himself seems to have been too 'pro' Israel. He was shocked at the depth of their weakness and even naive to it; and in Lamentations he seems to consider God had acted too harshly against His people. So perhaps in any case Jeremiah was not the appropriate interceder.

Ezekiel 22:31 *Therefore have I poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath. Their own way have I brought on their heads, says the Lord Yahweh-* As noted on :22, the fire of Babylonian judgment had been intended to purify them, to remove the dross. But the dross would not be removed, and so they were in fact consumed by the fire. And this was completely the result of their own

ways, rather than simply the anger of God. Judgment is really always an extension of a man's own way in his time of opportunity.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 23

Ezekiel 23:1 The word of Yahweh came again to me saying- The metaphors used to describe the anger of God with Israel are pretty awful. Her children to be slain with thirst, she was to be stripped naked by her husband (Hosea 2), gang raped by her lovers, having her nose cut off and left a battered, bleeding mess in the scrubland (Ez. 16,23), to have her skirt pulled up over her head and her nakedness revealed (Jer. 13:20-27), wishing to pluck off her own breasts for shame (Ez. 23:34). Jerusalem is to be raped, violated and humiliated, according to Ezekiel. Indeed, Ezekiel's images verge at times on what some would consider pornographic. He speaks of the woman Israel's pubic hair, breasts, menstrual cycle (Ez. 16:7,10); the gang rape by her enemies which God would bring about, leaving her mutilated and humiliated (Ez. 16:37; 23:22-49); about the size of her lovers' sexual organs and coital emissions, and how she let them fondle her breasts (Ez. 23:8,20). This is shocking language, which perhaps we skip over in our Bible reading from sheer embarrassment- and we are modern readers brutalized by exposure to this kind of stuff in the media. For early Israel, it would all have been even more shocking. It all seemed out of proportion to having 'merely' made a few political alliances with Egypt and Assyria. Was that really like a wife letting other men fondle her breasts and have sex with her, admiring their bodies as she did so? Did it all have to end in such brutality and vulgarity? Today, sex and violence are what attract attention. From lyrics of songs to advertising and movies, that's clear enough. And the prophets are using the same tactics to arrest Israel's attention, all the more so because nudity and sex were things simply not up for public discussion. There's an anxiety which any talk about sex seems to arouse in us, and it was the prophets' intention to make us likewise get on the edge of our seats, anxious, rapt, sensitive for the next word... realizing that really and truly, this is what human sin does to God. The outrageous sex talk was to bring out how outrageous and obscene are our sins and unfaithfulness to the covenant we cut with God in baptism.

Ezekiel 23:2 Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother- Unlike the similar lurid passage in Ez. 16, this appears to be a private revelation to Ezekiel, addressed personally as "son of man". Perhaps he still struggled to realize that the priesthood and society he had come from were really as bad as God saw them to be. The Jews considered the Israelites of the ten tribes to have been so far worse than themselves that they had gone into captivity in Assyria. One purpose of this allegory was to remind them that Israel were not worse than Judah; in fact the opposite was the case, and they were all the same sisters.

Ezekiel 23:3 And they played the prostitute in Egypt; they played the prostitute in their youth; there were their breasts pressed, and there were fondled the breasts of their virginity- The people of Israel worshipped idols in Egypt, and there lost their virginity. It was by grace that God took them on as His wife when they were already not virgins. The language of pressing the breasts means groping. They were raped, but raped as prostitutes are raped, half willingly so, in Egypt.

Ezekiel 23:4 Their names were Oholah the elder, and Oholibah her sister: and they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters- God's grace is here noted, that He

married such defiled women; and by grace, they had children, when prostitutes were stereotypically perceived as barren.

As for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem Oholibah- "Oholah" is "her tent", a reference to the false sanctuary created by Jeroboam for the ten tribes; and "Oholibah" 'my tent is in her', reflecting how indeed God's true sanctuary was in Jerusalem and not Samaria. But the allegory will continue to reveal that this didn't make her superior but rather even more responsible for the profanity performed in that sanctuary. So the assumption of Judah that they were somehow more righteous because they had the true sanctuary amongst them is thereby subverted.

Ezekiel 23:5 Oholah played the prostitute when she was Mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians her neighbours- Those lovers turned on her and destroyed her. She was taken captive to Assyria, the people whose gods she had so loved. "Doted" is literally 'to breathe after', the language of a woman in heat. This is how God presents her attraction to the Assyrian idols. And the word and extreme image is repeatedly used here (:7,9,12,16,20).

Ezekiel 23:6 Who were clothed with blue, governors and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses- It was as horsemen that the young men of Assyria came as soldiers to destroy Samaria and lead her into captivity. Her rulers were attractive because Israel thought that they had power to protect and save them instead of their God. And there again is a timeless warning. What they found so attractive turned to be their destruction. It was God's Kingdom which should have been "desirable" to Israel (s.w. Is. 27:2; 32:12), but the passing visual attraction of the world was more "desirable".

Ezekiel 23:7 She bestowed her prostitution on them, the choicest men of Assyria all of them; and on whoever she doted, with all their idols she defiled herself- Idolatry is presented as prostitution. But she "bestowed her prostitution on *them*", rather than them coming to her. For "doted" see on :5. Every relationship with the idols of our age is likewise prostitution against the God who has so loved us. "Choicest men" is used of soldiers (Dan. 11:15; Jer. 48:15; Ex. 15:4). It was the protection of Assyria's handsome soldiers which was so attractive to Israel; and therefore they agreed to serve their idols to have their protection. And it was those same soldiers who were to turn and destroy them.

Ezekiel 23:8 Neither has she left her prostitution since the days of Egypt; for in her youth they lay with her, and they fondled the breasts of her virginity; and they poured out their prostitution on her- Israel is presented as having been sexually unstable from her youth; her subsequent encounter with Yahweh, her marriage to Him and His pouring out His love upon her... didn't change her basic mentality. She was not serious, light minded, and went to whatever her eyes and flesh were attracted to. This is our tendency as humans. She didn't leave her prostitution "for" or because she had lost her virginity in Egypt, before she met Yahweh. The long term effect of her idolatry there, just like the long term effect of sexual promiscuity in youth, was that she never settled down to a stable monogamous relationship, even though she had the best ever husband.

Ezekiel 23:9 Therefore I delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians on whom she doted- For "doted" see on :5. It was appropriate that she

should be delivered into the hand or power of the Assyrians, for they were the ones she had loved more than Yahweh.

Ezekiel 23:10 These uncovered her nakedness; they took her sons and her daughters and her they killed with the sword, and she became a byword among women; for they executed judgments on her- The 'death' of the ten tribes must be compared to the insistence of all the restoration prophets that a revived Israel and Judah would together return to the land and form God's reestablished Kingdom. This has to imply that the slain Samaria would be as it were resurrected; which is what Ez. 37 predicts, a resurrection of the dry bones. The uncovering of nakedness implies shame, as does becoming a byword. This was a fate worse than death in their terms. The uncovering her nakedness means she was revealed for who she was- a worn out whore, self-ruined by her profligate life. What was uncovered by the Assyrians was her whoredom (:29). The Assyrians realized that Samaria had not been faithful to them as she had promised, but in fact had made similar agreements with other powers, and also worshipped their gods- as well as Yahweh. It was this discovery which made the Assyrians so angry with Samaria, just as the Babylonians were to be with Judah.

Ezekiel 23:11 Her sister Oholibah saw this, yet was she more corrupt in her doting than she, and in her prostitution which was more than the prostitution of her sister- This repeats Jeremiah's message to the Jews still in the land (Jer. 3:7). For "doting" see on :5. The idea seems to be that Jerusalem was encouraged in her immorality by Samaria. The reasoning was that because the sanctuary was in Jerusalem, Judah were automatically more righteous than Israel, and could therefore sin more than her. This is where mere tokenism and externality leads in religious life- to spiritual and literal immorality. "Corrupt" is the word used about the situation before the flood, when the *eret* was again "corrupt" and was "destroyed" (Gen. 6:11-13)- both are valid translations of the same Hebrew word. To be corrupt was to destroy oneself. The judgment was the sin.

Ezekiel 23:12 She doted on the Assyrians, governors and rulers, her neighbours, clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men- For "doting" see on :5. She was infatuated by the Assyrian leadership and military, the very things which Judah found attractive as promising protection and stability, when instead she should have looked to Yahweh for this.

Ezekiel 23:13 I saw that she was defiled; they both took one way- Again it is stressed that Judah was not better than Israel, as she imagined; she took the same "way". "Defiled" means that she was no longer a virgin (s.w. Gen. 34:5,13,27). But she had lost her virginity in Egypt; it was there that she had been defiled by idolatry (Ez. 20:7). The idea therefore is that God recognized that this was how she had been from the beginning; He "saw" the iniquity in His people which earlier by grace He had not 'seen' because He imputed righteousness to them, as the object of His love (Num. 23:21). It was specifically the temple which was "defiled" (s.w. Jer. 32:34; Ez. 5:11; 43:7), and perhaps that is the location of "the wall" in :14.

Ezekiel 23:14 She increased her prostitution; for she saw men portrayed on the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermillion- I suggested on :13 that the context is of the temple. It could be that Jews went to the land of the Chaldeans and were impressed with the friezes on their walls, coloured with bright red. For they

loved anything foreign, rather than the things of Yahweh. But more likely were these friezes replicated on the walls of the temple. Instead of the motif of the protecting cherubim within the temple, there were friezes of Chaldean soldiers, her pinups, her heroes and preferred saviours. "The wall" in Ez. 8:10; 43:8 refers specifically to the wall dividing the holy and most holy place; there, perhaps on the inside of the most holy, there were the friezes of idols and Chaldean warriors, used in a pornographic sense.

Ezekiel 23:15 Dressed with girdles on their waists, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them princes to look on, after the likeness of the Babylonians in Chaldea, the land of their birth- See on :23. The men depicted on the wall (:14) were *like* the Babylonian soldiers depicted on the friezes in the palaces and cities of the Chaldeans. The Jews had visited these lands and in their love for anything foreign, had replicated such motifs and friezes upon the walls of the temple.

Ezekiel 23:16 As soon as she saw them she doted on them, and sent messengers to them into Chaldea- For "doted" see on :5. She sent to Chaldea for these men to come to her, suggesting the pictures of the men were on the walls of the Jerusalem temple, and even within the holy places (see on :15). It is stereotypically *men* who respond to visual representations of *females*. Here it was men responding to the pictures of Chaldean men. It could be a reference to homosexual attraction, but the idea was that the lust was for the military protection of these soldiers; when the entire Angelic army symbolized by the cherubim was ready to protect Jerusalem. But they had removed the cherubim motif and replaced it with these images.

Ezekiel 23:17 The Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their prostitution, and she was polluted with them, and her soul was alienated from them- Judah felt that she had not been given the protection and support from Babylon which she had expected.

Ezekiel 23:18 So she displayed her prostitution, and uncovered her nakedness: then My soul was alienated from her, like as My soul was alienated from her sister- Jer. 6:8 and Ez. 23:18 speak of how God's soul "departed" (AV) from His people- but the same word is translated to hang / crucify (Num. 25:4; 2 Sam. 21:6,9,13). It's as if God was crucified in His pain for Israel. And in the death of His Son He went through that pain. And so never, ever, ever... can we nor Israel complain that our pain is greater than God's. Never. The pain of God at Israel's sin leads Him to exclaim (almost in the language of piercing and crucifixion): "Before me continually is grief and wounds" (Jer. 6:7). We can wound God by our sin, so sensitive is He to us. In the end, we read that God's "soul" departed from them, because "the Lord has rejected you" (Jer. 6:8,30). This is the same language used about Saul- God rejected him, and so His spirit departed from him (1 Sam. 15:23; 16:14). The implication was that God's very soul / spirit is "with" us, and therefore He can be so terribly wounded by us in His heart by the rebellions of those in covenant relationship with Him. For His heart / soul / spirit is *so* close to us His beloved people.

Ezekiel 23:19 Yet she multiplied her prostitution, remembering the days of her youth, in which she had played the prostitute in the land of Egypt- Despite God's departure from her, perhaps symbolized by the visible departure of the cherubim and glory from the temple described earlier in Ezekiel, she instead repeated her prostitution and

multiplied it, by trying to make treaties with the Egyptians and accepting their idols and gods.

Ezekiel 23:20 She doted on their paramours, whose flesh is as the flesh of donkeys, and whose issue is like the issue of horses- For "doted" see on :5. The language here is crude, but it reflects the crude nature of Jerusalem's attraction towards the other nations simply on the basis of their external attributes. Donkeys or asses were famed for having large reproductive organs, and horses for having much sperm. And these characteristics of the men portrayed on the walls of the temple (see on :14) were so attractive to the Jews. The horse was used by the Egyptians as the hieroglyphic for a lustful person; and as just pointed out in :19, Judah was still influenced by Egyptian thought and idolatry.

Ezekiel 23:21 Thus you called to memory the lewdness of your youth, in the fondling of your bosom by the Egyptians for the breasts of your youth- Under threat from the Babylonians, Judah returned to Egypt to make treaties with them, which involved accepting their idols into the Jerusalem temple. She was thus returning to her youth, acting as she had done then.

Ezekiel 23:22 Therefore, Oholibah, thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will raise up your lovers against you, from whom your soul is alienated, and I will bring them against you on every side- This alienation refers to the falling out between Judah and her masters in Babylon. She fell out with all her lovers once they realized she had been making similar treaties with other nations ["lovers"] and therefore her temple in Jerusalem was filled with the idols of various nations. She was alienated from Yahweh (:18) and now was alienated from her lovers. She was pathetically and tragically alone- and this is the picture of the condemnation of all who reject Yahweh. A gnashing of teeth alone in the darkness.

Ezekiel 23:23 The Babylonians and all the Chaldeans- The "Chaldeans" refer to a group of Aramean people who attacked and conquered Babylon in 625 BC. They came to establish the kingdom known as Babylon, but strictly the "Babylonians" at this stage referred to the local inhabitants of Babylon before the Chaldeans arrived there.

Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them; desirable young men, governors and rulers all of them, princes and men of renown, all of them riding on horses- These other nations are mentioned as exemplification of how Judah had been a whore in wanting relationship with so many different peoples. The names of these people all hint at the judgment upon Judah which they would bring: 'Punishment', 'Cry for help' and 'Shriek'. Judah befriended and 'loved' those who would later be their punishment, and force Judah to shriek urgently for help- which would then not be forthcoming.

Ezekiel 23:24 They shall come against you with weapons, chariots and wagons, and with a company of peoples; they shall set themselves against you with buckler and shield and helmet all around; and I will commit the judgment to them, and they shall judge you according to their judgments- LXX "And they all shall come upon thee from the north, chariots and wheels". This is clearly an allusion to the cherubim, seen also from the north, with chariots and wheels. The armies of cherubic protection which they had rejected (see on :14) would turn against them in the form of the

Babylonian invaders. God could have judged Jerusalem for her unfaithfulness to Him, but He allowed the other offended lovers to judge her for her unfaithfulness to them. In this sense He committed her judgment to them.

Ezekiel 23:25 I will set My jealousy against you, and they shall deal with you in fury- As explained on :24, God too was jealous, as the betrayed husband and lover. But the other lovers were also jealous, and so He judged them through allowing those lovers to judge her in their own way.

They shall take away your nose and your ears; and your residue shall fall by the sword. They shall take your sons and your daughters; and your residue shall be devoured by the fire- Cutting off nose and ears was a Mesopotamian punishment rather than a Hebrew one. So the idea may be that God would allow the former lovers to judge Judah, rather than He Himself directly. And they would judge in their way. The nose rings and earrings she had adorned herself with would be taken away and left for the executioners to pick up; her actual nose and ears would be cut off and she would be stoned to death, through the Babylonian siege engines hurling rocks at Jerusalem. For this was how they judged unfaithful women.

Ezekiel 23:26 They shall also strip you of your clothes, and take away your beautiful jewels- This alludes to the Mesopotamian custom (see on :25) of the executioner taking the clothes and jewels of the adulteress, and then leaving her dead body to be sexually used by any who wished. We note that Babylon was judging Judah for adultery against her; Judah had sworn total loyalty to Babylon as well as other nations, and when her whoredom / nakedness was discovered, when it was realized that the Jerusalem temple was full of the idols of all manner of gods; then Babylon judged Jerusalem as an adulterous wife. And God Himself of course wanted to do so, but as noted on :25, He allowed Babylon to do this for Him as it were.

Ezekiel 23:27 Thus will I make your lewdness to cease from you, and your prostitution brought from the land of Egypt; so that you shall not lift up your eyes to them, nor remember Egypt any more- The emphasis upon Egypt is perhaps because it was Egypt who tempted Judah to trust in her strength and therefore break her agreements with Babylon and Assyria. The unfaithful woman Jerusalem would be stoned to death by her one time lovers; but here we get the impression she would somehow be revived, resurrected to a position where she would never again make the same mistakes. And this is the revival spoken of in the valley of dry bones prophecy in Ez. 37. But this spiritual revival didn't happen at the restoration; it is yet to come, when these prophecies shall come to their final term.

Ezekiel 23:28 For thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will deliver you into the hand of those whom you hate, into the hand of those from whom your soul is alienated- Illicit love always turns to hatred. Never was this more true than in the case of Judah and her lovers. The true seed of Abraham were to dominate those who hated them (Gen. 24:60 s.w.). But Jerusalem was dominated by her haters. For she had broken the covenant.

Ezekiel 23:29 And they shall deal with you in hatred, and shall take away all your labour, and shall leave you naked and bare; and the nakedness of your prostitution shall be uncovered, both your lewdness and your prostitution- Their lovers hated

them now, and so did God because of their deep unfaithfulness (Jer. 12:8; Hos. 9:15; Am. 5:21; 6:8 s.w.). Their prostitution was uncovered [the same word used of exiles being sent into captivity] in that all the nations came to realize what God already had experienced with Jerusalem- that she had made exclusive covenants with them all, and accepted their gods into the Jerusalem temple. But she

Ezekiel 23:30 These things shall be done to you because you have played the prostitute after the nations, and because you are polluted with their idols- Jerusalem's prostitution involved idolatry in that as noted on :29, each of her lovers expected her to worship their idols as part of the covenant deal they made with her. The exposure of all this was when they each realized that they were being spoken with in just the same way as Jerusalem was dealing with various nations.

Ezekiel 23:31 You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore will I give her cup into your hand- Again the point is made that Judah were so wrong to think that they were so intrinsically better than the ten tribes. To drink a cup from the Lord is a double symbol- either the cup of blessing which we bless at the communion service (1 Cor. 10:16), or the cup of condemnation, also given from the Lord. In this sense at the breaking of bread service we drink either blessing or condemnation to ourselves, as Paul teaches in 1 Cor. 11. Hence self examination at that time ought to be naturally elicited.

Ezekiel 23:32 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: You will drink of your sister's cup, which is deep and large; you will be ridiculed and held in derision; it contains much- To be ridiculed and derided was a fate worse than death in the ancient world, and is often mentioned as Israel's fate. As with Job, the thing greatly feared comes upon those who are condemned; the nature of their condemnation will be appropriate to them. But the degree to which derision and ridicule is so painful to a person is directly related to their pride. It was Judah's pride which made these things so hard for them. If they had been humble, the derision would have been far less painful.

Ezekiel 23:33 You shall be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of astonishment and desolation, with the cup of your sister Samaria- The physical desolation of the land during the exile was a reflection of this, and was one of the curses for breaking the covenant (Lev. 26:33). And yet there is archaeological evidence that agriculture didn't cease in the land during the exile, the poor of the land, the vast majority of the population, were left there; and they even brought grain offerings to the temple site (Jer. 41:5). So God ameliorated this absolutely deserved judgment, in His pity and grace. And this God is our God. The "astonishment" reflects how they had wilfully believed the words of the false prophets. They really thought they were better than Samaria. And it was this deep seated spiritual arrogance which was their worst problem, and which enabled their conscience to become so blunted.

Ezekiel 23:34 You shall even drink it and drain it out, and you shall gnaw the broken pieces of it, and shall tear off your breasts; for I have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh- This is the picture of absolute self hatred. Plucking off their own breasts is another way of describing the weeping and gnashing of teeth of the rejected in their self hatred. The Bible has a lot to say about condemnation. Yet God doesn't wish to condemn and takes no pleasure in it. This vast array of Biblical information is therefore given, I suggest, in order to help us appreciate what a great salvation we

have received by grace in Christ; this is what we deserve, and yet we have been saved from it. Without that backdrop, the concepts of salvation, grace, redemption, rescue etc. all seem less wonderful.

Ezekiel 23:35 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have forgotten Me, and cast Me behind your back, therefore you also shall bear your lewdness and your prostitution- They had committed awful "lewdness" but there is here the implication that they didn't have to 'bear' it, to take the judgment for that sin. But they cast Yahweh behind their back, and so they had to bear the consequences. They refused Ezekiel's urgent calls for repentance. They worshipped their idols with their backs to Yahweh's sanctuary (Ez. 8:16). They did not literally 'forget' Yahweh. But effectively they did, for He was not continually in their self awareness and conscience. And this again is a timeless warning to all who claim to be His people. To cast Yahweh behind the back meant worshipping other gods (1 Kings 14:9). And yet they claimed to be Yahweh worshippers. So the point is that if we do not put God first and solely in our lives, then we have cast Him behind our back. We cannot have Him as merely part of our devotions and religious life. Nehemiah had heard these words of Ezekiel, and interpreted them as meaning that they had cast God's law behind their backs (Neh. 9:26 cp. Ps. 50:17). God is His word; "the word was God". Our attitudes to His word are our attitudes to Him.

Ezekiel 23:36 Yahweh said moreover to me: Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations- This could imply (as elsewhere) that Ezekiel struggled to really understand that his people, especially the priesthood he had come from, were really that bad. By declaring to the people what he had been privately shown in this chapter, he would thereby judge them. This is a parade example of knowledge of God's word bringing responsibility to judgment. If the word was declared to them and they refused to respond, then they had thereby their judgment.

Ezekiel 23:37 For they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands; and with their idols have they committed adultery- This may appear a mere repetition of the obvious. But perhaps the stress is upon "they have...", because as noted on :26, Ezekiel was reluctant to accept they had in fact sinned this deeply.

And they have also caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through the fire to their idols to be devoured- Whilst all our children are born to God, the reference would be particularly to the firstborn, who were to be devoted to God in memory of the Passover deliverance. And instead, they offered their firstborn to idols. That their children should be carried away into captivity in these lands to serve their gods was therefore an appropriate judgment, seeing the Jews had offered their firstborn to those idols.

Ezekiel 23:38 Moreover this they have done to Me: they have defiled My sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned My Sabbaths- God feels sin very deeply and personally; what they did was "done to Me". We marvel at His sensitivity, that so far from us and above us, yet He is so close and so deeply affected by our actions. We can likewise touch His heart so relatively easily by our devotion to Him. It seems Judah purposefully committed their worst sacrilege in the temple on the sabbath, "in the same day". The child sacrifices of :39 were committed on the sabbath. They had

justified their perversions by claiming that they were in fact a form of Yahweh worship. That was the only way their consciences could be numbed to do as they did. This is the scenario of Jer. 7:7-10; they offered their children in nearby Gehenna and then came into the temple, reasoning that they were "delivered", saved from Egypt and from threatened judgment, in order to be able to sin without conscience. This was the Old Testament form of continuing in sin because grace abounded (Rom. 6:1).

Ezekiel 23:39 For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into My sanctuary to profane it; and behold, thus have they done in the midst of My house- See on :38. Excavations of the Elephantine community reveal that the Jews mixed Yahweh and Baal worship to such an extent that they believed that Yahweh, like Baal, had a consort called Anat. Inscriptions from Quntillet Ajrud show the names Yahweh and Baal mixed together, including one which appears to speak of "Yahweh and his asherah". Ez. 16:21 and Ez. 23:39 are quite specific about this anyway- Israel offered sacrifice to idols in Yahweh's own temple.

Ezekiel 23:40 Furthermore you have sent for men who come from far, to whom a messenger was sent, and behold, they came; for whom you did wash yourself, paint your eyes, and decorate yourself with ornaments- As explained on :16, this was in response to their beholding the images of these men carved on the friezes of the temple instead of the cherubim, symbols of God's protection. The painting of eyes recalls Jezebel, notorious queen of apostate Samaria. Judah were no better; that is the recurring message. For it was that sense of spiritual superiority which led them into so much of their grosser sin.

Ezekiel 23:41 And sat on a stately bed, with a table prepared before it, whereupon you set My incense and My oil- The fornication committed involved elements of Yahweh worship. As noted on :38,39, this was the way in which they allowed their consciences to be so numbed. They justified their immorality as Yahweh worship. The table was the altar, with the incense and oil of Yahweh worship upon it; and they had sex with the representatives of the Gentile nations right in front of that altar. This was typical pagan worship- to sleep with the cult prostitutes before the altar. And they did this right within Yahweh's sanctuary. We too have an altar, a table at which we eat as Christian believers (Heb. 13:10). And before that we surely cannot commit such adultery.

Ezekiel 23:42 The voice of a multitude being at ease was with her: and with men of the common sort were brought drunkards from the wilderness; and they put bracelets on both their hands, and beautiful crowns on their heads- LXX "And they raised a sound of music, and that with men coming from the wilderness out of a multitude of men, and they put bracelets on their hands, and a crown of glory on their heads". I suggested on :41 that they committed religious and literal fornication before Yahweh's altar, as part of a ritual which they justified to themselves as Yahweh worship. I say "to themselves" because the later anger of their lovers was when the lovers realized that Jerusalem was not wholly devoted to them; her whoredom was revealed and uncovered to all when it was realized that she worshipped many gods, including Yahweh. The music therefore refers to the temple songs, and the crown for beauty to the high priestly crown. Hence in captivity they were mockingly asked to continue singing Yahweh's temple songs (Ps. 137:3).

Ezekiel 23:43 Then I said of her who was an adulteress of old, Now will they play the prostitute with her, and she with them- The final section of the prophecy is a reflection upon the fact that right to the end, the two women had continued their immorality. The idea here may be 'Who would really want to use such an old worn out prostitute?'. But as she was in her youth, so she continued to old age. She had no attraction, reflecting the lack of benefit in forming any alliances with the failed state of Judah, but still she desperately tried to sell herself. There was no repentance right to the end.

Ezekiel 23:44 They went in to her, as they go in to a prostitute: so went they in to Oholah and to Oholibah, the lewd women- Now both sisters are again mentioned; neither repented (see on :43), they were merely used, there was no love, no permanence. That alone was available in Yahweh their God and husband.

Ezekiel 23:45 Righteous men, they shall judge them with the judgment of adulteresses, and with the judgment of women who shed blood; because they are adulteresses, and blood is in their hands- The judges were "righteous" in that they executed just judgment upon her; she was a "lawful captive" (Is. 49:24). The judgment of an adulteress and of a woman who sheds blood is apparently different. The latter may refer to a woman who slays her own children. The two charges were connected in that Jerusalem slew her children as part of her spiritual adultery with other gods.

Ezekiel 23:46 For thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will bring up a company against them, and will give them to be tossed back and forth and robbed- This "company" equate with the crowd of witnesses who stoned an adulteress to death. And yet the figure implies she was both killed, and yet survived to be tossed back and forth and robbed- a description of Judah in exile. Does she survive this death, or not? This paradox is finally resolved in Ez. 37, when the dead bones of Judah are resurrected. Despite the awful sin of Judah, by God's grace He was not finished with her and would resurrect her to an intended further relationship with Him. That after all that she rejected Him and murdered His beloved Son is a tragedy beyond words. "Tossed back and forth" is literally "be removed", the word used for the punishment for breaking the covenant (Dt. 28:25). "Robbed" is s.w. 'to take for a prey'. Having repeatedly said that sinful Jerusalem would be given for a prey (Jer. 15:13; 17:3; Ez. 7:21; 23:46) we read that the latter day invasion of Israel comes as a great company (as in Ez. 23:46) to "take a prey" (Ez. 38:12,13); but that invasion is not to be successful, unlike the previous historical invasions which took Jerusalem for a prey. The implication therefore is that Jerusalem finally repents, and so shall not be given for a prey in the very last invasion.

Ezekiel 23:47 The company shall stone them with stones, and dispatch them with their swords; they shall kill their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses with fire- This sounds as if the prostitute was to be permanently killed as a prostitute would have been executed. But the marvel of the dry bones prophecy in Ez. 37 is that there would be revival and resurrection of this dead, shameful body; and God would enter again into relationship with her. Let's remember that God's own law was pretty clear about adultery. The adulterous woman was to be punished with death- for one act of adultery. Even if she repented. And in any case, it was a defiling abomination [according to the Mosaic Law] to remarry a divorced wife. But Hosea doesn't keep

the law. He lets his wife commit multiple acts of adultery, and he still loves her and pleads with her- even though he was a man in love with God's law. And this reflects the turmoil of God in dealing with human sin, and His sinful people. Hosea outlines his plan in Hosea 2. He will hamper her movements so she can't find her lovers; if she does find them, he will take away her food and clothing, so she appreciates his generosity to her; and if she still doesn't return, he will expose her naked and shamed in front of her lovers. But there's no evidence Hosea ever did that. He just... loved her, was angry with her as an expression of that love, loved her yet more, yet more... And this perhaps too reflects God's mind- devising and declaring judgments for Israel, which are themselves far less than what He has earlier stated in His own law, and yet the power of His love means He somehow keeps bearing with His people. Even in the context of speaking of His marriage to Israel, God says that He will punish them "as women that break wedlock are judged" (Ez. 16:38; 23:45). And yet, He didn't. His love was too great, His passion for them too strong; and He even shamed Himself by doing what His own law forbade, the remarriage to a divorced and defiled wife. Perhaps all love involves a degree of paradox and self-contradiction; and a jealous, Almighty God in love was no different. This, to me, is why some Bible verses indicate God has forsaken Israel; and others imply He hasn't and never will. Somehow, even right now, the Jews you meet... are loved still by their God. And he still fantasizes, in a way, over their return to Him. Imagine His utter joy when even one of them does in fact turn to Him! That alone motivates me to preach to Israel today.

Ezekiel 23:48 Thus will I cause lewdness to cease out of the land, that all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness- Through such terrible judgments it was God's intention that a resurrected, revived Judah would not again commit such unfaithfulness, and "all women", the other nations, would likewise be taught God's ways. Both these things were potentially possible at the restoration. But they didn't happen. Judah again fell into unfaithfulness, and the Gentile world weren't preached to by a repentant Judah. And so these things have been rescheduled and reapplied to the last days.

Ezekiel 23:49 They shall recompense your lewdness on you, and you shall bear the sins of your idols; and you shall know that I am the Lord Yahweh- As noted on :48, Judah were intended to bear the punishment for their idolatry and immorality. Although the punishment was total and shameful death, yet for her to 'know Yahweh' she would be revived, resurrected from the pile of dead, disgraced bones, as Ez. 37 states. But this didn't happen at the restoration as was potentially possible. Judah shall only know Yahweh ultimately through the application of these things in the last days.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 24

Ezekiel 24:1 Again, in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, the word of Yahweh came to me saying- The very day on which the army of Nebuchadnezzar began the two year siege of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:1; 2Kings 25:1-12).

Ezekiel 24:2 Son of man, write the name of the day, this selfsame day: the king of Babylon came close to Jerusalem this day- The date was to be recorded because this

parable of how Jerusalem would become a boiling pot of destruction was given the day the two year siege started. The false prophets were claiming that the people would survive the siege, and like some today, claimed that Jerusalem was inviolate. But this was not to be, and Bible prophecy likewise indicates that all the Zionist Christian claims that Jerusalem cannot fall to her enemies will also be proven tragically false.

Ezekiel 24:3 *Utter a parable to the rebellious house-* We wonder why this prophecy is given to those already in captivity. They are described in Ez. 2 as rebellious. The implication is perhaps that for the sake of the repentance of that group already in captivity, the suffering of the rest of Judah in Jerusalem could have been avoided; they could have returned from exile, and the further waves of captivity and awful suffering of Jerusalem avoided. But they refused. In the last days, perhaps the repentance of Judah / Jewry in dispersion could avert the latter day suffering of Jerusalem. Hence we ought to be witnessing to them.

And tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Set on the cauldron, set it on, and also pour water into it- In Ez. 11:3 the Jews had mocked: "This is the cauldron, and we are the meat". This would have been a sneering at Jeremiah's prophecy that Jerusalem would be boiled in the fire of Babylonian judgment- Jer. 1:13 "I see a seething pot; and the face thereof is toward the north". Their idea was that the holy city was as a cauldron which would defend them from the fire of judgment. But this is deconstructed here by Ezekiel in the parable of Ez. 24. The cauldron would refuse to respond to the purging of the fire and they would all in fact be destroyed. Their concept of sacred space would not save them.

Setting on a large pot with selected good pieces in it suggests preparations for a feast. God's judgment is likened to a banquet to which the nations are invited. As with the cup of wine, to be at God's banquet is a double symbol- either of blessing or of condemnation. This is why being given the Lord's cup at His table, the breaking of bread, is cause for self-examination.

Ezekiel 24:4 *Gather its pieces into it, even every good piece, the thigh, and the shoulder; fill it with the choice bones-* The valley of dry bones vision in Ez. 37 depicted Israel in captivity as bones waiting to come together and return to the land as a great army. Jer. 8:1 and other passages earlier in Ezekiel (Ez. 6:5; 24:4) had described both Judah and Israel as dry bones. The feeling of those bones was that "our bones are dried and our hope is lost" (Ez. 37:11). Judah in captivity felt that they had no "hope", that God had cast them off, and that they were unable to have a full relationship with Him outside the land. However, it seems that this was a rather convenient piece of theology for them- they were doing well in Babylon, and despite the opportunity to return to the land, they largely chose to remain in Babylon. The good pieces, thigh and shoulder [considered the softest and best part of the animal], may refer to the royal family and priesthood. The ordinary people fled from the Babylonians into Jerusalem, thinking they must be safe there; but this false belief was used by God to effectively gather those who believed it into the pot of judgment.

Ezekiel 24:5 *Take the choice of the flock, and also a pile of wood for the bones under the cauldron; make it boil well; yes, let its bones be boiled in its midst-* The choice of the flock would refer to the leadership of Judah. The bones are emphasized; because the cauldron was to boil dry, and those dry bones would be cast out but then by grace be revived in the Ez. 37 vision. The choice of the flock ought to have been offered to

God in sacrifice; but instead, by keeping the best for themselves and other gods, it would all the same be destroyed. We either give the best or lose it at judgment day.

Ezekiel 24:6 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Woe to the city of blood, to the cauldron whose rust is therein, and whose rust is not gone out of it! Take out of it piece after piece- The earlier fire of Babylonian judgment had been intended to purge the cauldron, representing Jerusalem. But it didn't, and so the heat was increased.

No lot is fallen on it- There was to be total destruction. The invaders typically counted off a certain "lot" to be spared and taken into captivity. But this apparently was not to be. And yet not all were destroyed; indeed, some were taken by lot into captivity (Joel 3:3). This again is God's grace, relenting because of His grace and pity; or because of the intercession and repentance of a minority. See on :26.

Ezekiel 24:7 For her blood is in the midst of her; she set it on the bare rock; she didn't pour it on the ground, to cover it with dust- Blood was poured out on the earth and covered with dust to teach the total dedication of life to God. There was also the custom of covering blood shed in violence with earth, to as it were prevent it from crying to God for vengeance (Gen. 4:10; Jer. 16:18). But Jerusalem didn't even try to cover the blood of the children she had slain; she justified it as part of a ritual of Yahweh worship. And so it was uncovered blood, which cried to God for vengeance.

Ezekiel 24:8 So that it may cause wrath to come up to take vengeance, I have set her blood on the bare rock, that it should not be covered- The blood, as noted on :7, was not covered, and so it as it were cried out for vengeance. "Her blood" may mean the blood shed by Jerusalem, which has earlier been defined as the blood of child sacrifices made to other gods. They did this because they kidded themselves that they were doing this as part of Yahweh worship; they were open about it, placing the blood on the bare rock of the altars, as was perhaps required by the sacrifice rituals. And God saw that and refused to Himself cover it; and the blood cried out to Him for vengeance, as did that of Abel slain by his brother.

Ezekiel 24:9 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Woe to the city of blood! I also will make the pile great- God as it were augmented the pile of firewood by adding the bones out of the boiled dry cauldron to it (:5). The resurrection and revival of these dry, charred bones in Ez. 37 is therefore all the more miraculous, just as in Ez. 15 the charred vine twigs were to be revived and used by God. The language of the restoration is used of us in the New Testament; this is how amazing is His ability to use we who were rendered worse than useless by sin.

Ezekiel 24:10 Heap on the wood, make the fire hot, boil well the flesh, make thick the broth- The language of Is. 30:33, where we learn that the firewood is kindled by the breath or Spirit of God breathing upon them. But it was that same breath of God which was to revive the dry bones in Ez. 37.

And let the bones be burned- Again the bones are emphasized; the cauldron boiled dry and itself melted in the end, and the bones were taken out of it and used as firewood (:5,9). But still by absolute grace, in Ez. 37 it is these bones which are to be revived. This is the power of the Spirit and the prophetic word breathed into those bones.

Ezekiel 24:11 *Then set it empty on its coals-* It boiled dry, explaining how the dead bones of Israel in Ez. 37 were dry bones.

That it may be hot and its brass may be hot, so that its filthiness may be molten in it, that its rust may be consumed- The "coals" are the same word used about the coals used in the sanctification of the tabernacle after the gross apostasy of Aaron's two sons (Lev. 16:12). The coals were used to burn incense which formed a cloud which covered the most holy place and made atonement for the desecration of the tabernacle (Lev. 16:13,17). The situation is clearly that of Ez. 10, where Ezekiel takes the coals and then the cloud of God's glory fills first the most holy, then the holy and then the entire temple. The cleansing ritual is then symbolized as complete by a live goat having the sins of the house of Israel placed upon it, and sent by a willing [AV "fit"] man into the desert far away. This willing man represented Ezekiel, sent by the Lord into the desert and thence to Babylon along with the captives. The word is also used in Ez. 24:11 concerning how there would be "coals" of fire in Jerusalem, upon which the cauldron of Jerusalem would be burnt and judged. This action was a direct result of Ezekiel taking the coals of fire from the cherubim in Ez. 10:2 and scattering them upon the city. This was therefore a direct result of the action of the cherubim, God's massively powerful Angelic way of working, in cooperation with Ezekiel. The whole arrangement shows God's eagerness to work with people. The coals of fire therefore don't solely and simply speak of the burning of Jerusalem by fire at the hands of the Babylonians. That burning was part of the cleansing of the temple from its apostasy, and the exile into Babylon along with Ezekiel, the willing man of Lev. 16:21, was in fact the bearing away of Israel's sin. There is always a silver lining to God's judgments. They are not simply Him lashing out in the offended anger of an omnipotent deity. They were and are designed to propel forward His purpose of saving by grace whilst at the same time judging sin and sinners. And yet tragically, the Babylonian holocaust did not purge the cauldron of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 24:12 *She has wearied herself with lies-* Jerusalem wearied herself with lies in that the "lies" were her dishonest covenants with the various surrounding nations, as well as with Yahweh. She even became 'weary' of this way of life; but still she would not be purged. The Hebrew word carries the idea of loathing; they in a sense hated their sin (s.w. Jer. 9:5), climaxing in Jerusalem loathing herself and wanting to pluck off her own breasts (Ez. 23:34). The world is full of people weary with sin, who loathe their own addictions and sin, yet they will not surrender themselves to God's demands and be purged.

Yet her great rust doesn't go forth out of her; her rust doesn't go forth by fire- As noted on :3, it could be that the repentance of a minority could have averted the boiling of the city. But the fire experienced so far at the hands of Babylon didn't make the rust go forth.

Ezekiel 24:13 *In your filthiness is lewdness: because I have cleansed you and you weren't cleansed, you shall not be cleansed from your filthiness any more-* As noted on :3,12, there was the opportunity to be cleansed by the initial wave of Babylonian attacks and the captivity of a minority. But this wasn't achieved. This will be true in the last days too; which is why the prophetic program is open ended, as so much depends upon when and whether a remnant repent.

Until I have caused My wrath toward you to rest- The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in

this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

Ezekiel 24:14 *I, Yahweh, have spoken it: it shall happen, and I will do it: I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I relent*- This could simply mean that the threatened judgment upon the people in Jerusalem would indeed happen; Ezekiel is repeating Jeremiah's message to the Jews in Judah itself (Jer. 4:28 s.w.). But this could also be an example of where God speaks in legitimate anger, but in grace does retract; for He did spare and relent, at least on a national level. And the scale of destruction in Jerusalem was not as total and absolute as implied at times. This could have been from pity; or as the result of the intercession and repentance of a minority. For God does "go back" if there is repentance (s.w. Jer. 18:8,10; 26:3; Joel 2:13,14).

According to your ways and according to your doings shall they judge you, says the Lord Yahweh- The judgment was therefore not so much by God as by "your doings". Sin is its own condemnation and judgment.

Ezekiel 24:15 *Also the word of Yahweh came to me, saying*- As noted on :3,12,13, there had been repeated attempts to spiritually cleanse Judah but they had not responded. And so now Jerusalem was to fall and the temple be destroyed, represented by the death of Ezekiel's beloved wife.

Ezekiel 24:16 *Son of man, behold, I will take away from you the desire of your eyes*- Ezekiel loved his wife and was clearly faithful to her, unlike Jerusalem. God recognizes how much he loved her. He is aware of how much we feel towards those we love and whom we lose. We recall God's understanding of Abraham's love for Isaac in Gen. 22:1 "Your only son, whom you love". Ezekiel's very deep and personal loss was to represent how God felt over the loss of Jerusalem; for He was represented by Ezekiel.

With a stroke: yet you shall neither mourn nor weep, neither shall your tears run down- "With a stroke" (s.w. "plague") is LXX "by violence"; :18 can be translated as saying that she not only "died" but 'was killed'. If Ezekiel's wife was indeed slain by

violence, then this would point forward exactly to the destruction of Jerusalem. If she were slain by local Babylonians, then the correspondence would be exact. If she were slain by the Jews who were hostile to Ezekiel's ministry, then this would also point forward to how Jerusalem was to be destroyed due to the violence of the Jews towards each other.

Ezekiel is told ahead of time that his wife is going to be slain "by violence" (LXX). He believed this, and the exiles were likewise being asked to believe that indeed, Jerusalem will fall and be slain. They were to prepare for this as Ezekiel was psychologically preparing for the loss of his wife.

Ezekiel 24:17 Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead; bind your headress on you, and put your shoes on your feet, don't cover your lips nor eat men's bread- The priests were allowed to mourn for their deceased ones; but the high priest was not, and was forbidden from removing his mitre. This command to Ezekiel could imply that with the destruction of the high priesthood in Jerusalem, Ezekiel was effectively the high priest, the spiritual leader of Judah. Or it could be that the idea simply is that Ezekiel is not to mourn at all, even though as a priest he would normally have been permitted to mourn for his wife. Mourners usually went barefoot, but he was to keep his shoes on his feet. Nor was he to eat the bread brought by men to mourners.

Ezekiel 24:18 So I spoke to the people in the morning; and at evening my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded- Ezekiel's personal loss was so intimately connected with the loss of the temple. He was totally involved in the message he preached, as we should be. "Died" here can also be translated "killed" (as it is in Ex. 1:16; 4:24; 16:3 and often); see on :16. The intention of this severe acted parable may have been to recognize Ezekiel's emotions [for his love for her is recognized] but to ask him to grieve by hiding his emotions. He was not to show others the extent of his grief- he was to hide his emotions. This was because he was God's representative; the loss of the temple was going to be deeply tragic to God, and yet He would not reveal His grief about it. The intention of the sign was so that the people would "know" Yahweh (:24); they would come to realize that indeed He had internally suffered greatly as Ezekiel had in the loss of his wife (cp. God's loss of the temple). The extreme restraint and apparent silence of His suffering was such that Jeremiah lamented that the destroyed temple was a sign of God's wrath (Lam. 2:7), rather than learning the lesson taught by Ezekiel- that the loss of the temple had been so painful for God.

Ezekiel 24:19 The people said to me, Won't you tell us what these things are to us, that you do so?- This was the intention of the acted parable; to elicit the question, "What are you doing? / What do you mean?", as in Ez. 12:9; even though in their consciences the answer was surely clear. The question was elicited; but this was followed by the direct revelation of God's word. And so it is in our witness; our lives elicit questions and pique interest from those around us, as a springboard toward the declaration of God's word to them. It was clear enough to them that Ezekiel was intentionally hiding his emotions and not sharing them with others; as noted on :18, this was to demonstrate the degree to which God intensely suffered in the destruction of the temple, and His lack of emotional outburst should not be read as meaning that He didn't feel for them. It could be argued that God isn't necessarily recorded as slaying Ezekiel's wife; perhaps she was terminally ill and now has a final stroke from

the Lord leading to her death. But he is being told not to mourn for her, and his restraint of his feelings seems to be the point of the acted parable rather than the death of his wife.

Ezekiel 24:20 *Then I said to them, The word of Yahweh came to me, saying- See on :19.*

Ezekiel 24:21 *Speak to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will profane My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pities-* This is how a man should feel about his wife if he truly loves her; he is proud of her, desires her, she is his holy place, and the one he pities / sympathizes with (Heb.). This was how Ezekiel felt to his wife, and how the people felt for the Jerusalem temple. But in reality they had profaned that which they loved and were proud of. They only loved the externalities of their religion. And we have here powerful reason for self examination; for we can love our church religion in all its external forms, being proud of it to others- and yet profane Yahweh's sanctuary in real spiritual terms.

And your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind shall fall by the sword- The prophecy was initially given by Ezekiel in captivity; the older, more senior members of the royal family and priesthood were already in captivity. And they were learning that now their children left behind in Judah were to die. It is psychologically credible that their angry reaction to this prophecy was to arrange the murder of Ezekiel's wife.

Ezekiel 24:22 *You shall do as I have done: you shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men-* The Babylonian discovery that the Jewish leadership had lied to them and made covenants with other nations, placing their gods in their temple along with those of Babylon, would lead the Babylonians to turn against the royal family and exiles already in Babylon. Perhaps the idea is that they would not have a chance to eat bread brought to them by sympathizers- for there would be no sympathizers, and they themselves would be persecuted and slain. But the reason for not mourning is given in :23.

Ezekiel 24:23 *Your ornaments shall be on your heads, and your shoes on your feet: you shall not mourn nor weep; but you shall pine away in your iniquities, and groan one toward another-* They were not to remove their ornaments and go barefoot, as was done when mourning. The reason was that they would lament beyond tears and all external mourning; they would mourn internally for their sins (s.w. Ez. 33:10). We wonder why Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, which appears to be a record of his external mourning. Whilst the book was inspired by God, at times Jeremiah there appears to be lamenting in a way inappropriate. He 'wept' (Lam. 1:16), whereas in Ez. 24:23 Judah were told not to externally weep. He did not take on board the idea that there was to be no mourning or weeping externally, but rather deep internal recognition of their sins. It seems the Jews were not obedient to Ezekiel's command not to externally weep but to internally mourn their own sinfulness; the same word for "weep" is used of how they did weep by the rivers of Babylon (Ps. 137:1).

Ezekiel 24:24 *Thus Ezekiel shall be a sign to you; according to all that he has done, you will do. When this comes, then you will know that I am the Lord Yahweh-* In Ez.

24:22-24, Ezekiel's feelings of grief for the loss of his wife were to be understood as representative of two things- Israel's grief for losing the temple, and God's grief over losing His people. In this way, Ezekiel was set up as a bridge builder, in that his feelings reflected both those of God and those of his audience- in order that his preaching could come over as God appealing to them. And consciously and unconsciously, this is how God uses us too, today. By opening our hearts to others, they open theirs to us and to the Lord. This was precisely how Paul dealt with Corinth. He opened his mouth and his heart to them, and in return he asks them: "Open you hearts to us" (2 Cor. 6:11; 7:2 RV). Paul received them into his heart (2 Cor. 7:3), and wished to be received into theirs.

Ezekiel 24:25 *You, son of man, shall it not be in the day when I take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that whereupon they set their heart, their sons and their daughters-* "In the day" may not refer to the same literal day; for it would have taken longer than a day to travel from Jerusalem to Ezekiel in Babylon. "At that time" seems to be the idea. The Jerusalem temple had been their strength, joy, glory, desire and psychological obsession (:21)- to the point that it is now paralleled with how they felt about their own children. And yet despite this very deep love for the religion of Yahweh, their behaviour toward Him was despicable, and they had cast Him behind their backs. This is the problem with being religious; form so easily swamps content. Some people are wired to be attracted to religion, to the outward, external forms of religion such as meetings, places of worship, tradition and history of the religion etc. These types have to be so careful to ensure that form is not swamping content; for the form is meaningless, indeed it is a distraction; it becomes "their strength... joy... glory... desire... that whereupon they set their heart", when it is God and His Son who should be all these things for us, and not mere religion. He is our strength and joy (2 Sam. 22:33; Neh. 8:10; Jer. 16:19), our glory (as the cherubim vision of Ez. 1 had shown), our desire.

Ezekiel 24:26 *That in that day he who escapes shall come to you, to cause you to hear it with your ears?*- We noted on :6 that God had originally threatened total destruction of all within Jerusalem, but in actuality He repented of this. But in Ez. 24:26 Ezekiel is told that in fact one would escape and come to him with the news which by prophecy he already knew. This happened (Ez. 33:21). The mention of one who escapes is therefore a tacit reflection of God's grace in not doing all He threatened in Ez. 24:6.

It could be that Ezekiel was struck dumb (:27) and deaf by the death of his wife, just as he had endured a similar period earlier in Ez. 3:24-26; 4:4-8, but when the news of Jerusalem's fall came, he recovered hearing and speech. In that period of prophetic silence and deep mourning we see reflected God's mourning and silence to His people throughout the two year siege. It has been suggested that the period of dumbness recorded in Ez. 3:24-26; 4:4-8 actually refers to this same period. But it could just as well be that Ezekiel, like us, experienced one such situation as a preparation for the repeat of that situation later in life.

Ezekiel 24:27 *In that day your mouth will be opened to him who has escaped, and you shall speak, and be no more mute. So you will be a sign to them; and they shall know that I am Yahweh-* At the Lord's return, God will use a repentant Israel to achieve great things in terms of converting this world unto Himself. They will walk up and down in His Name, witnessing to Him as He had originally intended them to (Zech.

10:12); men will cling to their skirts in order to find the knowledge of their God (Zech. 8:23). “In that day will I cause the horn of the house of Israel to bud forth, and I will give thee (Israel) the opening of the mouth in the midst of them (the surrounding nations, see context); and *they* shall know that I am the LORD”, in that Israel will preach to them from their own experience of having recently come to know Yahweh (Ez. 29:21). But at the time of the Lord’s return, when Israel repent and enter the new covenant with Him, they will remember all their past sins “and be confounded, and never open your mouth any more because of your shame... for all that you have done” (Ez. 16:63). They will be so ashamed that they *will feel as if* they can never open their mouth. But Yahweh will open their mouth, and they will witness. In some anticipation of this, Ezekiel as the “son of man” prophet, a representative of his people just as the Lord was to be, had his mouth shut in dumbness, and he only had his mouth opened when Israel came to know [to some degree] that “I am the LORD” (Ez. 24:27). In all these evident connections something marvellous presents itself. Those who feel as if they just cannot open their mouths in witness are the very ones whom the Father will use; He will open their mouths and use them exactly because they are ashamed of their sins! And so it should be with us.

Ezekiel's prophetic mouth was to be opened at the time when the siege finished and it would be opened to the remnant who had escaped. Through the ministry of His prophetic word, God would again speak to the remnant whom He hoped would repent and return to reestablish His Kingdom in Israel.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 25

Ezekiel 25:1 The word of Yahweh came to me, saying- We now have a distinct section, from Ez. 25-32, containing seven judgments upon the nations around Judah. The seven nations are surely a symbolic number. All the nations around her were to be judged for their participation in her judgment. The last of these prophecies was some 15 years later, so they were widely spaced. This sets the pattern for the book of Revelation, which described the seven judgments upon latter day Israel, followed by the various judgments upon those who have judged her.

Ezekiel 25:2 Son of man, set your face toward the people of Ammon, and prophesy against them- Whilst Ezekiel looked toward them from Babylon, his prophecies were to be told to them (:3). Perhaps a scribe was taking down his words and would take the scroll to the Ammonites.

Ezekiel 25:3 And tell the people of Ammon, Hear the word of the Lord Yahweh- All the practical effort involved in getting these prophecies to Ammon, not least the risk for the messenger, was surely only required because Ammon were intended to repent upon receiving these words of judgment.

Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Because you said, Aha, against My sanctuary when it was profaned, and against the land of Israel when it was made desolate; and against the house of Judah when they went into captivity- Ammonites joined with the Babylonians in attacking God's people (2 Kings 24:2). Ez. 25:3,6,8,15 reveal how sensitive God is to what is said and felt about the people whom He loves. Because Ammon mockingly said “Aha!” when Israel went into captivity, because Moab sneered that Judah were like any other nation now, because the Philistines had “despite of soul” (RV) against Israel... therefore God so condemned them even

though Israel were so spiteful to Him at that very time. Even though they betrayed Him, His sensitivity for them, His feeling, His emotion, His passion, His pleading with them...surely inspires us to plead likewise with them, for His sake. For the sake of His feelings, His passion...

Ezekiel 25:4 Therefore behold, I will deliver you to the people of the east for a possession, and they shall set their encampments in you, and make their dwellings in you; they shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk- The nomadic "people of the east" regularly attacked the more settled lands west of them such as Ammon. But they usually grabbed what they could and then returned to their nomad encampments. But now they were to actually move into Ammon and make permanent dwellings there. It has been suggested that Rabbah was left undefended whilst the Ammonites joined in the attack upon Jerusalem with the Babylonians; and so their judgment was immediate and appropriate.

Ezekiel 25:5 I will make Rabbah a stable for camels, and the people of Ammon a resting place for flocks: and you shall know that I am Yahweh- As noted on :4, the Bedouin nomads usually attacked and retreated with their spoil. But now they were to come and settle down in Ammon, no longer always driving their flocks to new pasture, but using Rabbah as a resting place and stable. The intention was that Ammon too would come to 'know Yahweh' through this judgment, just as Judah were intended to.

Ezekiel 25:6 For thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have clapped your hands, stamped with the feet and rejoiced with all the despite of your soul against the land of Israel- Ammon was like Judah, sometimes in covenant with Assyria and Babylon and sometimes not. But they eagerly joined in with their invasions of Israel to vent their anger upon God's people. It had been for Ezekiel to stamp with his feet to symbolize God's judgment of His people (Ez. 6:11). Ammon is here condemned for playing God in condemning others, when it is His prerogative alone to do that.

Ezekiel 25:7 Therefore behold, I have stretched out My hand upon you and will deliver you for a spoil to the nations; and I will cut you off from the peoples, and I will cause you to perish out of the countries. I will destroy you; and you shall know that I am Yahweh- In the same way as God at times threatened total destruction upon Judah but didn't literally carry it out because of His pity or because some repented, so it seems it was with Ammon. For some form of Ammonites continued. And again we have the hope of a national revival, in that they were to be "cut off" as Judah was, and yet come to know Yahweh in repentance.

Ezekiel 25:8 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because Moab and Seir say, Behold, the house of Judah is like all the nations- Moab had mocked Judah when they were destroyed (Zeph. 2:8; Jer. 48:27). The Moabite Stone, found in the ruins of Dibon records how Mesha, King of Moab, exults about his conquest of Judah along with other nations, treating them as just another nation he had defeated. This treatment of God's people as if they were nothing special was particularly offensive to God. We are to learn that His people are special, and even in disagreement, we are to respect them as His people and not treat them as if they are just worldlings.

Ezekiel 25:9 Therefore, behold, I will open the side of Moab from the cities, from his

cities which are on his frontiers, the glory of the country, Beth Jeshimoth, Baal Meon, and Kiriathaim- The "side" is Heb. "shoulder", referring to the high cliff face which formed Moab's defensive frontier. All that seems humanly invincible and the guarantee of our safety and endurance can be opened by God in an instant. We note that the names of the cities all have connections to idols, and that they were the defences of Moab's northern frontier- which was to be overcome by the Babylonians. These cities were actually part of the original Israelite inheritance (Jud. 11:23).

Ezekiel 25:10 To the people of the east, to go against the children of Ammon; and I will give them for a possession, that the people of Ammon may not be remembered among the nations- As with the judgments upon Judah, it seems these were not carried out fully at this time. The Ammonites were still an important people in the time of the Maccabees (1 Macc. 5:6,30-45) and are mentioned by Justin Martyr. As noted on :11, the final fulfilment will be in the last days.

Ezekiel 25:11 I will execute judgments on Moab; and they shall know that I am Yahweh- The seven nations listed in Ezekiel for judgment are also spoken of in Jeremiah: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Zidon and Egypt. The original intention was that they would be judged, and along with a judged but repentant Israel enter into covenant with Yahweh in the restored Kingdom of God in Israel. But this potential didn't work out. So the prophecies must come true in the last days. But it seems unwise to try to look for geographical entities which match e.g. "Moab". The seven nations are surely meant to represent all the nations surrounding Israel, the peoples of the *eretz* promised to Abraham who are the focus of Bible prophecy. There are likewise seven nations mentioned in Amos 1 and 2.

Ezekiel 25:12 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because Edom has dealt against the house of Judah by taking vengeance and has greatly offended and revenged himself on them- Edom had taken a special pleasure in desecrating the temple and ensuring it was razed to the foundation stones (Ps. 137:7). The theme of Edom / Esau wanting revenge is significant; it was the old hatred of Esau for Jacob (Ez. 35:5). The vengeance was for the incident of Jacob tricking Esau out of his birthright. But these prophecies against Edom demonstrate that the promises of Isaac associated with that birthright were in fact meaningless, and not worth any striving about. The judgment upon Esau / Edom, therefore, was effectively for their lack of forgiveness. And that is the abiding lesson for all ages. For out of the seven surrounding nations judged by Ezekiel, the others all finally will come to "know Yahweh", but Esau / Edom never will. This is not said of them. For hatred and unforgiveness of our brother is presented as the mortal sin.

Ezekiel 25:13 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, I will stretch out My hand on Edom, and will cut off man and animal from it; and I will make it desolate: from Teman even to Dedan shall they fall by the sword- As with the curses upon Judah, this utter destruction of every man and animal didn't quite happen. God relented, or perhaps a minority repented. These words about Edom / Esau differ markedly from the 'blessing' of Isaac upon Esau, that he would live by his sword and throw off the yoke of Jacob and also find blessing. I suggest therefore that the blessings of Isaac were of his own will and paternal imagination, rather than from God. And so all the angst between Jacob and Esau about obtaining those blessings was utterly misplaced and human.

Ezekiel 25:14 I will lay My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel; and they shall do in Edom according to My anger and according to My wrath- Israel never really fully did this, although John Hyrcanus did invade Edom and force its people to receive circumcision; but he did not make the area empty of man and animal (:13). And so as noted on :11, it will come true in the last days.

And they shall know My vengeance, says the Lord Yahweh- Unlike the other curses upon the nations, there is no comment that Edom would know Yahweh, i.e. enter into relationship with Him after the experience of judgment. God was going to take vengeance upon Esau / Edom, and the language of the curse upon Edom is far more intense than that upon the other nations. Esau was Jacob's brother, and therefore so much more was expected of him. Attitude and hatred toward our brother is therefore of paramount importance, and will lead to eternal condemnation as it did and shall do for Edom / Esau. The equivalent of "Edom" will have this fate in the last days (see on :11).

Ezekiel 25:15 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because the Philistines have dealt by revenge, and have taken vengeance with despite of soul to destroy for the old enmity- The Philistines were given Israelite territory by the Babylonians, both during the Assyrian invasion of Israel and the Babylonian conquest of Judah. But the Philistines weren't satisfied with that, and are judged here for wanting personal vengeance. They sold Israelite villages into slavery (Am. 1:6-8), beyond what the Assyrians and Babylonians had intended. It's as if God cut the Philistines a certain amount of slack, but when they went beyond that in "despite of soul", they became the more culpable to judgment. The "enmity" is the same word as in Gen. 3:15, and the 'ancient' enmity strengthens the allusion. They were the seed of the serpent at enmity with Israel, the seed of the woman; which considering Judah's deep sin at this time, reveals how God by grace still saw them as His special people of purpose.

Ezekiel 25:16 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, I will stretch out My hand on the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites, and destroy the rest of the sea coast- I suggested on :11 that these prophecies never came fully true as intended because Judah and these surrounding seven nations didn't repent after the Babylonian invasion. But they will come true in the last days. It is significant that the "sea coast", the Gaza strip, is a hotbed of hatred against God's people today; and judgment is threatened upon it. "Cherethites", those from Cyprus, is a word play upon the Hebrew word translated "I will cut off". These kinds of word play are common in the Bible because the text was initially used with illiterate people who would have appreciated such aids to memorization.

Ezekiel 25:17 I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes; and they shall know that I am Yahweh, when I shall lay My vengeance on them- Zech. 9:7 implies that a remnant of the Philistines would repent and turn to Yahweh. But again, this wasn't seen in the immediate context, and so it must refer to the last days- even though in that day their territory will be given to Israel (Obadiah 19; Is. 11:14). But then, material possession of land will be unimportant; all that will matter is knowing Yahweh, being in relationship with Him, which is the ultimate purpose of His "vengeance" or judgments.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 26

Ezekiel 26:1 *It happened in the eleventh year in the first day of the month that the word of Yahweh came to me saying-* The LXX adds "the first month". Jerusalem fell in the eleventh year on the ninth day of the fourth month. This message was presumably taken to Tyre, as a warning for them not to rejoice at her fall. However some manuscripts read "the twelfth year". This would clear up the problem and explain more easily why Tyre is now being warned not to rejoice over Jerusalem's fall. The messenger who came to Babylon with the news of Tyre's fall in the tenth month of the eleventh year (Ez. 33:21) could have gone to Tyre too, or at least, another such messenger may have done.

Ezekiel 26:2 *Son of man, because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken!-* The judgments upon Tyre and Egypt are far longer than those upon the other five of the seven surrounding nations condemned by Ezekiel in this section. This is because of their relative size and importance, and their attraction to Judah as defenders against Babylon. The past tense is apparently used, but it seems (see on :1) that Jerusalem had not yet fallen. So the sense of the tense may be 'This is how you ought not to respond after you hear the news'.

The gate of the peoples is now is turned to me; I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste- Jerusalem in Ez. 16 and Ez. 23 has been described as a whore, inviting men from all nations to come to her. She loved everything foreign, rather than the things of her God, and had thus acquired a name as an international metropolis; and Tyre now eagerly looked forward to replacing her in Canaan as this city.

Ezekiel 26:3 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, I am against you, Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against you, as the sea causes its waves to come up-* The "therefore" reflects how God is deeply sensitive to the thoughts and even unexpressed hopes and fantasies of people and nations; and judges them accordingly. The figure of the sea is appropriate to Tyre as an island citadel.

Ezekiel 26:4 *They shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers. I will also scrape her dust from her and make her a bare rock-* The apparently invincible technology of this world cannot resist Divine judgment; and that applies to all our insurance policies of whatever form. The reference to "a bare rock" here and in :14 uses the same term as that about Zion in the time of her condemnation (Ez. 24:7,8). The phrase is used nowhere else. The connection would be in the impression that Zion was to be judged in the same way as Tyre, with the same hallmark of Yahweh's activity. Neither was superior to the other, as they both considered. Again and again, the prophets reveal that it is human pride and the sense of inherent superiority which is to be brought down.

Ezekiel 26:5 *She shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea; for I have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh; and she shall become a spoil to the nations-* Tyre did revive at various times after the Babylonian invasion. So as noted on Ez. 25:11, we are to look for the final fulfilment in the last days. "The nations" who spoiled Tyre would refer to the various peoples confederate with the Babylonians and Greeks who effected Tyre's judgment. As noted on :4, the same kind of judgment was brought upon Tyre as upon Zion.

Ezekiel 26:6 *Her daughters who are in the field shall be slain with the sword; and they shall know that I am Yahweh-* "Daughters" can refer to confederate cities, and here the reference is to those towns and cities on the mainland who were connected with island Tyre. But did they really 'know Yahweh' through the Greek and Babylonian attacks upon Tyre? It seems that as noted on Ez. 25:11, this remains to be fulfilled in some latter day judgment of Tyre.

Ezekiel 26:7 *For thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will bring on Tyre Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, from the north, with horses, with chariots, with horsemen and a company, and many people-* The language is that of the cherubim of Ez. 1; again we see how movements of peoples and armies on earth were under Divine control. Ez. 26:3-14 speaks of how Babylon will surround and destroy Tyre. But this never happened- it was done by Alexander and the Greeks much later. So, did the prophecy just go unfulfilled? Ez. 29:17-20 explains that because the King of Babylon laboured so hard to take Tyre- even though he never actually succeeded- God would give him the land of Egypt as a reward. For me, this doesn't mean that the word of prophecy failed. Rather does it mean that God is open to a rethinking of plans and futures in accord with human response. Although all the conditions for Tyre's fall and Babylon's victory against her aren't given, evidently there must have been such unrecorded conditions; and they weren't fulfilled, hence Tyre was spared destruction by the Babylonians, and yet they were 'rewarded' for their part in the situation.

The following comment from Ted and Bev Russell expands upon this: "The prophecy about Tyre (in Ez. 26) indicated that the place would be scraped of her dust and made like the top of a rock, a place for spreading of nets, plundered for the nations, cast out, devoured with fire, (Hosea, Amos and Zechariah also), and *never rebuilt*, (Ez. 26:21) (11th year). However, later in Chapter 29, (27th year), we learn that Nebuchadnezzar and his soldiers would be given the land of Egypt, because they laboured strenuously and long against Tyre, so long that the soldiers had rubbed heads and shoulders from their leather helmets and armour, (verse 18), but they did not overcome Tyre. So instead God would give Nebuchadnezzar the land of Egypt, for wages. "Spoil and pillage from Egypt will be the wages that My servant will take from Egypt, instead of the reward I promised you at Tyre", (verse 17, 18, 19). Nebuchadnezzar was "God's servant", and even though he did a great service for God, in punishment at Tyre, (verse 18), God changed the terms and conditions of his labour. He would not conquer Tyre, but he was given Egypt instead! Tyre was *not* laid bare, and *not* never rebuilt. It thrived and still thrives. It had its ups and downs, with different conquerors, of course. To the best of my memory the peninsula that they built into the sea to defend themselves is not there now, but the seaside town is. It lays nets out, as a fishing town, but it is not bare. We have photos of us there. We know it was there in NT times (Peter). Is it that God changes His mind? Did someone, (of whom there is no record), plead successfully for Tyre, like Lot did unsuccessfully for Sodom? Or is it that He tells us something, only a piece of the future at a time, and then we get a fuller picture later on? The prophesy goes on and on about Tyre's destruction, and one has to be quick to see the change of circumstance in a few verses in Ezekiel 29! The complete destruction of Tyre has been used to show that the Bible is true, by some undiscerning folk, in past lectures, in our time, (with lantern slide pictures of destruction there). Once world travel was easily available and people more readily saw Tyre, that mistake is not made now. The point, (that the Bible is true), is better made elsewhere.

We do not need to question God's prophesies. We can believe Him each time, and believe the changes He makes, as well. In this prophecy do we know a reason why God changed his mind about utter and complete destruction of Tyre? It does indicate that we don't know everything, that we don't need to, and that God does not tell us. He decides what is best. Certainly the Bible record keeps us on our toes! For then "They shall know that I am the Lord", Ez. 29:21".

To this I would add a comment from Is. 23:1,2,4,15,18. These verses seem to imply that if Tyre had howled in repentance and then been silent and ashamed, she would be 'forgotten' 70 years and then become devoted to Yahweh. This never happened. Yet the 70 year period is of course analogous to Judah's 70 years in captivity, also without repentance.

Ezekiel 26:8 *He shall kill your daughters in the field with the sword; and he shall make forts against you, and cast up a mound against you, and raise up the buckler against you-* As noted on :7, this was not done by Babylon but by Greece under Alexander. The prophecy was reapplied and rescheduled, just as many Bible prophecies are; the original human preconditions for the first or ideal fulfilment did not come about.

Ezekiel 26:9 *He shall set his battering engines against your walls, and with his axes he shall break down your towers-* See on :8. This is the language of Alexander's invasion, not Nebuchadnezzar's. Alexander breached the walls by using battering rams attached to his ships.

Ezekiel 26:10 *By reason of the abundance of his horses their dust shall cover you. Your walls shall shake at the noise of the horsemen, and of the wagons, and of the chariots, when he shall enter into your gates, as men enter into a city in which is made a breach-* The noise of chariots and AV "wheels" recalls that of the cherubim of the opening visions. The human armies and chariots depicted here were under the direct control of the Angel cherubim. See on Ez. 13:13. Alexander conquered Tyre by making a breach in the southern wall, through which his army entered from the causeway they had built. The description of this fall of Tyre would have seemed impossible of fulfilment. For nobody thought that a causeway could be built enabling such military hardware to rumble into Tyre itself.

Ezekiel 26:11 *With the hoofs of his horses shall he tread down all your streets; he shall kill your people with the sword; and the pillars of your strength shall go down to the ground-* See on :8. This is the language of Alexander's invasion, not Nebuchadnezzar's. But as with the judgments upon Judah, the scale of destruction was not quite as envisaged. Alexander killed 8,000 defenders of Tyre and sold the remaining 30,000 into slavery. This is not the scale of total destruction implied here, and so we must look to a latter day fulfilment.

Ezekiel 26:12 *They shall make a spoil of your riches, and make a prey of your merchandise; and they shall break down your walls, and destroy your pleasant houses; and they shall lay your stones and your timber and your dust in the midst of the waters-* This was clearly done by Alexander the Great and not Nebuchadnezzar; although the rubble of the old Tyre was used by Alexander to build the causeway to island Tyre. According to Babylonian records, Tyre surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar and was not destroyed. So the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to him, and

yet some of the language still doesn't ring true to what even Alexander did. So the ultimate reapplication will be in the latter day judgment of "Tyre" at the Lord's return.

Ezekiel 26:13 *I will cause the noise of your songs to cease; the sound of your harps shall be no more heard-* Tyre sung songs so that her memory would be preserved (Is. 26:13). But all such attempts to achieve permanence beyond the grave are doomed; and we have there a lesson. The idea may be that the only sound would be the music of the sea washing over her bare rocks (:14). But again this is the language of Zion's judgment (Is. 24:8; Jer. 7:34). There was to be the same hallmark stamped upon it. Zion was no better than Tyre of the Gentiles.

Ezekiel 26:14 *I will make you a bare rock; you shall be a place for the spreading of nets. You shall be built no more: for I Yahweh have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh-* Tyre was rebuilt, to such an extent that it was besieged by the Crusaders in the 12th century. As noted on Ez. 25:11, this prophecy shall only come totally true in its latter day fulfilment.

Ezekiel 26:15 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh to Tyre: shall not the islands shake at the sound of your fall, when the wounded groan, when the slaughter is made in the midst of you?- "Islands" can mean 'sea coasts' and would refer to the areas with whom Tyre traded, such as Philistia (Is. 20:6), south and east coasts of Arabia (Ez. 27:15) and Caphtor. The language of merchant partners mourning her fall is that regarding Babylon in Revelation. I have suggested on Ez. 25:11 that the intended scenario at Ezekiel's time didn't come about, because neither Judah nor the judged nations repented and turned to Yahweh. So the prophecies are to be rescheduled and reapplied; and perhaps the judgment of Tyre is to be reapplied in the last days to Babylon, just as the prophecies in this chapter about Nebuchadnezzar were reapplied to Alexander the Great. For judgment upon Babylon is not specifically mentioned in Ezekiel.*

Ezekiel 26:16 *Then all the princes of the sea shall come down from their thrones and lay aside their robes and strip off their embroidered garments: they shall clothe themselves with trembling; they shall sit on the ground and shall tremble every moment, being astonished at you-* As noted on :15, this is more the language of the merchant partners of Babylon in Revelation 17-19 mourning that the queen city of their trading system has come to a disgraceful end. But the fall of Tyre didn't mean, in Ezekiel's time, the loss of political power [coming down from thrones] for her trading partners; we are to look to the last days for the complete fulfilment.

Ezekiel 26:17 *They shall take up a lamentation over you and tell you, How you are destroyed, who was inhabited by mariners, the renowned city, who was strong in the sea, she and her inhabitants, who caused their terror to be on all who lived there!-* The peoples who traded with Tyre (see on :15) do not rejoice that an oppressor has fallen, but rather lament that their source of trade and profit has fallen. So "terror" here refers more to awe and respect rather than fear of an oppressor. "Lived there" is not the best translation; the word is used about marriage, and the idea is that her trading partners were as it were married to her in covenant.

Ezekiel 26:18 *Now shall the islands tremble in the day of your fall; yes, the islands that are in the sea shall be dismayed at your departure-* The "islands" refer to coastal

areas who were associated with Tyre by trade (see on :15). 'Trembling at the fall' of Tyre is the same phrase used about Egypt (Ez. 32:10). The similarity is in that the same hallmark of Yahweh's judgment is seen upon all who are judged by Him. They were not mere victims of random event; the Divine hand was in the fall of all in whom His wayward people had trusted.

Ezekiel 26:19 For thus says the Lord Yahweh: When I shall make you a desolate city like the cities that are not inhabited; when I shall bring up the deep on you and the great waters shall cover you- The covering of island Tyre with the waters, which had seemed so impossible, was to parallel the waters of invading armies taking her over. And yet this was not fulfilled under Nebuchadnezzar nor really under Alexander; the city was rebuilt and was not left uninhabited; even under Alexander the majority of the population were not slain. So the main fulfilment is in the last days.

Ezekiel 26:20 Then will I bring you down with those who descend into the pit, to the people of old time, and will make you to dwell in the lower parts of the earth, in the places that are desolate of old, with those who go down to the pit- In her death, Tyre would go down to the grave with other Gentiles (Ez. 32:19) and be at rest there. So there is no sense at all that "the pit" included conscious beings. For death is unconsciousness. Tyre would no longer be seen as superior to others, for death was to be the great leveller- a principle which likewise applies today.

That you be not inhabited- After the Babylonian invasion, Tyre was inhabited; indeed Is. 23:15 speaks of a 70 year period of Tyre's desolation. But the final fulfilment therefore must be future, because as noted on Ez. 25:11, the whole series of prophecies in this section of Ezekiel was part of the wider Divine intention that the Gentiles along with Judah would repent after the Babylonian destruction and come into covenant with Him, 'knowing Yahweh'. But this didn't happen as God hoped and potentially enabled; and so the prophecies have their final fulfilment in the last days.

And I will set glory in the land of the living- This is the language of the restored Kingdom of God in Israel, where Zion will become characterized by "life" (Ez. 47:19). God's glory would be set there; as noted above and on Ez. 25:11, the intention was that the Gentiles along with Judah would repent after the Babylonian destruction and come into covenant with Him, 'knowing Yahweh'. But this didn't happen as God hoped and potentially enabled; and so the prophecies have their final fulfilment in the last days.

Ezekiel 26:21 I will make you a terror, and you shall no more be rebuilt; though you are sought for, yet you will never be found again, says the Lord Yahweh- But Tyre was rebuilt after the Babylonian invasion. Indeed Is. 23:15 speaks of a 70 year period of Tyre's desolation. So the final fulfilment therefore must be future, as explained on Ez. 25:11.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 27

Ezekiel 27:1 The word of Yahweh came again to me saying- The previous chapter has recorded the prophesied destruction of Tyre. Perhaps the idea was that as with the proclamation of Nineveh's destruction after forty days, so Tyre was intended to receive this message and repent. Perhaps this further prophecy was given because the first one had not been responded to as hoped for.

Ezekiel 27:2 You, son of man, take up a lamentation over Tyre- A funeral dirge is recited after a demise; Tyre's destruction was so sure to happen that Ezekiel can therefore recite this before the event, but in the past tense. This is a clear example of the 'prophetic perfect' tense in Biblical Hebrew.

Ezekiel 27:3 And tell Tyre: You who dwell at the entry of the sea, who are the merchant of the peoples to many islands, thus says the Lord Yahweh: You, Tyre, have said, I am perfect in beauty- Or, "you are a ship perfect in beauty". This poem about Tyre likens her to a great ship in the sea. The same phrase "perfect in beauty" is used of Jerusalem (Lam. 2:15; Ez. 16:14). Clearly Tyre considered herself as the holy city of God, and in Ez. 28 there are many allusions to the tabernacle. It seems Tyre was envious of Jerusalem's claim to be Yahweh's holy city, and rejoiced at the demise of Jerusalem and its temple, thinking that she would then replace it.

Ezekiel 27:4 Your borders are in the heart of the seas; your builders have perfected your beauty- As noted on :3, it was Zion who was the perfection of beauty (Ps. 50:2). That beauty was taken away in the destruction of the temple (s.w. Lam. 1:6; 2:1), and so Tyre wrongly imagined that she would replace Zion.

Ezekiel 27:5 They have made all your planks of fir trees from Senir; they have taken a cedar from Lebanon to make a mast for you- This is appropriate if in fact Tyre is being likened to a great ship (see on :3). We noted on :3 and :4 that Tyre was presenting itself as a fake and replacement Zion; the cedars of Lebanon were so associated with the Jerusalem temple that the temple is even called "Lebanon" in Zech. 11:1. So Tyre having the cedar of Lebanon as its mainstay and most focal point would suggest she was seeing the pagan temple in her midst, like the mast on the ship "Tyre", as replacing Zion.

Ezekiel 27:6 Of the oaks of Bashan have they made your oars; they have made your benches of ivory inlaid in boxwood from the islands of Kittim- Is. 2:13 and Zech. 11:2 imply that oaks of Bashan were used in the Jerusalem temple, so again we have the impression that Zion was being 'imitated' by Tyre; see on Ez. 28:12. Whilst "benches" refers to the benches sat upon by the rowers of the ship "Tyre", this is the same Hebrew word more commonly used for the "boards" of the tabernacle (Ez. 26:15-29 etc.). All the time we see allusions to the tabernacle and temple of Zion; which Tyre was imitating, suggesting she was greater than Zion, and her gods than Yahweh.

Ezekiel 27:7 Of fine linen with embroidered work from Egypt was your sail, that it might be to you for a banner; blue and purple from the islands of Elishah was your awning- Tyre is being likened to a glorious ship (see on :3). But again the descriptions recall that of the tabernacle, decked with embroidered work [which in the tabernacle was also made of material "from Egypt"], blue and purple (Ex. 25:4; 26:1,31). The ballad of the ship "Tyre" presents her as a floating, but fake, tabernacle.

Ezekiel 27:8 The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your rowers. Your wise men, Tyre, were in you; they were your pilots- The reference is to Tyre as a great ship (:3), captained by their own "wise men", with the local peoples as their "rowers". Tyre was famed for her wisdom, and her destruction reflects God's desire to judge and bring

down all human pride. See on :28 for the connection of "rowers" with the ship of Tarshish used by Jonah.

Ezekiel 27:9 The old men of Gebal and the wise men of it were in you, your repairers of ship seams. All the ships of the sea with their mariners were in you to deal in your merchandise- As noted on :8, all human wisdom comes to nothing before God's judgment. "Gebal" is LXX "Byblus", between Beirut and Tripoli. The latter day fulfilment of all this seems to be that the 30 or so nations listed here as confederate with Tyre will all be involved again in the final desolation of Israel and will be finally judged at the Lord's return. Thus Gebal is mentioned in Ps. 83:7 as one of the ten nations confederated under the aim of destroying Israel.

Ezekiel 27:10 Persia, Lud and Put were in your army, your men of war. They hung the shield and helmet in you; they set forth your beauty- "Put" is LXX "Libya", and this and "Persia" are listed in Ez. 38:5 as members of the final alliance which will be judged in the last days. That is the point when these prophecies have their final fulfilment.

Ezekiel 27:11 The men of Arvad with your army were on your walls all around, and heroic men were in your towers; they hung their shields on your walls all around; they have perfected your beauty- This is the sight that greeted Alexander the Great as he approached the island Tyre; but the seeming impregnability was destroyed by the Divine judgment at his hands.

Ezekiel 27:12 Tarshish was your merchant by reason of the multitude of all kinds of riches; with silver, iron, tin and lead they traded for your wares- Tarshish is not the source of these metals, but rather the merchant in them, the "caravans" or transporters of them (:25). Any attempt to claim that tin from Cornwall in the UK therefore makes Tarshish equal Britain is desperate in the extreme. "Tarshish" traded directly with Tyre and there is no evidence that Britain ever did so. Tarshish was noted for its silver not its lead (Jer. 10:9), and the only place where these metals occur together in close proximity is at the site of Tartessus on the coast of Spain. For "Tarshish" both the LXX. and the Vulgate give "Carthaginians". Tartessus was one of the chief Phoenician colonies in Spain, called Carthago Nova, because it was a colony of Carthage. They were famed for their large trading vessels, which were used to trade with Tyre; and thus "ships of Tarshish" became a generic term for merchant ships.

Ezekiel 27:13 Javan, Tubal, and Meshech, they were your traffickers; they traded the persons of men and vessels of brass for your merchandise- Javan is Greece, and Joel 3:6 mentions Tyre as selling Israelite slaves ["the persons of men"] to Greece. Tubal and Meshech were clearly not Tobolsk in Siberia and Moscow in northern Russia, as has been claimed by russophobic wishful thinkers; there is no evidence Tyre traded with those areas. They clearly refer to areas with which Tyre traded by sea. All the other areas listed are "coastlands", accessible to sea transport, and this consideration would make Tubal and Meshech probably refer to areas on the Black Sea coast or possibly southern Turkey.

Ezekiel 27:14 They of the house of Togarmah traded for your wares with horses and war horses and mules- The identification of Togarmah with Armenia is difficult in that the current Armenia was not then noted for its horses, and it was landlocked,

whereas this is a list of the coastal areas which Tyre traded with by sea. The identification with parts of modern coastal Turkey is therefore to be preferred.

Ezekiel 27:15 The men of Dedan were your traffickers; many islands were the market under your control. They brought you in exchange horns of ivory and ebony- Dedan would therefore likely be somewhere in the south with access to elephant tusks and "ebony" from India and Ethiopia. Solomon used ships to get these things via Ezion Geber (1 Kings 9:26; 10:22). So the "islands" or coastlands in view could be on the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea. But the problem with that view is that one ship could not travel directly from Tyre to those places, seeing there was no Suez Canal then built. The description of the nations here is in an intentional order. It begins in the far west at Tartessus in Spain, goes east through Javan [Greece], to the north west corner of Turkey (Tubal, Meshech) and it would make sense if the circular description now moves down to the islands of the Aegean. These were the "islands... under your control", and the men of Dedan [even if we insist Dedan was in the Persian Gulf] were the merchants. That is not quite the same as saying that Tyre's ships sailed to Dedan itself.

Ezekiel 27:16 Syria was your merchant by reason of the multitude of your handiworks. They traded for your wares with emeralds, purple, embroidered work, fine linen, coral and rubies- Again we find here the things used in the tabernacle, priestly clothing and breastplate (Ex. 28:7,13,18,19; 39:12). This confirms the impression that the ballad of the good ship Tyre presents her as a fake, floating tabernacle. We are being set up to expect the utter destruction of this false system, which we indeed find in Ez. 28.

Ezekiel 27:17 Judah and the land of Israel, they were your traffickers. They traded for your merchandise wheat of Minnith, and confections, honey, oil and balm- Here Judah and Israel, the special people of God, are mentioned as if they were treated by Tyre as just some other Gentile nations with whom they traded. And the style of the record here reflects that perspective. This too was to be a reason for Tyre's destruction; for God's people are special, and we too should treat them as such and not in the way we would relate to standard secular unbelievers. Tyre as a city state was always in need of food, and Palestine was a logical source for this.

Ezekiel 27:18 Damascus was your merchant for the multitude of your handiworks, by reason of the multitude of all kinds of riches, with the wine of Helbon and white wool- This doesn't have to mean that the ships of Tyre went to Damascus, which is landlocked. Rather we can read as with GNB "The people of Damascus bought your merchandise and your products, paying for them with wine from Helbon and wool from Sahar".

Ezekiel 27:19 Vedan and Javan traded with yarn for your wares: bright iron, cassia and calamus were among your merchandise- Cassia and calamus were used in the tabernacle rituals (Ex. 30:23,24; it is the "sweet cane" to be offered to Yahweh in Is. 43:24; Jer. 6:20). See on :16.

Ezekiel 27:20 Dedan was your trafficker in precious cloths for riding- They "traded saddle blankets for your goods" (GNB).

Ezekiel 27:21 Arabia and all the princes of Kedar, they were the merchants of your hand. In lambs, rams, goats, in these were they your merchants- These three animals were part of the tabernacle rituals; again we have the impression that Tyre is being presented as a fake tabernacle, a conscious imitation of Yahweh's shrine in Jerusalem. See on :16. We also find these three animals listed in the same order in Ez. 39:18, as the possessions of the confederacy of nations who will invade Israel in the last days under Gog, and be destroyed. The idea would be that the final fulfilment of this prophecy is at the Lord's return, although "Tyre" may be reapplied to "Babylon" or whoever leads that latter day confederacy. Such reapplication and shifting of fulfilment from one to another is common in Bible prophecy; we noted on Ez. 26 how the destruction of Tyre was intended to be done by Nebuchadnezzar, but this prophecy was reapplied and shifted to Alexander the Great. Likewise prophecies which have one context in the Old Testament are applied in a different context in the New Testament. Thus Rachel weeping for her children in Jeremiah is shifted to apply to the women weeping for their children at the time of Herod's massacre. See on :27.

Ezekiel 27:22 The traffickers of Sheba and Raamah, they were your traffickers. They traded for your wares with the chief of all spices and with all precious stones and gold- Again this doesn't require the ships of Tyre to have gone to Sheba, the idea is that men from Sheba traded with Tyre. And again, these were all used in the tabernacle construction and rituals; spices (s.w. Ex. 25:6; 35:8), "precious stones" is the term used for the "costly stones" brought from Tyre and Lebanon for the foundation of the temple (1 Kings 5:17; 7:9-11); and gold was likewise throughout the sanctuary.

Ezekiel 27:23 Haran and Canneh and Eden, the traffickers of Sheba, Asshur and Chilmad, were your traffickers- Men from throughout the *eretz* promised to Abraham worked for Tyre; she is presented as having relationships and economic control over the entire territory. This may be somewhat exaggerated, as Babylon was the greater power in the area; but the picture is thus painted because Tyre stands as representative of the latter day entity which shall be judged at the Lord's return.

Ezekiel 27:24 These were your traffickers in choice wares, in wrappings of blue and embroidered work and in chests of rich clothing, bound with cords and made of cedar, among your merchandise- Again, this is all the language of the priestly robes and the tabernacle and temple construction- the words and ideas are all used elsewhere in that context: wrappings, blue, embroidered work, cords, cedar. As noted on :16, Tyre is presented as an imitation tabernacle which is to be judged.

Ezekiel 27:25 The ships of Tarshish were your caravans for your merchandise, and you were replenished, and made very glorious in the heart of the seas- As explained on :12, the people of Tartessus [Tarshish] in Spain were famed for their large trading vessels, which were used to trade with Tyre; and thus "ships of Tarshish" became a generic term for merchant ships. They were the maritime equivalent of desert "caravans". "Very glorious" is the phrase translated "very grievous" about the sin of Sodom (Gen. 18:20). A parallel is being drawn because this proud, immoral system and city is about to likewise fall in judgment.

Ezekiel 27:26 Your rowers have brought you into great waters. The east wind has

broken you in the heart of the seas- This verse suddenly interrupts the description of her greatness and all the good things packed onto the good ship Tyre. The sudden east wind from God will destroy her; clearly there are similarities with the Jonah story, see on :28.

Ezekiel 27:27 Your riches, your wares, your merchandise, your mariners, your pilots, your repairers of ship hulls and the dealers in your merchandise, and all your men of war who are in you, with all your company which is in the midst of you, shall fall into the heart of the seas in the day of your ruin- See on :28 for the connections with Jonah. The good ship Tyre, loaded with wealth and sailors from throughout the *eretz* promised to Abraham, was to capsize and sink to the bottom of the seas under Divine judgment. This is the punishment of Babylon and those confederate with her. It seems that what was here threatened upon Tyre didn't fully come to pass; but the essence of the prophecy will do, in that the prophecy is to be reapplied and transferred to Babylon. See on :21.

Ezekiel 27:28 At the sound of the cry of your pilots the suburbs shall shake- "Pilots" is the word translated "captain" in Jonah 1:6, the only other usage of the word outside Ez. 27. The ship of Tarshish or Tyre was rowed into deep waters, "the heart of the seas" (:27), which is where Jonah was plunged into (Jonah 2:3). The connection with the Jonah story is perhaps the implication that Tyre could have repented as those sailors did, and the ship of Tyre would not have been wrecked as it was going to be. And of course the book of Jonah is the great example of where Divine judgment was stated but not carried out because of Gentile repentance. And this was exactly why Ezekiel is making this appeal to Tyre.

Ezekiel 27:29 All who handled the oar, the mariners and all the pilots of the sea shall come down from their ships. They shall stand on the land- This is the very picture of Babylon's supporters, portrayed as mariners, 'standing' in mourning over her (Rev. 18:17). If we enquire why the judgments of latter day Babylon are portrayed in terms of Tyre's fall as described here in Ezekiel, I suggest the answer is as explained on :21. The prophecies of Tyre's fall could have happened in Ezekiel's time, within the context of the intended repentance of the exiles and the nations, and the reestablishment of a kingdom of God in Israel. But this didn't happen, and so the prophecies about Tyre have been transferred and reapplied to Babylon, to come to total fulfilment in the last days.

Ezekiel 27:30 And shall cause their voice to be heard over you, and shall cry bitterly and shall cast up dust on their heads, they shall wallow themselves in the ashes- This is the bitter lamentation over Babylon of Rev. 18:8-10; casting dust on their heads is quoted and applied to the mourners for latter day Babylon in Rev. 18:19; see on :29. Wallowing in ashes was Zion's judgment (Jer. 6:26; 25:34); they had rejoiced at Zion's fall, but were to come to the same.

Ezekiel 27:31 And they shall make themselves bald for you, and clothe them with sackcloth, and they shall weep for you in bitterness of soul with bitter mourning- This is the language of the exiles mourning for the destruction of Zion (Jer. 4:8; 6:26 and throughout Lamentations). The implication is that Zion was but a fake sanctuary of Yahweh, just as Tyre was. They would meet the same end.

Ezekiel 27:32 In their wailing they shall take up a lamentation for you and lament over you, saying, Who is there like Tyre, like her who is brought to silence in the midst of the sea?- Babylon likewise is to be cast into the seas in the last days (Rev. 18:21), and those who traded with her shall wail and lament (Rev. 18:11); see on :21,29.

Ezekiel 27:33 When your wares went forth out of the seas, you filled many peoples; you enriched the kings of the earth with the multitude of your riches and of your merchandise- The list of Babylon's merchandise in Rev. 18 is based upon the "wares" which are listed here as Tyre's trade. See on :29.

Ezekiel 27:34 In the time that you were broken by the seas in the depths of the waters, your merchandise and all your company fell in your midst- The seas refer to the confederated nations who were to break her, and cause all her wealth and supporters to drown in the depths. Again we see the similarities with the ship of Tarshish in which Jonah was placed, which averted this catastrophe by repentance; see on :28.

Ezekiel 27:35 All the inhabitants of the islands are astonished at you, and their kings are horribly afraid; they are troubled in their face- This suggests shock. The fall of Tyre is portrayed as coming suddenly and unexpectedly. But even in Alexander's time, she only fell after an extended siege. The impression of a sudden fall, akin to Babylon's plagues coming suddenly and being like a famine which came in one day (see on Rev. 18:8), means that we must look to the last days for the total fulfilment of the prophecy.

Ezekiel 27:36 The merchants among the peoples hiss at you; you are become a terror- This could imply that the merchants who initially lamented the fall of Tyre because of their own personal loss therefrom, now change and hate her. For "hiss" suggests scorn. In the transference to Babylon, this would be the horns hating the whore (Rev. 17:16).

And you shall never again have any being- Tyre did revive, and suffered many more sieges and invasions, right up to the time of the crusades. So the prophecy didn't come fully true at the time, but it will do in its reapplied form in the last days.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 28

Ezekiel 28:1 The word of Yahweh came again to me saying- This prophecy is specifically intended to be given to the prince of Tyre (:2). We noted in Ez. 27 the allusions to Jonah. The ship of Tyre was to sink, but repentance was possible to avert this.

Ezekiel 28:2 Son of man, tell the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because your heart is lifted up, and you have said, I am a god, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet you are man, and not God, though you set your heart as the heart of God- For an asylum seeking exile like Ezekiel in Babylon to tell the king of Tyre that he was going to perish unless he repented... was a hard mission. And our witness is likewise not so easy, in the proud, secular world in which we are to make it. We note that the primary issue with the king of Tyre was not his idolatry, but his pride

and playing God. This is what is so utterly abhorrent to God. And we must have that same perspective. Throughout this chapter and on Ez. 27 we note that Tyre is portrayed as having a fake tabernacle and temple, an imitation Zion; and her prince was therefore enthroned there as if he were Yahweh. He consciously "set his heart" on this fantasy. The Ugaritic documents reveal that the kings of that time considered themselves to be Divine, the human reincarnation of a god who had died and was now rising again. But this king, perhaps Itobaal II or Azemilcus, was consciously impersonating the Yahweh religion of Zion.

Ezekiel 28:3 *Behold, you are wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that is hidden from you-* He was not in fact wiser than Daniel nor did he know all secrets [which in Daniel's context referred to his understanding of the prophecies]. But this is how the prince of Tyre thought of himself, and so he is addressed in his own terms. The reference to his supposed wisdom is no proof that a super-human being is referred to; this is an illustration of Lk. 16: 8: "And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light".

Ezekiel 28:4 *By your wisdom and by your understanding you have become rich, and have gathered gold and silver into your treasures-* This is another way of saying that the prince's wisdom was not actually that of Daniel (:3). For this was all the result of secular wisdom rather than spiritual. It has been suggested that these verses here are alluding to or even quoting a hymn to the prince of Tyre. The later allusions to a story of Adam's fall may likewise be alluding not so much to the Genesis account but to some Tyrian religious myth. For God likes to speak to people within the terms of their own reference, as we should in our sharing of the Gospel.

Ezekiel 28:5 *By your great wisdom and by your traffic you have increased your riches, and your heart is lifted up because of your riches-* Wealth and pride go together. God wants us to be humble, and that is likely the reason why "to the poor the Gospel is preached", and wealthy people find the humility required by the Gospel so difficult.

Ezekiel 28:6 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have set your heart as the heart of God-* For all the things that the prince of Tyre could have been condemned for, his state of heart was the essential issue. And this is typical of the prophets- to focus, as did the Lord Jesus, upon the state of human hearts as the critical issue in God's judgment of men.

Ezekiel 28:7 *Therefore, behold, I will bring strangers on you, the terrible of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom, and they shall defile your brightness-* The language of brightness recalls the cherubim vision of Ez. 1. Tyre was a fake Zion, appearing to even have the cherubim presence around their central temple and prince. Perhaps he is called "the prince" rather than the king to draw a similarity with how the true Zion is to have a "prince". His beauty and brightness may refer to the temple in the centre of Tyre which was the obsessive pride and joy of her prince. This was to be desecrated by strangers. "The terrible of the nations" refers to the Babylonian confederacy in Ez. 30:11; 31:12. But ultimately it was the Greeks and not Babylonians who brought Tyre down. Again we see how the

prophecies about Tyre were transferred from one possible fulfilment to another, and the ultimate, final transference will be to the destruction of the last days.

Ezekiel 28:8 *They shall bring you down to the pit; and you shall die the death of those who are slain, in the heart of the seas-* This particularly refers to the prince of Tyre personally, who claimed he was God (:9). But Azemilcus, the king of Tyre when the city finally fell to Alexander the Great, was spared by Alexander. Again we see that the prophecy didn't come true exactly. The ultimate best fit fulfilment will therefore be in the last days. See on Ez. 27:21,29. The predictions in Ez. 26-28 about the king of Tyre personally are one of the biggest reasons to think that they did not come true as intended at the hands of the Babylonians or Greeks; and therefore these prophecies are to be transferred for their final fulfilment to some other figure.

Ezekiel 28:9 *Will you yet say before him who kills you, I am God? But you are man and not God in the hand of him who stabs you-* The Babylonians besieged Tyre for 13 years under Nebuchadnezzar and failed to capture island Tyre. This didn't happen, as noted on :8. The ultimate best fit fulfilment will therefore be in the last days. See on Ez. 27:21,29.

Ezekiel 28:10 *You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers: for I have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh-* The person was to “die the deaths of the uncircumcised” (Ez. 28:10), but angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36). There is no reference here therefore to any sinful Angel in Eden. He was a man (:9). The reference to death by the uncircumcised could suggest that Tyre in their mock imitation of Yahweh worship also practiced circumcision.

Ezekiel 28:11 *Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me saying-* The words “devil”, “satan” and “angel” do not occur in this chapter, nor in the rest of Ezekiel. The context shows this is a prophecy about the King of Tyre; the preceding chapter 27 is an oracle against Tyre, and now chapter 28 speaks specifically about the King of Tyre. Ezekiel chapters 27 and 28 clearly hold together as a literary unit. The city of Tyre and the King of Tyre are described in similar terms, e.g. "perfect in beauty" (compare Ez. 27:3 and Ez. 28:12; Ez. 27:16,17 with Ez. 28:13; Ez. 27:33 with Ez. 28:16). The passage plainly speaks of the King of Tyre, not anything that happened at the beginning of the world.

Ezekiel 28:12 *Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and tell him-* As noted on :7-10, no king of Tyre was actually killed neither by Nebuchadnezzar nor Alexander. This funeral lamentation over him therefore looks ahead to the last days; see on Ez. 27:21,29. There must therefore arise an individual similar to some historical king of Tyre who sets himself up as if he is in Zion, sitting in the throne of God. This is the latter day antichrist figure of 2 Thess. 2:4 who sits as God in the temple.

Thus says the Lord Yahweh: You seal up the imitation, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty- The same phrase "perfect in beauty" is used of Jerusalem (Lam. 2:15; Ez. 16:14). Clearly Tyre considered herself as the holy city of God, and in the next verses there are many allusions to the tabernacle. It seems Tyre was envious of Jerusalem's claim to be Yahweh's holy city, and rejoiced at the demise of Jerusalem and its temple, thinking that she would then replace it. She considered herself the "imitation"

of Zion and Yahweh worship; but the simple message was that Tyre was to be destroyed, and God's plan was to restore Zion rather than transfer Zion to Tyre. I have explained above that the final fulfilment of the destruction of the "prince of Tyre" will be in the last days, when it will be as it were transferred to the destruction of Babylon and her "man of sin" leader who will likewise create a false sanctuary in imitation of Yahweh worship, perhaps literally in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 28:13 *You were in Eden, the garden of God*- I suggested on :4 that this section may be part of an allusion to a Tyrian religious myth rather than to the Hebrew account in Gen. 2. But the text here refers to where the king of Tyre was in place, not in time. Pharaoh and Assyria are similarly described as being a "cedar in Lebanon", no "tree in the garden of God was like unto him in his beauty... all the trees of Eden envied him... yet shalt thou be brought down with the trees of Eden unto the nether parts of the earth: thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised" (Ez. 31:2,3,8,9,16,18). Thus "You have been in Eden" has similarities with the language used by Ezekiel about Egypt in Ez. 31. Egypt is described in language which recalls the trees in the garden of Eden, watered by many waters- and then cut down. In the same way as the Garden of Eden was ended, so would Egypt be.

The trees in Eden are not to be taken literally, they represent the nations whom Pharaoh and Assyria conquered, possibly referring to the fact that they were all within the old geographical boundaries of the garden of Eden. Pharaoh being the greatest of the trees in Eden and the most appealing maybe, suggests that he was taking to himself the place of the tree of knowledge, which was in the midst of Eden and probably the most attractive of them all, seeing that it fascinated Eve so much with its tempting fruit. Pharaoh was not literally that tree, but in the parable he was making himself like it. Similarly the king of Tyre is likened in this parable to the cherubim in Eden.

Every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz, emerald, chrysolite, onyx, jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and beryl. Gold workmanship of tambourines and of pipes was yours. In the day that you were created they were prepared- These were the stones in the high priestly breastplate; as noted on :12, Tyre pretended to being an "imitation" of Zion, Yahweh's holy city. David and Hiram of Tyre had been close friends (2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kings 5:1,6,7,10), and Hiram and Solomon had made a league in which Hiram supplied materials for the building of the temple (1 Kings 5:12,17,18). But this was now abused by Tyre in creating an imitation sanctuary in Tyre rather than Zion.

With Hiram's knowledge of the true God, it seems that subsequent Kings of Tyre came to put themselves in the position of God, presenting themselves as seated between the cherubim on Mount Zion, in the same way as the king of Assyria effectively aspired to the same thing - Phoenician inscriptions have been uncovered calling the king of Tyre "Lord of the Heavens". Even more amazingly, the jewels described in :13 were all found embedded in the sphinx-cherubim unearthed in Tyre. The three jewels of the breastplate missing from the list in :13 were also missing from the sphinx. Inscriptions also describe Tyre as the "garden of God", and reliefs of cherubim guarding Tyre as they did Eden have been found. Thus the king of Tyre had set up a blasphemous system of worship copying that of the temple and of Eden, with himself as God in the midst of it. Harry Whittaker makes a distinction between "the prince of Tyre" (Ez. 28:2) and "the king of Tyre" (Ez. 28:12). which he sees as a reference to the Tyrian god Melkart ("King of the city"). He suggests that Tyre had

installed a system of Yahweh worship similar to that which was in Jerusalem (perhaps a result of Hiram's relationship with Solomon and assistance in building Yahweh's temple)- but this had become mixed with the worship of Melkart (H.A. Whittaker, *The Very Devil* (Wigan: Biblia, 1991) p. 33.). God is saying that He is aware that this replica ["imitation", :12] of His system of worship has been pushed by the king of Tyre as far as it can go - no wonder a prophecy like Ezekiel 28 was necessary to expose his sin!

According to the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary: "This feeling of superhuman elevation in the king of Tyre was fostered by the fact that the island on which Tyre stood was called "the holy island" [Sanconiathon], being sacred to Hercules and Melkart, so much so that the colonies looked up to Tyre as the mother city of their religion". "The city was thought of as rising from the waters like the rock-throne of God" (Ralph Woodrow, *Was Satan Once An Angel In Heaven?* (Riverside, CA: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1968) p. 7. Woodrow was one of the few, if not the only, popular American Evangelical preacher of the 20th century who spoke out against the popular view of Satan). This would explain why the King of Tyre is criticized for saying "I am a God, I sit in the seat of God" (Ez. 28:2). It would also explain all the allusions to Israelite worship- he was setting himself up as a rival to Zion, dressing himself in clothing featuring all the jewels in the High Priestly breastplate (Ex. 28:15-20); the word used for his "workmanship" with those jewels in Ez. 28:13 is used in Ex. 31:3,5; 35:31 of the workmanship of the tabernacle and associated garments. Note how Ez. 27:22 says that Tyre traded in "all precious stones". The King of Tyre claimed to be "perfect in beauty" (Ez. 28:12)- just as Zion was described earlier in Ezekiel in the same terms (Ez. 16:14).

Ezekiel 28:14 *I put a terrifying messenger there to guard you-* "Guard" is related to the term used for the cherubim overshadowing the ark. The suggestion may be that Tyre as a great mercantile power was privileged to cast its 'wings' over Israel. It was the abuse of this exalted position that was a factor in the ruin of Tyre (: 4,5). God is clearly superior to the prince of Tyre. God was in control of the cherub.

The king of Tyre is likened to a cherub dwelling in Eden, the garden of God. However, the Genesis record stresses that the cherubim dwelt not *in* the garden, but east of it. It would therefore seem that Ez. 28:11-19 is alluding to some pagan story of the garden of Eden (see on :4), and re-focusing the myth upon a real, known human being on earth- i.e. the king of Tyre.

Cassuto points out that the Ezekiel reference to the cherub 'walking in the midst of the stones of fire' is an allusion to Ugaritic poetry which speaks of 'stones of fire'. Ezekiel does the same thing in Ez. 31:8,9, where he references pagan ideas about Eden, the cherubim etc., and re-focuses them upon Pharaoh, king of Egypt. It could even be argued that Ezekiel's detailed visions of the cherubim in Ez. 1 and 10 are a deconstruction of Babylonian and underlying Canaanite myths about the cherubim- showing who the cherubim *really* are.

A number of sphinx have been discovered, which appear to be a Canaanite pagan rendition of the cherubim described earlier in Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10. "A sphinx is merely a pagan cherub. The sphinx often depicted a king's head, and an animal's body—the animal was usually regarded as a god. Head and body were a composite god: the deification of the king" (Arthur Gibson, "The Diabolical Prince of Tyre", *The Testimony* Vol. 46 (1976) p. 174).

A large cherub-sphinx with a king's head and animal's body set on a base of sculptured mountains was discovered in nearby Sidon, apparently a deification of a

king of Tyre who is here described as being “upon the holy mountain of God” (Ez. 28:14). Phoenician and Ugaritic texts record the King of Tyre pronouncing that “I am *El*”- exactly what we read him doing in Ez. 28:2, proclaiming that “I am God, I sit in the seat of God” (Descriptions of the sphinx-cherubim discovered and the references to the King of Tyre’s claim to be “*El*” are to be found in R. D. Barnett, “Ezekiel and Tyre”, *Eretz-Israel* Vol. 9 (1969), p. 9 (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society). The King of Tyre claiming to be *El* is also referenced in W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (London: Athlone Press, 1968) p. 49).

You lived on My holy mountain and walked among sparkling gems- This holy mountain is Mt. Zion, on the earth, not symbolically in heaven as the Watchtower asserts (see Ez. 20:40). This is an allusion to the stones set in the breastplate of the high priest of Israel (Ex. 39:10-14). They were ‘stones of fire’ because of the way they would shine when exposed to the brilliance of the Shekinah glory of the sanctuary. They symbolized the twelve tribes of Israel (Ex. 39:14). Hiram the earlier king of Tyre walked in the midst of these stones of fire when he moved among the children of Israel (as in the preparation of the materials for the temple). But now Tyre had as it were created a similar sanctuary and breastplate in Tyre.

Ezekiel 28:15 *You were perfect in your ways-* “You were perfect in your ways” is no proof that a super-human person is being spoken of, seeing that the word is applied to Noah, Abraham, Job and David (Gen. 6: 9; 17:1; Job 1:1; Ps. 18:23 & 25). Those who believe in a personal devil are faced with a contradiction- was the devil originally a sinner, or, was he once perfect but fell?

From the day that you were created- “Perfect” (upright) from the time of his spiritual birth - which is how the word “created” is used in Ezekiel 21:30 and Psalm 102:18 (cp. 2 Cor. 5:17). Perhaps this refers to how under Hiram, Tyre had become a proselyte state of Israel.

Until unrighteousness was found in you- There may be allusion to the falling out between Hiram and Solomon.

Ezekiel 28:16 *By the abundance of your trading they filled the midst of you with violence, and you have sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane out of the mountain of God; and the angel who guarded you drove you away from the midst of the stones of fire-* Tyre was no longer accepted by God as a proselyte state with the right to worship at the Jerusalem temple; and perhaps in protest at this, Tyre had created their own imitation temple and Yahweh cult in Tyre. “The king of Tyre” (:12) is the subject of this prophecy. Verses 4 and 5 describe him as getting rich by his trading in silver and gold, and getting proud because of this - much more applicable to a human king than to an angel. His sin is defined in Ez. 28:15,16: “The iniquity of your trading... by the multitude of your trading... you have sinned”. The sin in view wasn't some Angelic rebellion against God; it was specifically his trading and avarice, which have been described in detail in the last two chapters, and refer to the king of Tyre rather than to anything in the garden of Eden. I suggested on :4 that this section may be part of an allusion to a Tyrian religious myth rather than to the Hebrew account in Gen. 2.

Ezekiel 28:17 *Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness. I have cast you to the ground; I have laid you before kings, that they may see you-* It appears that the prophecy of the fall of Tyre is being consciously framed to mirror the fall of Adam, e.g. :2: “you are a man”;

“man” is *Adam* in Hebrew, as if God is saying to the prince of Tyre, “You are like Adam in this parable”. Verse 17 tells how he will be brought to the ground - as Adam had to return to the dust. The passage is often skim read, leading to the assumption that the King of Tyre is being likened to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, or to some Satan figure who fell from Heaven at that time. But careful reading shows that the King of Tyre is being likened to Adam in Eden, not to the serpent.

Ezekiel 28:18 By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trading, you have profaned your sanctuaries; therefore have I brought forth a fire from the midst of you; it has devoured you, and I have turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all those who see you- As noted on :16, the sin of the prince was his trading, which has been explained in the previous two chapters. This is what was in view rather than the sin of some supposed angel in Eden. Like Adam, the prince of Tyre was to return to the dust.

This verse may imply that Tyre had set up forms of worship similar to that of Israel. Hiram was ‘ever a lover of David’ and rejoiced with Solomon in the building of the temple (1 Kings 5: 1-12). The king of Tyre would so doubt have learned about God’s kingdom in Israel from these two kings of Israel. Or, the verse may be interpreted this way: Tyre’s sanctuaries were in Israel when the divine presence and favour were manifest. But Tyre failed to appreciate its privileged association with Israel. When Nebuchadnezzar came down into Jerusalem (586 B.C.), the prince of Tyrus said: ‘Aha, the gate of the peoples is broken, it has swung open to me; I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste’ (Ez. 26:2 R.S.V.). In so saying, Tyre had spoken her own nemesis according to the decree of Genesis 12: 3: ‘I will... curse him that curseth thee’. Tyre, in her self-centred, mercantile interests, had profaned the sanctuaries and was herself to be reduced to ashes.

Tyre could not with impunity violate her privileged relationship with Israel. When Nadab and Abihu treated the sacred as secular, ‘there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD’ (Lev. 10:2). Similarly, Tyre had failed to make a difference between the holy and unholy. It was, therefore, to be reduced to ashes - devoured like Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24,25).

Ezekiel 28:19 All those who know you among the peoples shall be astonished at you. You have become a terror, and your life shall end evermore- This would be axiomatic if it spoke simply of the personal prince of Tyre. Clearly enough Tyre politically is in view. She revived many times after the Babylonian and Greek attacks upon her. So the final fulfilment is yet future, in the last days.

Ezekiel 28:20 The word of Yahweh came to me saying- Now we have a brief judgment upon Sidon, a neighbour of Tyre. This underlines how the previous passage concerns Tyre, a literal entity on earth, and has no reference to the fall of any angel in Eden.

Ezekiel 28:21 Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, and prophesy against it- Whilst Tyre was in ruins after the surrender to Babylon and lost power, nearby Sidon apparently revived in power. This prophecy was therefore to preclude any conclusion that Tyre was reviving in the form of Sidon nearby. She too was to fall.

Ezekiel 28:22 And say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you Sidon. I will be glorified in the midst of you; and they shall know that I am Yahweh when I

shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her- Again we have the Divine hope that the judged nations around Judah would repent and sanctify Yahweh as their God. This didn't happen, and so the prophecies have been transferred and reapplied to the last days.

Ezekiel 28:23 *For I will send plague into her and blood into her streets. The wounded shall fall in the midst of her, with the sword on her on every side; and they shall know that I am Yahweh-* This repeats the language concerning Judah's judgment (Ez. 5:12; 6:12). Judah was to be punished like the Gentiles because of her Gentile heart; that was the immediate lesson for the first audience of these words as they sat in Babylonian captivity.

Ezekiel 28:24 *There shall be no more a pricking brier to the house of Israel, nor a hurting thorn of any that are around them, that scorned them; and they shall know that I am the Lord Yahweh-* As noted on :22, we see here Yahweh's intention that the judged nations around Judah would repent and sanctify Yahweh as their God. This didn't happen, and so the prophecies have been transferred and reapplied to the last days. Sidon was clearly a thorn and brier to Israel, alluding to the calamity upon Eden which happened due to Adam's sin. This prophecy will only be fulfilled when paradise is restored at the Lord's return to earth.

Ezekiel 28:25 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the nations, then shall they dwell in their own land which I gave to My servant Jacob-* They were gathered back [although they resisted this in that many preferred to stay in the soft life of Babylon], but they hardly dwelt safely or confidently in their land. They planted vineyards, but received a poor harvest due to their lack of attention to God's house; their enemies destroyed their fruits, and their vine "cast her fruit before the time" (Hag. 1:6; Mal. 3:10,11). Haggai and Malachi criticized Israel for this, saying it could be rectified by their obedience: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. 3:10). Yet in Nehemiah's time, Judah refused to pay tithes properly; but even then, if they had thoroughly repented, the Kingdom conditions were still possible. Such was God's desire to continue working with His hopeless people.

Consider the use of the word *pus*, 'scatter'. It was God's intention that mankind should scatter abroad in the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28); but it required the judgment of the tower of Babel to actually make them 'scatter' (Gen. 11:4). Thus even in judgment, God worked out His positive ultimate intentions with humanity. And this word *pus* is the same word used with reference to Judah's 'scattering' from the land into Babylonian captivity (Ez. 11:17; 20:34,41; 28:25). The intention, surely, was to show the captives that they had been scattered as the people had at the judgment of Babel / Babylon, but even in this, God was working out His purpose with His people and giving them the opportunity to fulfil His original intentions for them.

Ezekiel 28:26 *They shall dwell securely therein; yes, they shall build houses, and plant vineyards, and shall dwell securely, when I have executed judgments on all those who do them despite all around them; and they shall know that I am Yahweh their God-* After Tyre and Sidon would be judged, then Israel would plant vineyards and dwell "securely". It seems that this was potentially possible; Judah could have

become Yahweh's battle axe against Tyre, the nations brought to fear Him, and then the Kingdom conditions would have begun. This would then have led to the Ez. 38 invasion with Israel dwelling "securely". But all these things have been reapplied to the last days.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 29

Ezekiel 29:1 In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, the word of Yahweh came to me saying- The relevance of the date is that this was during the siege of Jerusalem, six months before the final fall of the city; and all Judah's hopes were on salvation from the Babylonians by the Egyptians. And so at that time Ezekiel warns that Egypt shall fall. The prophecies about Egypt are given on different dates, a year before and after the fall of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 29:2 Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt- The judgments upon Tyre and Egypt are far longer than those upon the other five of the seven surrounding nations condemned by Ezekiel in this section. This is because of their relative size and importance, and their attraction to Judah as defenders against Babylon.

Ezekiel 29:3 Speak and say, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great monster that lies in the midst of his rivers, that has said, 'My river is My own, and I have made it for Myself'- The dragon or crocodile was also a symbol of Egypt in Is. 27:1; 51:9; ps. 74:13. The "rivers" refer to the various branches of the Nile at the Nile delta. As with the prince of Tyre, the king of Egypt considered himself God and the creator of the Nile. It was this arrogance and playing God which was so offensive to God. For He values humility above all.

Ezekiel 29:4 I will put hooks in your jaws, and I will make the fish of your rivers stick to your scales; and I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers, with all the fish of your rivers which stick to your scales- This describes how a crocodile would be captured (the "monster" of :3). The fish stuck to its scales refer to the various smaller peoples confederate with Egypt.

Ezekiel 29:5 I'll cast you forth into the wilderness, you and all the fish of your rivers. You'll fall on the open field. You won't be bound together, nor gathered. I have given you for food to the animals of the earth and to the birds of the sky- This may refer to the destruction of the Egyptian army in the wilderness whilst attacking Cyrene. This meant they were unable to help Judah as Judah hoped.

Ezekiel 29:6 All the inhabitants of Egypt will know that I am Yahweh, because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel- The crocodile lived amongst reeds in the Nile marshlands, so the reed is an appropriate symbol to use. Egypt had been a staff of reed to Judah during the earlier Assyrian invasion 100 years earlier (Is. 36:6); but they failed to learn the lesson, and were desperately trusting them again. Circumstances repeat in our lives, in order to test us and develop our learning in the life of faith. Judah should have learnt from the failure of Egypt to stop the Assyrians; but they didn't. The situation repeated quite accurately, in that the Egyptians appeared

to give some support against Assyria, leading to a withdrawal from Jerusalem for a short while; just as happened during the Babylonian siege (Jer. 37:5).

Ezekiel 29:7 When they took hold of you by your hand, you broke, and tore all their shoulders; and when they leaned on you, you broke, and paralyzed all of their thighs- To take by the hand speaks of entering a covenant. The idea seems to be that the covenant was mutually destructive to both Judah and Egypt. The wrath of Babylon was upon both parties, seeing they had also made agreements with them. It was God who broke the arm of Egypt (Ez. 30:21 s.w. "you broke..."). God worked through these dishonest covenants in order to break both parties.

Ezekiel 29:8 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will bring a sword on you, and will cut off man and animal from you- As with the prophecies against Tyre in Ez. 26-28, these prophecies about Egypt didn't come totally true; man and animal were not cut off from Egypt in totality. Perhaps some repented and so the full brunt of the destruction was averted. Or more likely, these prophecies are part of the wider potential scenario, whereby the remnant of Judah would repent along with the nations judged by Babylon, and together they would reestablish Yahweh's kingdom in Israel. This didn't happen, because God will not force human freewill decisions. And so the essence of the prophecies will come true in the last days.

Ezekiel 29:9 The land of Egypt shall be a desolation and a waste- This along with many phrases used in this condemnation of Egypt were in fact descriptions of what God had threatened to do to Judah at the hands of the Babylonians (e.g. Ez. 12:20). But instead of Egypt averting the fulfilment of those prophecies, as Judah hoped, Egypt would itself suffer them as well.

And they shall know that I am Yahweh- As explained on :8 this didn't come totally true. The Divine hope and intention was that Egypt would come to know Him, i.e. to have relationship with Him.

Because you have said, 'The river is mine, and I have made it- Pharaoh believed that the river Nile was his own creation. This playing of God is cited repeatedly as the reason for their destruction. And we too can so easily do the same in our attitudes and judgments.

Ezekiel 29:10 Therefore, behold, I am against you and against your rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation, from the tower of Seveneh even to the border of Ethiopia- "Syene" as the modern Asswan. The idea is from the northern border to the southern border of Egypt. This never completely happened; see on :8.

Ezekiel 29:11 No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of animal shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years- Throughout Ez. 26-28 I have noted that the promised judgments upon Tyre didn't come about exactly as predicted. There was the possibility of transference of the prophetic words from one context to another; e.g. the destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar was delayed and transferred to Alexander the Great. But the final fulfilment will be in the last days. But that fulfilment will be in essence and not necessarily to the letter. There will be reapplication as well as rescheduling and transference. These forty years of desolation would have come true within the wider possible prophetic vision, of Judah and the judged nations all repenting and turning to Yahweh, and His Kingdom being

reestablished in Israel. But this was not to be because the human freewill preconditions didn't come about- e.g. Judah didn't repent and many of the exiles preferred to stay in Babylon. And so likewise this forty years desolation unto repentance of Egypt didn't happen. Although the essence of it will come true in the last days.

Ezekiel 29:12 I will make the land of Egypt a desolation in the midst of the countries that are desolate; and her cities among the cities that are laid waste shall be a desolation forty years; and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries- As noted on :11, this is not recorded as having happened. The nations around Egypt were likewise not completely desolated. There was no invading army which systematically destroyed all the cities of Egypt as required here. And so we look to a latter fulfilment. However the language of a desolate land and cities is taken from Lev. 26:33, the curses upon Israel for breaking the covenant. It seems that Egypt could have entered a covenant with Yahweh and so were punished for breaking it in that they refused that covenant.

Ezekiel 29:13 For thus says the Lord Yahweh: At the end of forty years will I gather the Egyptians from the peoples where they were scattered- As explained on :11, this is all part of a potential scenario which could have come about if Judah had repented and allowed themselves to be restored. Had they done so, then the Egyptians and others would also have been restored. Had Egypt accepted unity with God's people and with Yahweh, then the restoration of Judah would have been theirs; for the language of restoration, just like the language of their judgments (see on :9), is identical to that used about Judah's restoration.

Ezekiel 29:14 And I will bring back the captivity of Egypt, and will cause them to return into the land of Pathros, into the land of their birth; and they shall be there a base kingdom- To 'bring back the captivity' means to 'restore the fortunes', to lift up or exalt. And this is the phrase used about the restoration of Israel, in which Egypt potentially could have had a part. And yet this idea is apparently juxtaposed with that of her being "a base kingdom". But there is no contradiction, once we appreciate that the word for "base" is often used of how a person or nation must be abased, brought down, *so that* they may be exalted. Ezekiel has used the term exactly in this sense, to describe how Judah shall be base or abased, so that she may be exalted (Ez. 17:24; 21:26). And it is the teaching of other scriptures too; the abased Jewish remnant were to be exalted (s.w. Is. 57:15), the abased ["humble"] in spirit are to be lifted up (Prov. 29:23; Job 5:11). This is why the idea of Egypt being an abased kingdom is mentioned in the same breath, as it were, as the promise of her revival. But this would happen only if she identified with the restoration of Israel, accepted Yahweh as her God, and repented.

Ezekiel 29:15 It shall be the most base of the kingdoms; neither shall it any more lift itself up above the nations; and I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations- As with the permanent destruction of Tyre never to rise again, this didn't happen. The Seleucid kingdom was powerful in Egypt, it became "the king of the South", and has at times been a powerful nation. So the final fulfilment is to be in the last days. But as explained on :14, the idea was that Egypt would be "most base" *so that she might be exalted*, in God's sight. She would no longer be "above the nations"

because in the new system envisaged, God would be the king and if any particular nation was to be lifted up above other nations, it would be Israel. The same Hebrew term translated here "lift itself up above the nations" is used in Is. 2:2; 11:12 of how in the Messianic kingdom, Zion [and therefore, not Egypt] would be exalted / lifted up above the nations.

Ezekiel 29:16 It shall be no more the confidence of the house of Israel, bringing iniquity to remembrance, when they turn to look after them- So often Yahweh is portrayed as the only "confidence" or trust of His people. Judah's confidence in nations like Egypt was therefore a betrayal of their relationship with Yahweh. This rejection of trust / hope in foreign alliances was behind Jeremiah's comment that the man who hoped / had confidence in Yahweh alone would be blessed (Jer. 17:7 s.w.). The immediate context referred to having Egypt and other nations as their hope / confidence.

And they shall know that I am the Lord Yahweh- The Divine hope was that the repentance of Israel and that of Egypt would happen at the same time, and they would come into relationship with ["know"] Yahweh. This didn't happen as it could have done, and so the fulfilment is deferred until the last days.

Ezekiel 29:17 It came to pass in the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, in the first day of the month, the word of Yahweh came to me saying- This was 17 years after the prophecies given either side of it. It is inserted here to make the powerful point that years later, Ezekiel reminded God's people that the help they had expected from Egypt at the time, 17 years before, hadn't come. Only Yahweh would be their help, even 17 years later.

Ezekiel 29:18 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 worn; yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyre, for the service that he had served against it- Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre for 13 years, and as noted on Ez. 26-28, he didn't achieve all that was prophesied, and much of it was transferred to Alexander the Great to fulfill; indeed much of it will only have a total fulfilment in the last days. Babylon didn't even plunder Tyre, and so was not as it were paid any wages for her efforts. But all the same, God noticed the efforts and wanted to reward him. The reference to the suffering of the heads and shoulders would refer to the unsuccessful efforts of the Babylonians to build a causeway out to the island Tyre using the rubble of the destroyed city.

Ezekiel 29:19 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and he shall carry off her multitude and take her a spoil and take her a prey; and it shall be the wages for his army- We note God's sensitivity to even pagan Gentiles. The 13 year unsuccessful siege of Tyre by Babylon had not even yielded the Babylonians any plunder from Tyre. And so God wanted to recompense them somehow, so He would give them Egypt. But how much more eager to recompense is God when it comes to the feeble attempts of us His servants to please Him!

Ezekiel 29:20 I have given him the land of Egypt as his recompense for which he served, because they worked for Me, says the Lord Yahweh- This happened only to a limited extent; it was to be at the time when a Messiah figure would appear in Judah,

and the Egyptians would know Yahweh, i.e. enter relationship with Him (:21). This scenario didn't work out at the time of the restoration, which could potentially have occurred at the same time Babylon took Egypt (:21 "in that day"). In some form, the essence of these things must therefore come true in the last days.

Ezekiel 29:21 In that day will I cause a horn to bud forth to the house of Israel- This budding forth of a shoot or horn speaks of the possibility of a Messiah figure arising (Ps. 132:17) in the likes of Zerubbabel. Again, this was the scenario which could have happened at the restoration, but it didn't. The final fulfilment will be in the Lord Jesus in the last days.

And I will give you the opening of the mouth in their midst; and they shall know that I am Yahweh- At the Lord's return, God will use a repentant Israel to achieve great things in terms of converting this world unto Himself. They will walk up and down in His Name, witnessing to Him as He had originally intended them to (Zech. 10:12); men will cling to their skirts in order to find the knowledge of their God (Zech. 8:23). "In that day will I cause the horn of the house of Israel to bud forth, and I will give thee (Israel) the opening of the mouth in the midst of them (the surrounding nations, see context); and *they* shall know that I am the LORD", in that Israel will preach to them from their own experience of having recently come to know Yahweh (Ez. 29:21). But at the time of the Lord's return, when Israel repent and enter the new covenant with Him, they will remember all their past sins "and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame... for all that thou hast done" (Ez. 16:63). They will be so ashamed that they *will feel as if* they can never open their mouth. But Yahweh will open their mouth, and they will witness. In some anticipation of this, Ezekiel as the "son of man" prophet, a representative of his people just as the Lord was to be, had his mouth shut in dumbness, and he only had his mouth opened when Israel came to know [to some degree] that "I am the LORD" (Ez. 24:27). In all these evident connections something marvellous presents itself. Those who feel as if they just cannot open their mouths in witness are the very ones whom the Father will use; He will open their mouths and use them exactly because they are ashamed of their sins! And so it should be with us.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 30

Ezekiel 30:1 The word of Yahweh came again to me saying- The continued trust of the people in Egypt as their last minute saviour from Babylon called for repeated appeals at different times and perhaps to different groups.

Ezekiel 30:2 Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Wail, Alas for the day!- The fall of Egypt was seen as a tragedy; for Ezekiel too was human, "son of man", and the death of any man diminishes each of us. This lamentation may also have even been an appeal for Egypt to repent.

Ezekiel 30:3 For the day is near, even the day of Yahweh is near; it shall be a day of clouds, a time of the nations- This is the language of the latter day judgment upon all the nations around *eretz* Israel (Joel 1:15; 2:1,2; Obadiah 15). I have explained from Ez. 26 onwards that much of the scenario presented of the judgment of Tyre and Egypt didn't come true as planned. It was God's intention that Judah would repent, and the nations judged by Babylon would likewise, and together they would reestablish God's Kingdom in Israel. But they didn't repent, and so the prophecies will have their final fulfilment in the last days. This explains why we read here language which is elsewhere used about the final judgment of all nations around the time of the return of the Lord Jesus. That will be the ultimate coming of the day of clouds (Rev. 1:7).

Ezekiel 30:4 A sword shall come on Egypt and anguish shall be in Ethiopia, when the slain shall fall in Egypt; and they shall take away her multitude, and her foundations shall be broken down- "Anguish" is the word for birth pangs; the implication could be that out of the agony of Babylonian judgment there was to be brought forth something new, a repentant remnant. Life was to come out of death.

Ezekiel 30:5 Ethiopia, Put and Lud, and all the mixed people, and Cub- These were the nations confederate with Egypt whom the Jews hoped would help them.

And the children of the land that is allied with them, shall fall with them by the sword- The reference appears to be to the Jews who had already gone down into Egypt, trusting in the alliance made with her. They were the children of their own land in that they were not in their own land but still associated with her. Jer. 42:22; 44:14 were clear that these Jews would fall by the sword along with the Egyptians. And so appears the timeless lesson- that Egypt, the world, is no safe haven and will not save us in the end.

Ezekiel 30:6 Thus says Yahweh: They also who uphold Egypt shall fall- "Uphold" is the same word translated "lean" in Is. 36:6; whoever leaned upon the staff of Egypt would fall, and Egypt herself would "come down" as a result of this. Her attempt to help Judah would be her downfall rather than her blessing, as the false prophets of Judah perhaps claimed.

And the pride of her power shall come down: from the tower of Seveneh shall they fall in it by the sword, says the Lord Yahweh- The tower of Syene was the border of Egypt, and as noted on Ez. 29:10, the idea is 'All of Egypt from the north to the south'.

Ezekiel 30:7 They shall be desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate; and her cities shall be in the midst of the cities that are wasted- As noted on Ez. 29:11,

this is not recorded as having happened. The nations around Egypt were likewise not completely desolated. There was no invading army which systematically destroyed all the cities of Egypt as required here. And so we look to a latter fulfilment. However the language of a desolate land and cities is taken from Lev. 26:33, the curses upon Israel for breaking the covenant. It seems that Egypt could have entered a covenant with Yahweh and so were punished for breaking it in that they refused that covenant.

Ezekiel 30:8 They shall know that I am Yahweh, when I have set a fire in Egypt, and all her helpers are destroyed- The Divine hope was that the repentance of Israel and that of Egypt and the other surrounding nations would happen at the same time, and they would come into relationship with ["know"] Yahweh. This didn't happen as it could have done, and so the fulfilment is deferred until the last days. And so the destruction of Egypt by fire likewise didn't happen exactly as envisaged here, because the wider potential scenario of repentance didn't come about. "Set a fire" is the phrase used about putting fire on the altar (Lev. 1:7), so again we have a hint that Egypt was to become an acceptable sacrifice, through the fire of Babylonian judgment. But it is also used of how Zion was to be put or set into the fire (Ez. 15:4,6). Far from saving her from this judgment as Judah hoped, Egypt was to share her condemnation.

Ezekiel 30:9 In that day shall messengers go forth from before Me in ships to make the careless Ethiopians afraid; and there shall be anguish on them, as in the day of Egypt; for, behold, it comes- "Messengers" is *malak*, the word also translated "Angels". As taught in the opening vision of the cherubim in Ez. 1, the Angels were behind the movements of Gentile nations as well as of Israel. All that happens on earth is not random, but a reflection of the vast system of Divine operation and control spoken of in the cherubim. The primary reference is to messengers going from Egypt along the Nile to tell the Ethiopians of the arrival of the Babylonians, just as they had told them about the Assyrians in this way in Is. 18:1,2. But Angels were propelling those messengers on their skiffs.

Ezekiel 30:10 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also make the multitude of Egypt to cease, by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon- The idea seems to be that Egypt's large population would be noticeably reduced by the invasion, but this didn't quite happen at the hands of the Babylonians. The scenario that was potentially possible didn't come about at this time, although the essence of it will in the last days.

Ezekiel 30:11 He and his people with him, the terrible of the nations, shall be brought in to destroy the land; and they shall draw their swords against Egypt, and fill the land with the slain- Such mass destruction didn't actually happen. Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptian army at Carchemish on the Euphrates, quite far from Egypt itself (Jer. 46:2). Egypt was then placed under tribute and in this way, the Babylonians received their "wages" for besieging Tyre. But there is no record of any major Babylonian incursion into Egypt; Herodotus doesn't mention it whilst providing an otherwise detailed history of these times.

Ezekiel 30:12 I will make the rivers dry, and will sell the land into the hand of evil men; and I will make the land desolate, and all that is therein, by the hand of strangers: I, Yahweh, have spoken it- This is the idea of Is. 19:6, that the "brooks of defence shall be emptied", the artificial canals would dry up. But as noted on :11, the

Babylonians didn't completely do this to Egypt; and so the essence must be seen in the last days. Or it may be that just as the prophecy about Nebuchadnezzar conquering Tyre was transferred to Alexander the Great, and the prophecies about Tyre become transferred to Babylon in the last days, so these words about Egypt were to be transferred for fulfilment to Babylon or some other power. For Babylon also fell as a result of her rivers being dried up. The selling of the land may allude to how earlier the Egyptians had been forced by famine to sell their land, but to Joseph, a good man (Gen. 47:20); now famine would dry their rivers and force them to sell their land to wicked men.

Ezekiel 30:13 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also destroy the idols and I will cause the images to cease from Memphis; there shall be no more a prince from the land of Egypt: and I will put a fear in the land of Egypt- As explained on :11, the immediate prophetic potential for Egypt was precluded from fulfilment by the lack of repentance. And so the idols continued in Egypt. And likewise the idea that Egypt would never have a prince was not immediately fulfilled; Egypt has had plenty of local rulers in its long history. The idea is more as in GNB, speaking of that immediate generation: "There will be no one to rule Egypt, and I will terrify all the people". Or we could read with the LXX: "I will also destroy the nobles from Memphis, and the princes of Memphis out of the land of Egypt; and they shall be no more".

Ezekiel 30:14 I will make Pathros desolate, will set a fire in Zoan and will execute judgments on No- The destruction of Egypt by fire likewise didn't happen exactly as envisaged here, because the wider potential scenario of repentance didn't come about. "Set a fire" is the phrase used about putting fire on the altar (Lev. 1:7), so again we have a hint that Egypt was to become an acceptable sacrifice, through the fire of Babylonian judgment. But it is also used of how Zion was to be put or set into the fire (Ez. 15:4,6). Far from saving her from this judgment as Judah hoped, Egypt was to share her condemnation.

Ezekiel 30:15 I will pour My wrath on Sin, the stronghold of Egypt; and I will cut off the multitude of No- "Sin" is LXX "Syene". We wonder why all these details are given when the potential scenario wasn't to come about. But that is the same question as to why we have Ez. 40-48 recorded. This is the whole tragedy- that such detailed plans are laid by God, but human lack of response and repentance precludes so much potential from coming about. Divine volumes could likewise be written about our own lives and wasted potentials. And yet in essence, all these things shall come true albeit in a different application and time.

Ezekiel 30:16 I will set a fire in Egypt; Sin shall be in great anguish, No shall be broken up and Memphis shall have adversaries in the daytime- The destruction of Egypt by fire likewise didn't happen exactly as envisaged here, because the wider potential scenario of repentance didn't come about. "Set a fire" is the phrase used about putting fire on the altar (Lev. 1:7), so again we have a hint that Egypt was to become an acceptable sacrifice, through the fire of Babylonian judgment. But it is also used of how Zion was to be put or set into the fire (Ez. 15:4,6). Far from saving her from this judgment as Judah hoped, Egypt was to share her condemnation.

Ezekiel 30:17 The young men of Aven and of Pibeseth shall fall by the sword; and

these cities shall go into captivity- "Aven" is On. And the idols of On were accepted by Judah (Hos. 4:15; 10:5 LXX). The record of the destruction of Egypt's idols and the cities in which they were enshrined was directly relevant to the Judah of Ezekiel's day, who had accepted the worship of these idols in return for Egypt's military support. That is the implication of the passages describing Judah's adultery in Ez. 16,23.

Ezekiel 30:18 At Tehaphnehes also the day shall withdraw itself, when I shall break there the yokes of Egypt, and the pride of her power shall cease in her: as for her, a cloud shall cover her, and her daughters shall go into captivity- The day withdrawing itself is language used about the latter day time of judgment (Am. 5:20; 8:9; Is. 5:30; Jer. 13:16). This will be the time when the spirit of these prophecies comes to its final fulfilment. We note the connection between pride and power. God's hatred of pride, and desire to save us the humble, is one reason He doesn't give secular "power" to many of His children lest they be lifted up in pride.

Ezekiel 30:19 Thus will I execute judgments on Egypt; and they shall know that I am Yahweh- The purpose of Divine judgment is not simply punishment, nor merely the expression of His anger and irritation. It is designed ultimately to restore and to bring the likes of Egypt to "know" Him, to walk in relationship with Him. This is and was His intention for Egypt. The link between His judgments and positive human response to them may be one reason why not all these judgments were actually carried out upon Egypt.

Ezekiel 30:20 It happened in the eleventh year, in the first month, in the seventh day of the month, that the word of Yahweh came to me, saying- This was at or about the time of the abortive attempt of Pharaoh-Hophra to come to save Jerusalem from the Babylonians (Jer. 34:21; 37:5-7).

Ezekiel 30:21 Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and behold, it has not been bound up, to apply healing medicines, to put a bandage to bind it that it be strong to hold the sword- This again suggests that God had worked to bring about the healing of Egypt in her repentance after her first defeat by the Babylonians. But she didn't respond. Jer. 46:17 therefore says of Pharaoh: "he has let the appointed time pass by". He was given a window of repentance but he refused it. The breaking of Pharaoh's arm was in fact by being a staff of reed to Judah which collapsed. This was all the very opposite narrative to that which the faithless Jews at the time wished to believe- that the strong arm of Pharaoh would save them from the Babylonians. Instead, both Judah and Egypt would collapse as it were in a heap together before the Babylonians. And from this debased state they were both intended to arise as repentant, knowing Yahweh. But they didn't.

Ezekiel 30:22 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms, the strong arm, and that which was broken; and I will cause the sword to fall out of his hand- One arm had already been broken by the first Egyptian conflict with the Babylonians. They ought to have repented and turned to Yahweh as a result of this. But as a result of that, they would now again be punished, and left with no strength, no arm, and no ability to hold a sword in their own defence, let alone in that of Judah.

Ezekiel 30:23 I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries- Scattering and dispersal was the judgment threatened upon Judah (Ez. 12:15; 20:23; 22:15). This didn't literally happen to the Egyptians to the same extent, but the idea was that they would suffer Judah's judgment rather than save Judah from that judgment.

Ezekiel 30:24 I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand: but I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he shall groan before him with the groanings of a deadly wounded man- As noted on Ez. 29:11, this is not recorded as having happened. Just as the king of Tyre was never dealt with as prophesied, neither was the Pharaoh. And so we look to a latter fulfilment.

Ezekiel 30:25 I will hold up the arms of the king of Babylon; and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down; and they shall know that I am Yahweh, when I shall put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall stretch it out on the land of Egypt- This was absolutely not what the initial audience of Ezekiel wanted to hear; that God would hold up the arms of Babylon and make the arms of Pharaoh, their hoped for saviour, to wax feeble. God would put His sword in Babylon's strengthened arms. Our message too is unpopular and counter instinctive to what our society wants to hear.

Ezekiel 30:26 I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them through the countries; and they shall know that I am Yahweh- Scattering and dispersal was the judgment threatened upon Judah (Ez. 12:15; 20:23; 22:15). This didn't literally happen to the Egyptians to the same extent, but the idea was that they would suffer Judah's judgment rather than save Judah from that judgment. But the final Divine intention was that Egyptians and perhaps also Babylonians [for the grammar is purposefully ambiguous here] could come to know / have relationship with Yahweh. This didn't happen, and so the final fulfilment of the essence of all this must be in the last days.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 31

Ezekiel 31:1 It happened in the eleventh year, in the third month, in the first day of the month, that the word of Yahweh came to me saying- Two months after the previous pronouncement of woe upon Egypt. The length of these prophecies against Egypt may appear to us a mere droning on, but there was an urgent need for God's people to realize that Egypt was not to be their help; and we need the same message repeated.

Ezekiel 31:2 Son of man, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt and his multitude: Whom are you like in your greatness?- Presumably this prophecy was to be taken to Pharaoh. This involved no small effort for an exile and asylum seeker in Babylon to achieve. The reason for commanding Ezekiel to go this effort was presumably because like Nineveh, had Pharaoh repented, the threatened judgments need not have happened. Perhaps the fact they did not all work out as stated could reflect some degree of repentance in Egypt. See on :10.

Ezekiel 31:3 Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with beautiful branches, and with a forest-like shade and of high stature; and its top was among the thick

boughs- We may wonder why Egypt is addressed (:2) through a description of Assyria's fall some time previously. We have here a classic idea of what I term 'prophetic transference', whereby the prophetic words about a certain person or entity at one stage of history are transferred or reapplied to another person or entity at another point. Thus we noted on Ez. 26-28 that the prophecies about the fall of Tyre and her king never came exactly true, but they are quoted in Rev. 18 about the fall of latter day Babylon. The fulfilment of the words about Tyre was reapplied or transferred to Babylon. Likewise the specific prophecy that Tyre would fall to Nebuchadnezzar was reapplied or transferred to the victory of Alexander the Great against Tyre. This feature also explains why the New Testament appears to quote Old Testament prophecies quite out of context. This makes perfect sense once we understand this ability of God to transfer prophetic burdens from the initially intended person or entity to another, perhaps at another time- often in the last days. In the first year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had declared himself master of Nineveh (Assyria), and so the allusion to Assyria's fall was to remind Egypt that they would likewise fall before Babylon.

Ezekiel 31:4 The waters nourished it, the deep made it to grow. Its rivers ran all around its plantation; and it sent out its channels to all the trees of the field- The reference is to the Nile being the source of Egypt's prosperity. But the reference is to how rivers, especially the Tigris, were also the source of Nineveh's strong position, although rivers giving nourishment to other trees also suggests military support for the "trees" under her dominion. But Assyria's fall was to be that of Egypt. And Judah were to believe this and therefore not trust in Egypt.

Ezekiel 31:5 Therefore its stature was exalted above all the trees of the field; and its boughs were multiplied, and its branches became long by reason of many waters, when it shot them forth- Assyria like Egypt appeared to have influence far beyond its home area, represented by the long branches. And Judah were tempted to take refuge in it. But like Assyria, Egypt would fall.

Ezekiel 31:6 All the birds of the sky made their nests in its boughs; and under its branches all the animals of the field brought forth their young; and all great nations lived under its shadow- This is exactly the language of Ez. 17:23 and Mt. 13:32 about the Kingdom of God, which will be, and could then have been, the Kingdom of Israel reestablished as God's Kingdom on earth. Instead of trusting in the kingdom of Egypt as their salvation, they were to raise their spiritual horizons and believe that if they repented, then they would not only survive Babylon's threat but would become the reestablished Kingdom of God on earth, under whose branches all the nations would come to live in fellowship with Yahweh- including Babylon and Egypt.

Ezekiel 31:7 Thus was it beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its branches; for its root was by many waters- The beauty and strength of the tree is associated with its root being by "many waters"; referring to the Tigris for Nineveh, and the Nile for Egypt. But Ezekiel will go on to describe a situation when living waters flow out from Zion and water the entire area, bringing life from the God of Israel to all the surrounding nations. This was where they should have been focused, on the promised restoration of the Kingdom of God in Israel, rather than trusting in the kingdom of Egypt. Like Assyria, this was to fall; see on :6.

Ezekiel 31:8 The cedars in the garden of God could not hide it; the fir trees were not like its boughs, and the plane trees were not as its branches; nor was any tree in the garden of God like it in its beauty- The nations around Assyria are defined as the other trees in Eden, the garden of God. This confirms my suggestions on Gen. 2 that Eden was in fact the *eretz* promised to Abraham. The same idea is found in describing Tyre as having been in Eden (Ez. 28:13). The language of unequalled beauty however is applied to Zion in Lam. 2:15; Ez. 16:14. It is also used of Tyre in Ez. 28:12,17. So we conclude that as often in the Bible, we are reading things from how they seemed to men at the time. Hence the language of demon possession in the New Testament. Tyre considered herself the perfection of beauty, and so did Egypt and so did Assyria. But the true perfection of beauty from God's viewpoint was Zion.

Ezekiel 31:9 I made it beautiful by the multitude of its branches, so that all the trees of Eden that were in the garden of God envied it- The beauty and power of the nations was given by God. The God of Israel, Yahweh, who was using all the nations towards the possible reestablishment of His Kingdom in Israel. It was for Israel to cooperate with this rather than resist it by trusting in Egypt as if it were Assyria.

Ezekiel 31:10 Therefore thus said the Lord Yahweh: Because you are exalted in stature and he has set your top among the thick boughs and his heart is lifted up in his height- Again, pride is identified as the prime reason for the judgment to come. We note the change of pronouns. Now the individual, "you", is addressed. This whole prophecy was directed to Pharaoh personally (see on :2). The similarity with the language of Daniel about Nebuchadnezzar as a great tree was because Daniel was using this kind of parable to urgently appeal for that man's repentance, lest he be cut down. And so Ezekiel was appealing for Pharaoh's.

Ezekiel 31:11 I will even deliver him into the hand of the mighty one of the nations. He shall surely deal with him. I have driven him out for his wickedness- The tenses vary here between future and past (:12). This is because the allusion is to the past downfall of Nineveh and Assyria, but that is being used as a warning to Egypt. The singular "mighty one of the nations" is not named, because we are intended to see the term as referring to God. But "mighty one" is the same word translated "ram", and this same word in this sense is used as a symbol of the Medes, who along with the Babylonians destroyed Assyria (Dan. 8:20). And the fall of Assyria is being here transferred to Egypt.

Ezekiel 31:12 Gentiles, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off and have left him: on the mountains and in all the valleys his branches are fallen, and his boughs are broken by all the watercourses of the land; and all the peoples of the earth are gone away from his shadow, and have left him- All the big powers were only powerful by reason of the other nations who were under them, and whose mercenaries formed the bulk of their military strength. The collapse of support for Assyria was to be seen for Egypt too. And it was this apparent strength which was so attractive to Judah. "The terrible of the nations" is the word used for how Assyria appeared to Judah at the time of Hezekiah; but they were destroyed by just one Angel (Is. 25:3-5; 29:5, 20). And now, other nations appeared "terrible" to Assyria and had destroyed her; and the same cycle was about to happen to Egypt. Yet somehow human nature doesn't think that the

inevitable cycle will reach us personally, and so Pharaoh and his supporters in Judah didn't want to see that in fact Egypt was set to follow the path of Assyria, and all apparent strength would evaporate. In the end, Yahweh would be the "terrible one" (Jer. 20:11).

Ezekiel 31:13 On his ruin all the birds of the sky shall dwell, and all the animals of the field shall be on his branches- In the parable of the tree, the birds and animals which once lived in its branches will now prowl around over those dead branches once they are fallen to the earth. This was how fickle were the supporters of the superpowers; and so Judah should not consider that Egyptian military might was that great, because it depended upon the tribes and smaller nations who supported her. And such support was unreliable and fickle at best.

Ezekiel 31:14 So that none of all the trees by the waters exalt themselves in their stature, neither set their top among the thick boughs. Their mighty ones shall not stand up on their height, even all who drink water; for they are all delivered to death, to the lower parts of the earth, in the midst of the children of men, with those who go down to the pit- The GNB clarifies: "And so from now on, no tree, no matter how well-watered it is, will grow that tall again or push its top through the clouds and reach such a height. All of them are doomed to die like mortals, doomed to join those who go down to the world of the dead". The prophetic scenario envisaged was that the Babylonian judgments of the nations would lead to their repentance and 'knowing Yahweh', coming into relationship with Him. The judgment of Assyria had been intended to teach all the trees, the nations, the utter folly of pride. But this lesson wasn't learnt, there wasn't repentance, Egypt didn't learn the lesson from Assyria and neither did Judah and the other nations. And so the potential scenario just didn't happen, which explains why not everything predicted in these prophecies came strictly true. It was a potential scenario.

Ezekiel 31:15 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In the day when he went down to Sheol I caused a mourning. I covered the deep for him, and I restrained its rivers; and the great waters were stayed; and I caused Lebanon to mourn for him, and all the trees of the field fainted for him- I suggested on :14 that the intention of the fall of Assyria as that of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 4 was in order to elicit repentance amongst the nations. But this didn't happen. Even though God arranged things to provoke sorrow and mourning amongst the nations, it seems they didn't mourn Nineveh's fall, and neither would they mourn that of Egypt nor Judah. Because the hoped for repentance hadn't been elicited.

Ezekiel 31:16 I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to Sheol with those who descend into 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- I suggested on :14 that the intention of the fall of Assyria as that of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 4 was in order to elicit repentance amongst the nations. But this didn't happen. The nations didn't tremble and fear because Assyria had been cast down by God because of her pride. The image of comforting doesn't have to mean that the previous nations in the *eretz* promised to Abraham, "Eden", were conscious after death. The idea is that they would all alike be unconscious in *sheol*, they would all meet the same end. And the purpose was that Judah would realize that Egypt

would go the way of Assyria and of all earth's proud empires and pass away. And therefore they would not trust in them, but in God.

Ezekiel 31:17 They also went down into Sheol with him to those who are slain by the sword; yes, those who were his arm, that lived under his shadow in the midst of the nations- The arm or strength of Assyria as of Egypt was not God, but rather her associated, supportive nations. And this was the arm or strength which Judah was tempted to depend upon rather than the revealed arm of Yahweh their God. Death is presented here as the great equalizer; the minions of Assyria [and Egypt] came to the same end in death. Appreciating the mortality of Egypt ought to have helped God's people realize the futility of trusting in Egypt rather than Yahweh.

Ezekiel 31:18 To whom are you thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? Yet you will be brought down with the trees of Eden to 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, says the Lord Yahweh- As explained on :18, Pharaoh and her supporting nations were revealed as sharing the same fate. It is emphasized that all the trees of Eden, the nations in the *eretz* promised to Abraham, all went to the same place in death. Those who had been the minions or colonies of Egypt and Assyria were the same as their masters in death; Pharaoh himself would lie in the midst of the other nations. In death they were all alike, and the ideas that a Pharaoh went to live somewhere else were just fiction. Judah were being invited to share this perspective and therefore not trust in their apparent strength. And for us too, appreciating the fundamental mortality of man helps us realize the folly of trusting in man. For Pharaoh, to whom this message was personally addressed (:2), this would have been a very hard message. Because death was a major theme if not obsession with the Egyptians. The pyramids reveal how much of life was spent preparing for the death of the Pharaoh, involving detailed claims about the journeys of the Pharaoh after death. But Ezekiel is turning all that on its head, and asking Pharaoh to accept that death is death, and he will be amongst the uncircumcised, and all go unto one place- the grave. The only way out was through relationship with Israel's God and the hope of bodily resurrection at the last day.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 32

Ezekiel 32:1 It happened in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, in the first day of the month, that the word of Yahweh came to me saying- About a year and a half after the destruction of Jerusalem. In that time many of the Jews left in the land had fled into Egypt, although in Jer. 44 Jeremiah had foretold their judgment there. That prophecy was probably given at about this time, and is another example of Jeremiah and Ezekiel being used by the Spirit in parallel to say the same things at the same time to different audiences of the Jews.

Ezekiel 32:2 Son of man, take up a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt and tell him, You were likened to a young lion of the nations: yet you are as a monster in the seas; and you broke out with your rivers, and troubled the waters with your feet and fouled their rivers- The Jews considered Egypt to be like a lion, a strong alternative to the Babylonian lion threatening them, But instead of being a lion, Egypt was to be revealed as a flabby water monster of the rivers who would be dragged out of them

and slain. And this monster does nothing good for other rivers / peoples; he muddies their waters. The dragon was intended to remain in the Nile, where he was; any attempt by Egypt to extend influence beyond that was 'breaking out' from where God had placed Egypt, and would not prosper. And Judah should take warning from that and not look to Egypt for help against Babylon.

Ezekiel 32:3 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will spread out My net on you with a company of many peoples; and they shall bring you up in My net- Egypt's judgment at the hand of a coalition of peoples clearly looks to her defeat by the Babylonians, whose army was comprised of mercenaries from many nations. These "many nations" were animals "of the whole earth" / *eretz* promised to Abraham (:4) who were in coalition with Babylon. The defeat in view is clearly that of the Egyptian army at Carchemish by Nebuchadnezzar. But the further desolation of Egypt itself is not recorded as having happened at the hands of the Babylonians. This was part of the prophetic scenario which didn't then happen; see on :15.

Ezekiel 32:4 I will leave you on the land, I will cast you forth on the open field and will cause all the birds of the sky to settle on you, and I will satisfy the animals of the whole earth with you- Being cast out into the open field in the desert was exactly what happened to the infant Israel (Ez. 16:5), and she was saved from that state by Divine grace alone. The parallel is because God intended Judah to perceive that Egypt was going to share her judgment, and would not save Judah from it but rather herself experience it. And yet as God sought to save Israel from that situation in the "open field", so He sought to save Egypt if they repented.

Ezekiel 32:5 I will lay your flesh on the mountains and fill the valleys with your height- This is the language of the final destruction of Israel's enemies in Ez. 39:17. The connection is because the prophetic scenario here described didn't completely come about. The threatened judgments were intended to elicit repentance (see on :15), but because God foresaw that repentance would not be forthcoming, He didn't bring about the full judgments. And yet the prophetic word is to come ultimately true. This will be achieved by what I have elsewhere called 'transference'. The judgment of Egypt will be transferred to the nations of Ez. 38, several of whom are also mentioned later in this chapter 32 (Meshech, Tubal etc.) as sharing the same judgment as Egypt.

Ezekiel 32:6 I will also water with your blood the land in which you swim, even to the mountains; and the watercourses shall be full of you- As often observed in this commentary, there is no historical evidence that the land of Egypt itself was desolated like this. See on :5.

Ezekiel 32:7 When I shall extinguish you, I will cover the sky and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud and the moon shall not give its light- This is language elsewhere used (notably in the Olivet prophecy, see on :9) about the last days judgment of the nations around Israel. I have explained on :5 that the judgments on Egypt didn't fully come about, but they will in essence in the last days, and the specific judgments upon her will be transferred to other entities and situations. Just as the judgments upon Tyre and her king didn't come about completely, but the language used is then reapplied in Revelation 18 to Babylon's judgments in the last days.

Ezekiel 32:8 All the bright lights of the sky will I make dark over you and set darkness

on your land, says the Lord Yahweh- Darkness upon Egypt recalls the plague of darkness. the impression given thereby is that these judgments are a lead up to another Passover deliverance- during which many repentant Egyptians identified with Israel and made the journey out of Egypt towards the promised land. And this was the Divine intention for Ezekiel's time and the restoration. See on :13.

Ezekiel 32:9 I will also trouble the hearts of many peoples- As explained on :7, the Olivet prophecy picks up some of the language used here and applies it to the latter day judgment of Israel's enemies. In this case the connection is with Lk. 21:26.

When I shall bring your destruction among the nations, into the countries which you have not known- This simply didn't happen to the Egyptians as a result of their conflict with Babylon. There would have been historical testament to this if it had happened. The whole situation looks ahead therefore to the last days, bearing in mind the concept of transference of prophecy outlined in :5 and elsewhere.

Ezekiel 32:10 Yes, I will make many peoples amazed at you, and their kings shall be horribly afraid for you, when I shall brandish My sword before them; and they shall tremble every moment, every man for his own life, in the day of your fall- 'Trembling at the fall' of Egypt is the same phrase used about Tyre (Ez. 26:18). The similarity is in that the same hallmark of Yahweh's judgment is seen upon all who are judged by Him. They were not mere victims of random event; the Divine hand was in the fall of all in whom His wayward people had trusted. The sword God would brandish was that of Babylon (:11); they were being used by Him, and it was futile for Judah to think that Babylon and other nations could save them from this sword. The Jerusalem temple was full of the idols of various nations who were aligned with Egypt, whom Judah hoped would save them from Babylon. But these nations were to crumble once Egyptian power was destroyed by Babylon.

Ezekiel 32:11 For thus says the Lord Yahweh: The sword of the king of Babylon shall come on you- Earlier prophecies in Ezekiel had spoken of the sword coming upon Jerusalem. Judah were to realize that their destruction by Babylon was connected with the wider judgment of Egypt and other nations.

Ezekiel 32:12 By the swords of the mighty will I cause your multitude to fall; they are all the terrible of the nations; and they shall bring to nothing the pride of Egypt, and all its multitude shall be destroyed- All the big powers were only powerful by reason of the other nations who were under them, and whose mercenaries formed the bulk of their military strength. The collapse of support for Assyria was to be seen for Egypt too. And it was this apparent strength which was so attractive to Judah. "The terrible of the nations" is the word used for how Assyria appeared to Judah at the time of Hezekiah; but they were destroyed by just one Angel (Is. 25:3-5; 29:5, 20). And now, other nations appeared "terrible" to Assyria and had destroyed her; and the same cycle was about to happen to Egypt. Yet somehow human nature doesn't think that the inevitable cycle will reach us personally, and so Pharaoh and his supporters in Judah didn't want to see that in fact Egypt was set to follow the path of Assyria, and all apparent strength would evaporate. In the end, Yahweh would be the "terrible one" (Jer. 20:11).

Ezekiel 32:13 I will destroy also all its animals from beside many waters; neither shall the foot of man trouble them any more, nor the hoofs of animals trouble them-

This scenario didn't come about, just as the complete destruction of all persons in Judah didn't. The Nile flood lands were not abandoned, all animals weren't destroyed. But the allusion is to the earlier plagues upon Egypt which targeted their livestock (see on :8). These judgments were to be seen as a lead up to another Passover deliverance- during which many repentant Egyptians identified with Israel and made the journey out of Egypt towards the promised land. And this was the Divine intention for Ezekiel's time and the restoration.

Ezekiel 32:14 Then will I make their waters clear, and cause their rivers to run like oil, says the Lord Yahweh- This promise of rivers of oil sounds like the blessings of the Messianic kingdom and the reward for obedience to the covenant (Dt. 32:13; 33:24). Again there is a hint that Egypt like Judah were intended to repent as a result of the Babylonian judgments, and then come into relationship with God, "to know Yahweh", and experience His blessings.

Ezekiel 32:15 When I shall make the land of Egypt desolate and waste, a land destitute of that of which it was once full, when I shall strike all those who dwell therein, then shall they know that I am Yahweh- This didn't totally happen. Egypt was defeated militarily at Carchemish, far from the borders of Egypt; there is little evidence of desolation within Egypt and certainly not to this extent. The connection is between "When..." the desolation happens, *then* "they will know Yahweh", entering relationship with Him. This wasn't chosen by them, and so the desolation which could have brought that about didn't happen. God perhaps foresaw that they wouldn't repent, and so He didn't bring that desolation which could potentially have brought about their repentance.

Ezekiel 32:16 This is the lamentation with which they shall lament, with which the daughters of the nations shall lament therewith; over Egypt and over all her multitude shall they lament therewith, says the Lord Yahweh- As noted on :16, Ezekiel was asked to do the work of the lamenting women and make this lamentation. Jeremiah's lamentations over Jerusalem had already begun (see on :1), and they were to be seen as part of a wider lamentation over the other nations to be judged at the same time as Judah. The "multitude" of Egypt, the nations of her coalition, would not save Judah. Their hope was only in Yahweh.

Ezekiel 32:17 It happened also in the twelfth year, in the fifteenth day of the month, that the word of Yahweh came to me, saying- The two weeks which elapsed since :1 were perhaps to give both Judah and Egypt a chance to repent. Two weeks was perhaps a reasonable time to allow communication from Chebar in Babylon to reach Judah and Egypt.

Ezekiel 32:18 Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt- This is asking Ezekiel to do the work of women, just spoken of in :16: "This solemn warning will become a funeral song. The women of the nations will sing it to mourn for Egypt and all its people" (GNB). Such challenges of gender roles are common in the Bible, thousands of years before this kind of thing was on the secular agenda.

And cast them down, even her, and the daughters of the famous nations, to the lower parts of the earth, with those who go down into the pit- Here we see the power of the prophetic word. Ezekiel's word had cast down Egypt. The nations of her coalition are called her daughters because they had as it were acted in whoredom

toward Jerusalem. The casting down is another connection with the casting down of Babylon spoken of in Is. 14. Absolutely all the superpowers were to come down, it was just a question of when. And instead of seeking salvation from whichever one seemed strongest, Judah were instead to throw themselves upon Yahweh their God.

Ezekiel 32:19 Whom do you pass in beauty? Go down, and be laid with the uncircumcised- The language of unequalled beauty however is applied to Zion in Lam. 2:15; Ez. 16:14. It is also used of Tyre in Ez. 28:12,17. So we conclude that as often in the Bible, we are reading things from how they seemed to men at the time. Hence the language of demon possession in the New Testament. Therefore GNB gives: "Say to them: "Do you think you are more beautiful than anyone else?". Tyre considered herself the perfection of beauty, and so did Egypt and so did Assyria. But the true perfection of beauty from God's viewpoint was Zion.

Ezekiel 32:20 They shall fall in the midst of those who are slain by the sword, she is delivered to the sword; draw her away and all her multitudes- The picture is of the mass execution of the Egyptian soldiers along with the foreign mercenaries who supported them, their bodies falling into a pit already filled with dead bodies, and then the corpses being dragged away.

Ezekiel 32:21 The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of Sheol with those who help him. They are gone down, they lie still, even the uncircumcised, slain by the sword- Judah were reminded that Egypt was not strong of herself; her military might was due to "those who help him". Death was a major theme if not obsession with the Egyptians. The pyramids reveal how much of life was spent preparing for death, involving detailed claims about the journeys after death. But Ezekiel is turning all that on its head, and asking the Egyptians to accept that death is death, and they will be amongst the uncircumcised, and all go unto one place- the grave. The only way out was through relationship with Israel's God and the hope of bodily resurrection at the last day.

Ezekiel 32:22 Assyria is there and all her company; her graves are all around her; all of them slain, fallen by the sword- The fall of Assyria has been presented as representative of Egypt's fall in Ez. 31. Assyria too once seemed indomitable, and she too had a "company" of nations who gave her strength. They would go to the same death as Egypt and her coalition. Egypt was allied with the Assyrian king Ashur-uballit II, and marched in 609 BC to his aid against the Babylonians. But Assyria like Egypt was to come to its end.

Ezekiel 32:23 Their graves are set in the uttermost parts of the pit, and her company is around her grave; all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who caused terror in the land of the living- This land of the living may refer specifically to Israel; see on :26. Throughout these prophecies of condemnation of Gentile nations, we have noted constant hints of redemption, if they wished to avail of it. "Company" translates a Hebrew word often used of the company of nations associated with Egypt or Babylon. But the promises to Abraham were that a "company" (s.w.) of nations would and could become part of Abraham's seed (Gen. 28:3; 35:11; 48:4). The "great company" who were to participate in the restoration of God's Kingdom in Israel was intended to include this great company of nations, who for now were judged (Jer. 31:8).

Ezekiel 32:24 There is Elam and all her multitude around her grave; all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who are gone down uncircumcised into the lower parts of the earth. They who caused their terror in the land of the living have now borne their shame with those who go down to the pit- "The land of the living" may refer specifically to Israel; see on :26. For "multitude" or 'company', see on :23.

Ezekiel 32:25 They have set her a bed in the midst of the slain with all her multitude; her graves are around her; all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword; for their terror was caused in the land of the living, and they have borne their shame with those who go down to the pit. He is put in the midst of those who are slain- The only honour for Pharaoh would be that he would be at the centre of those who were also ashamed. For the Egyptians, the afterlife was all about glory. But death was to be shame for them. These messages were intended to be taken to the Egyptians in the hope they would repent; see on Ez. 31:2. It was a hard message for them to accept, just as our teaching of conditional immortality and no immortal soul is hard for many to accept.

Ezekiel 32:26 There is Meshech, Tubal, and all their multitude; their graves are around them; all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword- These nations are mentioned in Ez. 38 as participating in the final invasion of Israel in the last days. But the allusion is to how they and the other Scythians invaded the land in the time of Josiah, and the majority of whom then miserably perished (Herodotus i. 106). The Ez. 38 invasion is therefore described in terms of a revival of the nations who had recently invaded and been destroyed.

For they caused their terror in the land of the living- "The land of the living" in :26,32 can too easily be skim read as meaning 'the world of the living'; and indeed it can mean just this. But the land of life is later defined in Ez. 47:7-12 as Israel. Perhaps the idea is that Egypt was a force respected in Judah, but it was to come to nothing. And if Judah had stopped looking to Egypt for help, they could have been restored as God's kingdom and indeed become the land of the living.

Ezekiel 32:27 They shall not lie with the mighty who are fallen of the uncircumcised who are gone down to Sheol with their weapons of war, and have laid their swords under their heads, and their iniquities are on their bones; for they were the terror of the mighty in the land of the living- The Egyptians liked to believe that the dead would go to the afterlife with all their favourite swords and domestic possessions; hence the pyramids were found full of such things. But the Egyptians were to have a most dishonourable burial; they would *not* even have the honour of the warriors of some previous uncircumcised nations, who were buried with their swords under their heads. "Their iniquities are on their bones" is hard to understand; the GNB offers "their shields over their bodies". The bones of Israel were also to be dishonourably discarded (Ez. 6:5; 24:10), but those dishonoured bones were to be resurrected and revived according to the prophecy of the dry bones in Ez. 37. The idea may be that such revival was possible for the Egyptians if before their death they repented.

Ezekiel 32:28 But you shall be broken in the midst of the uncircumcised, and shall lie with those who are slain by the sword- This prophecy is an intentional attack upon Egyptian views of the afterlife, whereby preservation of bones unbroken was thought

to be extremely important; see on :27. They would get no special treatment, but would lie together with all the dead, with them and "in the midst of" the other nations.

Ezekiel 32:29 There is Edom, her kings and all her princes, who in their might are laid with those who are slain by the sword. They shall lie with the uncircumcised, and with those who go down to the pit- Edom had just been rejoicing over the fall of Jerusalem (Ps. 137:7). So this is to be seen as a prophecy of the future. Perhaps Edom like the Egyptians liked to think that their practice of circumcision gave them some special status; which is what the Jews also believed. This passage is a clear expose of that position. Circumcision alone would not save; covenant relationship with Yahweh involved far more than the mere token of the covenant, just as the baptism which circumcision points forward to (Col. 2:12,13) will not alone save anyone.

Ezekiel 32:30 There are the princes of the north, all of them, and all the Sidonians, who are gone down with the slain; in the terror which they caused by their might they are put to shame. They lie uncircumcised with those who are slain by the sword, and bear their shame with those who go down to the pit- "Laid to rest" (GNB) confirms the general impression we get here in this insight into "the world of the dead". They lay at rest, dead, silent, doing nothing, and all the nationalities go to the same place and lay still and powerless together. This is quite different to the ideas beloved of the Egyptians, that death was an endless active adventure and journey, and they as the superior nation would be separate from the uncircumcised and other nationalities. Death is presented as a place of silence and unconsciousness, with no division between nationalities. This likewise contradicts the picture of death held by those who believe in the myth of an immortal soul and punishments for the soul after death.

Ezekiel 32:31 When Pharaoh sees them, he will take comfort in his hordes. Pharaoh and all his army will die violently, says the Lord Yahweh- This is almost sarcasm; the only comfort for Pharaoh would be that he had not died alone. However there is no record of Pharaoh being killed at Carchemish, although the Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle, now housed in the British Museum, claims that Nebuchadnezzar "crossed the river to go against the Egyptian army which lay in Karchemish. They fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him. He accomplished their defeat, decisively. As for the rest of the Egyptian army which had escaped from the defeat so quickly that no weapon had reached them, in the district of Hamath the Babylonian troops overtook and defeated them so that not a single man escaped to his own country". We would expect a mention of the death of Pharaoh but there is none. And the account of the battle of Carchemish in Jer. 46:3-12 doesn't mention it either. Again we see that the prophetic scenario envisaged didn't completely come about, although the essence of it will in the last days.

Ezekiel 32:32 For I have put his terror in the land of the living- "The land of the living" in :26,32 can too easily be skim read as meaning 'the world of the living'; and indeed it can mean just this. But the land of life is later defined in Ez. 47:7-12 as Israel. Perhaps the idea is that Egypt was a force respected in Judah, but it was to come to nothing. And if Judah had stopped looking to Egypt for help, they could have been restored as God's kingdom and indeed become the land of the living.

And he shall be laid in the midst of the uncircumcised with those who are slain by the sword, even Pharaoh and all his hordes, says the Lord Yahweh- Whether or not Egyptians were circumcised is an open question, but the idea that circumcised and

uncircumcised will come to the same end in death is a reminder to the Jews that their circumcision would not of itself save them. It was the token of the covenant, but they had broken that covenant.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 33

Ezekiel 33:1 The word of Yahweh came to me saying- Ezekiel's prophecies had now been fulfilled about the fall of Jerusalem and the inability of Egypt to save. Now it is his duty in the rest of the prophecy to persuade the Jews in exile and in the land of the need for repentance in order to bring about the reestablishment of the Kingdom God had prepared in potential.

Ezekiel 33:2 Son of man, speak to the children of your people and tell them, When I bring the sword on a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them and set him for their watchman- Ezekiel personally was the watchman of Israel (Ez. 3:17). This could be read as an encouragement to Ezekiel to keep on in his duty of witnessing as a watchman, and to remember that his own salvation depended upon it. It would seem, as noted on Ez. 3:17, that he at times flagged in the work. The people of the land hadn't appointed a watchman, but God had- taking the initiative by grace.

Ezekiel 33:3 If, when he sees the sword come on the land, he blows the trumpet and warns the people- The men of Judah blew the trumpet to call their soldiers (Ez. 7:14), but Ezekiel and Jeremiah were blowing God's trumpet of repentance (Jer. 6:1; Ez. 33:3,6). There was a total mismatch between God and His people.

Ezekiel 33:4 Then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and doesn't take warning, if the sword come and take him away, his blood shall be on his own head- This is a metaphor from the animals sacrifices, on the heads of which they laid their hands, to symbolize that their guilt should be upon the sacrifice. Animal sacrifice was therefore not going to take away their guilt; and now with the temple in ruins and in exile, this was impossible anyway.

Ezekiel 33:5 He heard the sound of the trumpet and didn't take warning; his blood shall be on him; whereas if he had taken warning, he would have delivered his soul- Ezekiel had been a watchman and had warned them, as Ez. 3 has recorded. Perhaps the exiles were complaining that the death of their relatives at the hands of the Babylonians was somehow unfair. But the point was that Ezekiel had given them warning, as had Jeremiah. Their deaths were completely their own fault.

Ezekiel 33:6 But if the watchman sees the sword come and doesn't blow the trumpet and the people aren't warned, and the sword comes and takes away any person from among them; he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand- There has been a wrong emphasis being placed on the passages in Ezekiel which state that the duty of the prophet was to warn Israel of impending judgment, and if they did that, they would be free of their responsibility. The impression is given that the prophets therefore said "Look out Israel, judgment day is coming!" and then walked away breathing a sigh of relief that they wouldn't be condemned themselves for failing in their duty. But the purpose of the prophets was

to plead with Israel to repent, to describe the judgments for sin with the earnest hope that this would bring about repentance among those who heard. If they didn't do *this* they would be condemned. The Lord says that we are *all* the watchers of the door of the house of the ecclesia (Mk. 13:34,35; Lk. 12:39,40), as the prophets were the watchmen over the city of Zion, God's Old Testament ecclesia. We *all* therefore have a responsibility to guide and warn the ecclesia, not just to scrape out of condemnation for ourselves, but from a genuine, earnest desire to help others to the Kingdom road. This sin of the watchman in not pleading with the sinner would therefore be that of a sin of omission- and most of our sins are likely in that category rather than cold blooded sins of commission.

Ezekiel 33:7 So you, son of man, I have set you a watchman to the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at My mouth, and give them warning from Me- This suggests that although the nation hadn't set him as a watchman, God, by grace- see on :2. Ezekiel was still to act as a watchman; judgment was still threatened. After all, God had intended destroying every man and animal in the land, and by grace alone had not done so. Yet instead of being moved by that to repentance, the people remaining in the land and the exiles were continuing in sin.

Ezekiel 33:8 When I tell the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die, if you don't speak to warn the wicked from his way; that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at your hand- Not only our salvation but that of others can be limited by our exercise of freewill. If others' salvation is not dependent upon our preaching, then there is no meaning to the very concept of preaching. This is true to the extent that a watchman can occasion the death of those he could warn, if he doesn't do it. And their blood [for they will die] *will be required* at his hand (Ez. 33:8,13). The wicked will only turn from their ways if the watchmen warns them- and Ez. 33 shows clearly enough that the watchman can be lazy to fulfil his commission, with the result that some will die eternally who need not have done so. It's not that another watchman is raised up to do the job- it is his responsibility, which he can discharge or not. God's word has been delegated to us; to not speak it forth is therefore in a sense to diminish His word. Hence Jeremiah is told to "keep not back a word" of all God's words (Jer. 26:2 AV; RV: "Diminish not a word"). The requiring of blood at our hands suggests that there will to some degree be a 'going through' of all the sins of the rejected at judgment day. For the Hebrew word translated "require" implies some kind of inquisition / explanation.

Ezekiel 33:9 Nevertheless, if you warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, and he doesn't turn from his way; he shall die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your soul- Jerusalem had by now fallen, they had not turned from their way, they had died in their iniquity. But it seems that more judgment was threatened to the Jews who remained in the land and also those in exile, and Ezekiel must continue to warn about it. Dan. 12:3 says, in a restoration context, that those who turn people to righteousness shall "shine" for ever. "Shine" is the same word as "warn" here. If we are shining beacons to others, we shall eternally be so. Our attitudes in this life will be eternally established; in this sense we save our souls or personalities.

Ezekiel 33:10 You, son of man, tell the house of Israel: Thus you speak, saying, Our transgressions and our sins are on us, and we pine away in them- The pining away meant that they had broken the covenant (Lev. 26:39). The AV puts this as a question

from them: "If... our sins be upon us...", as Ezekiel had claimed, and as they still denied. "Sins" is put for "punishment for our sins". They still insisted they were suffering unjustly for the sins of their fathers and not for their own sins, despite Ezekiel rebuking this attitude in Ez. 18.

How then can we live?- Their attitude was that if indeed they were guilty of their sins, well, how could they live further? "How shall we live?" is the question answered by the vision of the dry bones reviving (Ez. 37:11 cp. Is. 49:14). Although they were suffering the punishment of death for sin, yet by grace there could be a revival from that death by allowing God's Spirit to operate.

Ezekiel 33:11 Tell them, As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die, house of Israel?- The desire of God for repentance is stronger than His need to punish sin. Hence LXX "Shall I at all desire the death of the sinner, saith the Lord, as I desire that he should turn from his evil way, and live?". This is why He hangs on so long with sinful people, and Israel are the parade example. His desire for repentance, His passion for human reformation, is active and huge. It's not that He has set a bar which must be jumped over, and is passive toward us until that is achieved. God is not passive to human repentance. He wants us to repent and wills us to do so. Those who refuse to turn or repent will die, and He has no satisfaction or pleasure or will for that to happen. The exiles could have repented, both individually and collectively ["turn yourselves" in Hebrew carries that collective implication], and averted the death which was otherwise planned for them and their brethren back in Judah at the hand of the Babylonians. Peter alludes to these words in saying that for all time, God is not willing ["pleasure" in Hebrew can mean 'will'] that any should perish but that all should repent (2 Pet. 3:9). His work of judging insistent sinners is in this sense for Him a "strange act... a strange work" (Is. 28:21). His passion is for our repentance and salvation, not our condemnation.

Ezekiel 33:12 You, son of man, tell the children of your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not save him in the day of his disobedience; and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turns from his wickedness; neither shall he who is righteous be able to live thereby in the day that he sins- The "disobedience" in view is not a single act of moral failure. Rather does it seem that the tiny remnant of the righteous at this point were tempted to now break covenant with God as it were in protest at what they saw as unfair treatment of their people. It was the "transgression" of divorce from God, of the adultery which broke the covenant (Is. 50:1; Ez. 21:24 s.w.). The singular "disobedience" of Judah is specifically defined as their idol worship in the name of Yahweh (Mic. 1:5 s.w.). And this kind of thing has been seen so often when previously righteous folk encounter the 'problem of suffering'. Ezekiel had explained the justness of the judgments and revealed the seriousness of sin. But that inspired argumentation was apparently not accepted by them, and that had led them to break covenant with Yahweh.

Ezekiel 33:13 When I tell the righteous that he shall surely live; if he trust to his righteousness and commit iniquity, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered; but in his iniquity that he has committed, therein shall he die- As explained on Ez. 18:22, the good deeds of the righteous will be 'gone through' at judgment day. But if

they turn away, then those good deeds will not be remembered or gone through, but rather his sins.

Ezekiel 33:14 Again, when I say to the wicked, You shall surely die; if he turn from his sin and do that which is lawful and right- "Turn" is the word also used for the 'return' of the exiles. Their repentance would lead to their return. They didn't repent, yet by grace God took the initiative and returned them anyway. Yet most didn't want to return and preferred the soft life in Babylon / Persia, and those who did, as the later prophets make clear, didn't repent. Doing justice and right was the characteristic of Abraham's true seed (s.w. Gen. 18:19). Those who did not do so were therefore not the true Israel of God. Again, the Jewish assumption of salvation from the Babylonians on account of their fleshly descent is being deconstructed.

Ezekiel 33:15 If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that which he had taken by robbery, walk in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die- The "statutes of life" refers to how the law was intended to give life (Rom. 7:10; Lev. 18:5) but in practice, human failure meant that no law gave life (Gal. 3:21). Such sensitivity and generosity to the poor is not a mere optional extra in the spiritual life; it is in fact part of being basically "just" and committed to social justice, part of 'doing right / truly' (:14). The implication is that the wealthy who had gone into captivity were still abusing the poor. They had still not learnt their lesson.

Ezekiel 33:16 None of his sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live- The not remembering of Judah's sins was part of the new covenant offered to them; the same Hebrew phrase is used (Jer. 31:34; Is. 43:25). Yet here this is made contingent upon specific repentance. It seems that God offered them such not remembering of sin whether or not they specifically repented, in the hope it would provoke them to that specific repentance; and even that didn't work with them.

Ezekiel 33:17 Yet the children of your people say, The way of the Lord is not fair; but as for them, their way is not fair- The majority of the captives insisted, according to Ez. 18, that they hadn't sinned, and they were suffering unjustly because of the sins of their fathers; whereas this righteous remnant in Babylon were intended to admit that "we have sinned. Equally with them of old time have we transgressed" (Is. 64:5). They took the message of Ezekiel to heart- unlike the majority. And thus this was the sad end of the great plan developed by the God of all grace for His people in Babylon. They rejected it, and hated His servants who brought that good news to them. The complaint that God is unfair is answered by reminding them that they have sinned. And this finally is one aspect of the answer to 'the problem of suffering'.

Is. 40:3, which is quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the Lord*", whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the people*". Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25). We are not only Jesus to this world but also effectively we are the witness to God Himself. We minister His care to others; to the extent that Paul could write both that he was a minister of God, and also a minister of the church (2 Cor. 6:4; Col. 1:24,25).

Ezekiel 33:18 When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall even die therein- This was perhaps a warning to the righteous remnant who

had so far repented in exile; they were liable to be dragged back into sin by the other exiles and the depressive situation they found themselves in.

Ezekiel 33:19 When the wicked turns from his wickedness and does that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby- The parallel Ez. 18:27 says "Save his soul alive". This implies that judgment is about to come, the death penalty already passed, but his repentance just about averts this at the last moment. It is the term used in Gen. 19:19 of how Lot was just about saved by grace out of Sodom, which was a symbol of Jerusalem under judgment, as Ez. 16 has made clear. This was the desperate urgency of Ezekiel's appeal; and yet he was seen at best as a singer of fairy tales or old time love songs (Ez. 33:32).

Ezekiel 33:20 Yet you say, The way of the Lord is not fair. House of Israel, I will judge every one of you after his ways- God objects to their complaint that He has judged masses of people unfairly because of the sins of a minority. This is the usual human complaint at the 'problem of suffering'. But God insists, then and now, that He judges each person individually. He knows how they would have acted in the future, He weighs fairly the degree of collective guilt they must blame in a society given over to rebellion against Him. And we are to trust His judgment rather than break covenant with Him over it.

Ezekiel 33:21 It happened in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, in the fifth day of the month, that one who had escaped out of Jerusalem- We noted on Ez. 24:6 that God had originally threatened total destruction of all within Jerusalem, but in actuality He repented of this. But in Ez. 24:26 Ezekiel is told that in fact one would escape and come to him with the news which by prophecy he already knew. This now happened. The mention of one who escapes is therefore a tacit reflection of God's grace in not doing all He threatened in Ez. 24:6.

The date here given is about a year and a half after the city's fall. This period is very long. Some manuscripts read the eleventh year, leaving about six months for the news to travel by messenger. Eleven and twelve are easily confused in Hebrews. Or it could be that the "one" who came was not an individual but the group of exiles. In this case, the singular would be used for the plural in a collective sense, as in "the escaped remnant" elsewhere. We have the same thing in "the escaped of Moab" (Is. 15:9); "He that escapeth of them" (Am. 9:1).

Came to me saying, The city has been struck- Ez. 33:21 – 39:29 is a complete section within the book. I understand Ez. 33:21,22 to mean that Ezekiel opened his mouth and gave the six prophetic utterances in this section on the night before the exiles received the news that Jerusalem had fallen. It was on the fifth day of the tenth month of the 12th year of the exile (Ez. 33:21). Ezekiel's mouth was opened by Divine inspiration that evening, and he gave these messages through the night until the messenger arrived in the morning with the news that Jerusalem had fallen. Each of the six messages begin with the rubric "Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying...".

Ezekiel 33:22 Now the hand of the Yahweh had been upon me the evening before the fugitive came; and He had opened my mouth by the time the man came to me in the morning. So my mouth was opened, and I was no longer dumb- The idea may be that now he opens his previously closed lips to the Jews. In the interval he had prophesied to foreign nations, as he had been forbidden to speak to the Jews from Ez. 24:27 onward.

Ezekiel 33:23 The word of Yahweh came to me saying- This was a revelation presumably added in answer to specific objections to Ezekiel's statements so far.

Ezekiel 33:24 Son of man, they who inhabit those waste places in the land of Israel speak, saying, 'Abraham was one, and he inherited the land; but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance' - Clearly "many" remained in the land after the destruction of Jerusalem. They ought to have reflected that by grace, the prophecies of absolute destruction of every person hadn't come true. Instead they argued that if one man Abraham inherited the land, then how much more should they. But Abraham didn't inherit the land in his lifetime as promised (Acts 7:5)- to understand this required a belief in a future resurrection and inheritance in the Kingdom of God on earth. And they lacked that perspective.

Ezekiel 33:25 Therefore tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: You eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes to your idols, and shed blood. Shall you possess the land?- This is the degree to which the Jews in the land and in exile were so deeply in sin, despite seeing all Ezekiel's warnings come true. The intentional eating of blood was part of the demands of pagan idol rituals. And this was leading them to shed blood as part of their lifting up their eyes in worship to the idols; human sacrifice, not just of firstborn children but others too, was apparently still being practiced.

Ezekiel 33:26 You rely on your sword, you work abomination, and every one of you defiles his neighbour's wife. Shall you possess the land?- "Abomination" relates usually to idol worship in the Old Testament. This is what was leading them to adultery, and also violence with the sword- perhaps relating to human sacrifice, and not just of babies. The spiritual situation in the land and perhaps also amongst the exiles was extremely bad; and yet at the same time, that generation as none before had a vast, Divinely planned potential before them: if they repented, God would pour out His grace and His Spirit and use them to reestablish His Kingdom, and the repentant victims of Babylonian judgment amongst the Gentiles along with the restored ten tribes would join them in the land. These things had all been spoken about earlier in Ezekiel's prophecies.

Ezekiel 33:27 You shall tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: As I live, surely those who are in the waste places shall fall by the sword; and him who is in the open field will I give to the animals to be devoured; and those who are in the strongholds and in the caves shall die of the pestilence- The reference seems specifically to the Jews who remained in the desolated land of Judah, the urban poor who were now living in the open fields and caves. God had previously through Ezekiel threatened to destroy the majority of them by the sword, animals and plague- but by grace had relented. Maybe from pure pity, or also in response to the repentance of a remnant and the intercession of the likes of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. But these three judgments were to return upon them as they stubbornly refused to repent. There is no evidence however that this actually happened; there was not another wave of Babylonian invasion and Jer. 41:5 describes some of the people of the land coming to make offerings at the temple site. Perhaps there was some response to Ezekiel's appeal here, which was presumably taken from Babylon to the people in the land. But maybe God was so eager to accept His sinful, stubborn people that He still tried to forge ahead with His plans as far as possible even without their repentance.

Ezekiel 33:28 I will make the land a desolation and an astonishment; the pride of her power shall cease and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, so that none shall pass through- As noted on :27 this didn't come about to the extent threatened. Even though the Jews were robbed of "power", they still had pride in it. And this is singled out as the reason for their judgment. Breaking "the pride of her power" was one of the curses for breaking covenant (Lev. 26:19). But the covenant had already been broken; yet it seems God still counts them as being within it, in His earnest grace toward them. "The pride of your power" is the same phrase used about the Jerusalem temple which was now in ruins (Ez. 24:21). This had already been caused to "cease", but still their pride remained. The intention of the Babylonian judgments had been to humble Israel, but this still hadn't happened.

Ezekiel 33:29 Then shall they know that I am Yahweh, when I have made the land a desolation and an astonishment, because of all their abominations which they have committed- Judah were to repent, to enter relationship with Yahweh ["knowing" Him in the Hebrew sense] as a result of the desolations. But they didn't. And perhaps God foresaw that, and so as noted on :27,28, He didn't bring all the planned desolations, because He foreknew they would not achieve their effect. These things however will come true in the last days.

Ezekiel 33:30 As for you, son of man, the children of your people talk of you by the walls and in the doors of the houses, speaking one to another, each one to his brother saying, Please come and hear what is the word that comes forth from Yahweh- The walls refers to the public places where in the shade people talked in groups; in the doors refers to private places. "One to another" uses a Chaldean rather than Hebrew word, suggesting they had already begun to adopt the language and speech of Babylon. They were fascinated by Ezekiel- his prophecies had undoubtedly come true. And yet they still did not know Yahweh, they were out of relationship with Him (:29). We can express interest in God's word, and yet be so far from Him. Relationship with Him is not solely predicated upon Bible study or reading.

Ezekiel 33:31 They come to you as the people come, and they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but don't do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their gain- Elsewhere it is idolatry which is cited as the main reason why they didn't respond to God's word. But the attraction of idolatry was "gain"; they were fertility gods, who were thought to give material "gain". This is the same word translated "dishonest gain" which was the characteristic of the leaders as well as the people of Judah (Ez. 22:3,27; Jer. 6:13; 8:10). They considered there was no "gain" in serving Yahweh (Mal. 3:14 s.w. "profit"). Whereas the true gain was in the things of Yahweh's kingdom.

Ezekiel 33:32 Behold, you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they don't do them- It was tragic for the prophets that the people were so indifferent. Ezekiel was appealing for each man to "Save his soul alive" (Ez. 18:27), implying that judgment is about to come, the death penalty already passed, but his repentance just about averts this at the last moment. It is the term used in Gen. 19:19 of how Lot was just about saved by grace out of Sodom, which was a symbol of Jerusalem under judgment, as

Ez. 16 has made clear. This was the desperate urgency of Ezekiel's appeal; and yet he was seen at best as a singer of fairy tales or old time love songs.

The prophets portrayed the tragic, passionate love of God to His people, they sung of it, wrote of it, made poetry about it [for much of the prophetic writing is poetry]. And yet they passed this off as mere "allegory" in a mocking way (Ez. 20:49), Ezekiel was "to them like one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice... for they hear what you say, but they will not do it" (Ez. 33:32). They were like buskers singing songs in the subway, which we may listen to with half an ear, even admire them for a few moments, and then walk on in our busy lives. But the prophets were speaking forth the words of passionate love of God Almighty for His people... truly as Paul Simon put it, with an uncanny appropriacy to our train of thought, "the words of the prophets are written on the subway walls". They thought that "the Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill" (Zeph. 1:12); "the Lord does not see us" (Ez. 8:12; 9:9); "my way is hidden from the Lord" (Is. 40:27; 29:15). This of course is the attitude with which we daily live. The question is, will we perceive it as the prophets did?

However, whilst "lovely song" can legitimately be understood as a love song, the Hebrew used here is unusual if that is what was meant. The word for "love" is used almost exclusively by Ezekiel in describing the unbridled lust in the name of love which had characterized God's people (s.w. Ez. 23:5,7,9,12,16,20, AV "doted"). Perhaps they were blasphemously using Ezekiel's words and poetry as songs used at the time of their idolatry.

Ezekiel 33:33 When this comes to pass (behold, it comes!), then shall they know that a prophet has been among them- This could equally be translated "It is come". Ezekiel's prophecies had been fulfilled, and they ought to recognize that he was indeed a prophet and not just an interesting person to listen to for entertainment.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 34

Ezekiel 34:1 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying-* Ezekiel was a priest, and they were the shepherds of Israel whom he now condemns as a main reason why the Kingdom was not being established. So he was an appropriate person to be used to deliver the criticism.

Ezekiel 34:2 *Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and tell them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Shouldn't the shepherds feed the sheep?-* The leadership could have been criticized for many things, but the fundamental issue was selfishness; thinking of themselves and not others. The shepherds refer not only to the priests but to the entire leadership of the people.

Ezekiel 34:3 *You eat the fat-* This should have been given to God, under the Mosaic law (Lev. 3:17). They kept the best for themselves, and thereby were playing God. For the fat was to be 'eaten' by God in the Mosaic rituals. Yet Zech. 11:16 prophesied that God would raise up such shepherds who 'eat the fat' as punishment for Israel. These shepherds sinned of their own freewill, but God confirmed them in that way.

And you clothe yourself with the wool, you kill the fatlings; but you don't feed the sheep- The situation sounds to be ongoing at Ezekiel's time. The priesthood was still profiting from the people rather than feeding them. This criticism of them would have caused many problems for Ezekiel; perhaps he was criticizing his own relatives.

Ezekiel 34:4 *You haven't strengthened the diseased-* The same criticism could be levelled at the 'shepherds' of our times who drive out the spiritually weak rather than seeking to cure and strengthen them. The priests were only interested in what they could get out of people, rather than what they could do for them. The "diseased" [s.w. "sick"] were made diseased or sick by God in punishment for their sins (Mic. 6:13 s.w.). The idea is that those who were sick as a result of their punishments at the hands of the Babylonians should be strengthened by the priests. But they were ignored.

Neither have you healed that which was sick, neither have you bound up that which was broken- The binding up of the breach or break between God and His people was to be in the Messianic Kingdom (Is. 30:26; 61:1). But this was potentially possible at the restoration; if the shepherds led the people towards it.

Neither have you caused to return that which was driven away, neither have you sought that which was lost; but with force and with rigour you have ruled over them- Very much the language of God causing to return those driven away into captivity. It seems that after the first wave of captives were taken away to Babylon, they could have returned if the shepherds of Judah had acted rightly- those driven away could have returned. God's purpose is so open to our behaviour. Hence :5 "They were scattered because there was no shepherd". The scattering of the majority could have been averted by the spirituality of a minority. It must be so tragic for God to see all these potentials for salvation being wasted time and again. The fact He continues to set up all these potentials, when He sees them wasted multiple times, is testament to His love and passion for us. The shepherds of those in captivity didn't actually want them to return from exile because they personally were benefitted.

Ezekiel 34:5 *They were scattered because there was no shepherd-* The scattering of the flock was here directly blamed upon the shepherds / priesthood.

And they became food to all the animals of the field and were scattered- A reference to all the nations surrounding Israel. When we read of "all the animals of the field" in Genesis 1-3, I have elsewhere suggested that this refers specifically to all the animals within the *eretz* of greater Israel, the land promised to Abraham; for that is how the phrase is used here in Ez. 34:5. It clearly doesn't refer to all animals / nations on the planet. The focus of God is so intensely upon Israel and this is reflected in the language of the Bible. See on :6.

Ezekiel 34:6 *My sheep wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill-* This is very much the language of Israel worshipping idols upon the mountains and "every high hill" (Ez. 6:13; 20:28). Mountains and hills represent nations and peoples; because of this, they were made to wander amongst the nations and peoples. Their judgment was appropriate to their sin; for the practice of sin is really a living out of condemnation.

Yes, My sheep were scattered on all the surface of the earth; and there was none who searched or sought them- We would likely have condemned the shepherds for themselves committing idolatry. But that is never mentioned here; rather is the emphasis upon the fact that the shepherds didn't try to get Israel to repent and return

to God. The lack of spiritual effort for others was the main source of their condemnation. The criticism that the shepherds fed themselves instead of the flock (:2,8) could even imply that the shepherds were not themselves idolaters, but their sin was that of spiritual selfishness.

Ezekiel 34:7 *Therefore you shepherds, hear the word of Yahweh-* The following prophecy says that Yahweh will replace the shepherds with His own shepherding, manifest through His chosen individual shepherd. But we could deduce that this threat was also effectively an appeal to the shepherds to repent.

Ezekiel 34:8 *As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, surely because My sheep became a prey, and My sheep became food to all the animals of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did My shepherds search for My sheep, but the shepherds fed themselves, and didn't feed My sheep-* See on :6 *There was none who searched or sought them.* Israel were given as a "prey" to the Gentiles because of their own sins (Ez. 7:21 s.w.); but here the shepherds are blamed for this. They could have 'stood in the gap' and stopped this judgment coming upon the people. But they didn't care for people; that quite simply is the crushing condemnation.

Ezekiel 34:9 *Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of Yahweh-* This was an appeal for repentance so that the process of condemnation at the last day (explained on :10) need not happen.

Ezekiel 34:10 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require My sheep at their hand-* When did this happen? This surely suggests that those men will be resurrected and asked at the judgment what they did with the sheep. The pain and anger of God is because Israel were *His* sheep, and He had entrusted them to others to care for. As explained on Ez. 18:22, there will be a 'going through' of the sins of the rejected at judgment day. God will "require" the flock at the hand of the pastors of Ezekiel's day. The Hebrew word translated "require" has the sense of to search / enquire- which suggests a process of discussion during the judgment process.

And 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- The people in view are clearly the shepherds, but they are now likened to the mouth of the ravening beast who devoured them. They were therefore no better than Babylon, the devouring beast; indeed, they effectively *were* Babylon. Here we see the power of sins of omission; omitting to care for the flock made these people the same as Babylon. For nearly all the accusations against the shepherds in this chapter refer to sins of omission rather than commission.

That they may not be food for them- Omitting to feed the sheep meant that they were effectively devouring and eating the sheep. The implication of their laziness and sins of omission is here stated in powerful terms. We too need to think through the implications of our similar sins of omission.

Ezekiel 34:11 *For thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I Myself, even I, will search for My sheep, and will seek them out-*

Psalm 80 begins with an appeal to God as the shepherd of Israel, continuing right on from the theme of Israel as God's flock in Ps. 79:13. But their accusation in Ps. 80:5 was that He was a bad shepherd; for a shepherd's duty was to provide food and

water to the sheep. But God has given them tears for both food and water. They had no sense of their own failure as His sheep, and the consequences of their own choices. Part of the new covenant offered the exiles was that God would be their shepherd and regather them (Ez. 34:11), seeing their own shepherds had failed them. But instead of eagerly responding to the shepherd's voice through the prophets, they found fault with their wonderful shepherd. And so the regathering offered in Ez. 34 didn't happen at the restoration, because the sheep refused the voice of the Divine shepherd. God's shepherding of the exiles back to Zion from Babylon was effected through Cyrus: "'He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure', even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be built;' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid'" (Is. 44:28). But the exiles were unenthusiastic about the decree of Cyrus, they generally remained in Babylon, and those who did return didn't build the foundations of the temple according to the plans given them in Ezekiel. And thus the exiles refused God's shepherding.

This chapter is full of connection with the language of the Lord Jesus as the shepherd of Israel in John 10. There was an intense manifestation of God in Jesus, as there is in all those who do the work of caring for His sheep. Likewise :15 "I myself will be the shepherd...". The terms of the new covenant which God promised a repentant Judah at the restoration included the promise of God shepherding them as a flock (Jer. 31:10). Such a shepherd could have been raised up then, but this didn't come about; and so the ultimate fulfilment is in the work of the Lord Jesus. This is the time when a Messiah figure could have 'shepherded in the strength of Yahweh' (Mic. 5:4 s.w.).

Ezekiel 34:12 *As a shepherd seeks out his flock*- The Lord's teaching places a huge value on the importance of the individual- He is the unusual shepherd who will leave the 99 in the wilderness and go searching for the one lost sheep. Yet His parable of searching for one sheep is clearly based upon a similar one in Ezekiel 34, where we read that God [in His Son] will 'seek out his *flock*' (Ez. 34:12). Perhaps Jesus meant us to understand that for Him, one lost sheep is as good as the whole flock; so important is the individual to Him. He made no effort to start an organization; rather did He focus upon the conversion and radical transformation of a group of individuals. We were each uniquely created in order to manifest some specific aspect of the Father's glory.

In the day that he is among his sheep- This is the intensity of 'God with us' in Christ; God Himself comes among us in order to bring us back to Him.

That are scattered abroad, so will I seek out My sheep; and I will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day- The cloudy and dark day was the day of judgment which came upon Judah, and which resulted in them being scattered into Babylon and Persia. The shepherd who was to deliver them and get them to return from the various places of their scattering was intended to be Cyrus. Is. 44:28 is crystal clear about this. God "says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure', even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be built;' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid'". It was God's intention that Cyrus repent and become a proselyte, and Yahweh would then use him to save His people "out of all places where they have been scattered". The decree of Cyrus was addressed to "Whoever is left [of the Jews], in any place where he lives" (Ezra 1:4). "Cyrus" literally means "sun" and so contrasts with the cloudy and dark day. But Cyrus let the ball drop and didn't carry through the Divine purpose as he might have done and neither did the Jews respond as they should have done. Cyrus was Yahweh's

anointed (Is. 45:1), and so the essence of these prophecies is to come true in the last days in the person of the Lord Jesus. We could say that the prophecies are transferred from Cyrus to the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 34:13 *I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country-* This 'causing' to go forth [AV] was by grace, because they had not met the required spiritual preconditions- in that they had not in fact cast away their idols (see on Ez. 20:6-8). And it was to be the same in the exodus from Babylon. This Divine 'causing to go forth' was by the Spirit, for those who left captivity did so because their minds were stirred up by the Spirit to do so, even though they were not spiritually qualified for the restoration (Ezra 1:5). They had been commanded to "go forth" from Babylon (Is. 52:11 s.w.) but it was God who caused them to do this by the grace of His Spirit's operation on their hearts. The same is true of our exodus from this world through the water of baptism. It is all of grace and confirmation of the smallest desire to do so; and so this causing to go forth was by God's "mighty hand" (Ez. 20:34 s.w.).

Ezekiel 34:14 *I will feed them with good pasture; on the mountains of the height of Israel shall their fold be-* A reference to Jerusalem or the temple mount? This was to be the source point of their teaching, the spiritual feeding which the shepherds / priests had failed to provide from the temple.

There shall they lie down in a good fold; on fat pasture shall they feed on the mountains of Israel- The restored Judah did live in a "fat" pasture land, but the fatness of the land was still given to the kings of Persia because of Judah's spiritual weakness (Neh. 9:25,35-37). They could have broken free and in fact subsumed the surrounding empires and kingdoms into the restored kingdom of Judah.

Ezekiel 34:15 *I Myself will be the shepherd of My sheep, and I will cause them to lie down, says the Lord Yahweh-* See on :11. This is the language of the wealthy farmer exasperated with his shepherds who goes out into the field and himself shepherds the flock; remembering that shepherds were perceived in social terms as the lowest of the low. Recall how shepherds were despised in Egypt and it was better to say you were a cattle herder than a shepherd (Gen. 46:34). This going out into the fields by God Himself was reflected in His efforts to bring Judah back from Babylon, where they were sitting in captivity in Ezekiel's time. But the majority of them preferred to remain there. Despite such passionate effort from God, manifest through the extraordinary desire of Cyrus to restore them (see on :12). So many today prefer to remain in the Babylon of this world rather than coming out of captivity into the things of God's Kingdom- despite God's intense efforts for them through manipulating life situations for them to lead them to Him.

Ezekiel 34:16 *I will seek that which was lost, and will cause to return that which was driven away. I will bind up that which was broken and will strengthen that which was sick: but the fat and the strong I will destroy; I will feed them in justice-* The binding up of the breach or break between God and His people was to be in the Messianic Kingdom (Is. 30:26; 61:1). But this was potentially possible at the restoration; if the shepherds led the people towards it. The Divine shepherd would act quite differently to ordinary shepherds, who would focus upon the fat and strong and not destroy them,

but rather accept that the broken and sick weren't worth the effort and were an acceptable loss. He would do exactly opposite.

We note here and in :15 the stress on God 'causing' the return. The idea of being given spirituality is repeated so often in the restoration prophecies. Thus Jer. 32:17 "I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all My heart and all My soul". The whole mental focus of God is involved in this. The word *shub* is used both of 'repentance', turning back, as well as the return to the land. But God is consistently presented as the causer of this turning / repenting. Jer. 33:7 is clear: "I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return" [also Jer. 30:3; 32:44; 33:11,26; 34:22; 42:12, seven times in total- a major theme]. Ez. 34:16 makes the spiritual aspect of this 'return' very clear: "I will seek that which was lost, and will cause to return that which was driven away". It's not simply that the lost is found because it wanders back home; it is caused to return.

Ezekiel 34:17 *As for you, O My flock, thus says the Lord Yahweh: See, I judge between sheep and sheep, the rams and the male goats-* Surely the basis for the Lord's parable of His final judgment in Mt. 25:32. The focus seems to move away from the shepherds to another reason for the sad state of Israel's flock- the abuse of the poor majority by the minority of 'fat ones' amongst the flock, the goats. Zech. 11:11 in a restoration context speaks of the poor of the flock as the faithful ones; the false shepherds in Zechariah likewise have to be removed before the envisioned restoration of the Kingdom can happen. But they had been caused to stumble by others within the flock, according to the reasoning here in Ez. 34. The idea seems to be that the sheep will be divided and the fat, abusive ones taken out of the flock and placed together with the goats. It's as if this message in Ez. 34 foresees the likely objection of many: 'But I'm not a shepherd, so this doesn't apply to me'. The focus is now upon the ordinary sheep themselves who have deprived other sheep of spiritual food. So easily, the Lord's sheep are turned away from spiritual feeding by the actions of other sheep. They cease attending places of spiritual feeding, or are banned from attending them, by the behaviour of those who are apparently the best sheep. By so doing, those apparently fat, well fed sheep of :16 are declared to be goats... The connection with Mt. 25:32 suggests that this will be the same basis for judgment at the last day for all the Lord's people. The same issues are in view there as in Ez. 34- not visiting, not feeding, not clothing (Ez. 34:3) and not providing water.

Ezekiel 34:18 *Does it seem a small thing to you-* The intention of the gripping passage in Ez. 16 was to convict Jerusalem of her sins (:2); because they considered their spiritual and literal prostitution "a small matter". The same word is used here in accusing the priesthood of considering it "a small matter" for the flock to have been ruined by them. This was the problem, as it is today- the real implications of attitudes and behaviour are not taken seriously. We fail to perceive how deeply we affect both God and man. Society makes us feel insignificant cogs, but we are not like that to God. This was the problem with Ezekiel's audience; they had a light hearted approach to eternal issues. To them, sin was a light thing (Ez. 8:17; 22:7). This was the role of the prophets, to convict people of the gravity of their sins and positions, and the consequences to come.

To have fed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the remainder of your pasture; to have drunk of the clear waters, but you must foul what

remains with your feet?- It is a characteristic of those who reject the message of the Kingdom that they seek to stop others entering it as well (see on Lk. 11:52).

Ezekiel 34:19 *As for My sheep, they eat that which you have trodden with your feet, and they drink that which you have fouled with your feet*- To tread underfoot was to despise. The leadership had despised that which God wanted to feed them with and this in turn damaged it for the ordinary sheep.

Ezekiel 34:20 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh to them: Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep*- This judgment would be very different to how a human shepherd would judge; he would prefer the fat and reject the lean. But as noted on :16, the fat were to be destroyed. The "lean" or famished by famine are those referred to in Is. 17:4-6, the glory of Jacob who had been "made thin" [s.w. "lean"] would become the faithful, repentant remnant, "gleanings [that] will be left there, like the shaking of an olive tree, two or three olives in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outermost branches of a fruitful tree".

Ezekiel 34:21 *Because you thrust with side and with shoulder and push all the diseased with your horns, until you have scattered them abroad*- The "diseased" or 'stricken' were those stricken by the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 14:17 s.w.). But these were not helped by the "fat", the wealthy leadership and priesthood. Instead they were pushed into captivity by the selfishness of the fat.

Ezekiel 34:22 *Therefore will I save My flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep*- But the rich, the fat among the exiles, still oppressed the lean or the poor (Neh. 5:1-19). And God's people continued to be a prey to the Gentiles. The intended prophetic scenario didn't come about at the time although it will in the last days.

Ezekiel 34:23 *I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even My servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd*- This Messianic figure was to be "the prince" of Ez. 40-48. Initially it was intended to be Cyrus (Is. 44:28), but then other possibilities arose, not least Zerubbabel. The system of shepherds, be it the priesthood or the royal family, was to be replaced by one singular shepherd after the pattern of David, although he would have assistants who were also after God's own heart- another way of saying they too would be like David, the man after God's own heart (Jer. 3:15; 1 Sam. 13:14).

Ezekiel 34:24 *I, Yahweh, will be their God, and My servant David prince among them; I, Yahweh, have spoken it*- The "Prince" of Ez. 40-48 could have been this shepherd figure who was to lead scattered Israel back from the Babylonian exile, and who initially could have been Cyrus (Is. 44:28).

Ezekiel 34:25 *I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause dangerous animals to cease out of the land; they shall dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods*- This is the new covenant which was offered with the exiles at the restoration, seeing that they had broken the old covenant. The peace was peace with God. Wild animals, both literally and in terms of marauding nations, would never again threaten the people. They would be safe everywhere. Being safe in the desert

and sleeping in the woods is language appropriate to sheep. They would no longer experience predators.

Ezekiel 34:26 *I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing; I will cause the shower to come down in its season, there shall be showers of blessing-* The implication is that a rebuilt temple in Zion would be the focus for blessings. Joel 2:23 and Hos. 6:3 use similar language in talking of the giving of the Spirit. The new covenant offered in Jer. 31 and Ez. 20 was to involve a new spirit, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of God's sinful people.

Ezekiel 34:27 *The tree of the field shall yield its fruit and the earth shall yield its increase and they shall be secure in their land; and they shall know that I am Yahweh, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them out of the hand of those who made slaves of them-* The deliverance from Babylon was to be at the same time as dramatic fertility in the revived land of Israel. The returned exiles would dwell there securely- because Babylon would have destroyed one group of local nations, and then God Himself would destroy Babylon and her supporters as Jeremiah had made clear. This scenario didn't happen, but will do at the return of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 34:28 *They shall no more be a prey to the nations, neither shall the animals of the earth devour them-* This can only be really true in the last days, for after the restoration Israel continued to be a prey.

But they shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid- This is the situation predicted when Israel were faithful to the old covenant (Lev. 25:18,19; 26:5). But there is no mention in Ez. 34 of Israel repenting or living righteously; rather the emphasis is that God by pure grace shall go forth and regather His people and make a new covenant with them (:25)- a covenant of grace, whereby He saves them almost in spite of their disobedience. And this is the same new covenant made with us. On one hand, repentance and obedience are required; but on another hand, salvation under the new covenant is by grace alone. And I see no reconciliation between these two poles, at least not by any intellectual process or clever feat of exegesis. This is the mystery of grace and salvation which will have its final revelation at the day of judgment. Note that dwelling securely without fear is the situation developed in Ez. 38:8,11,14; the invasion led by the man Gog will happen after Israel have returned to the covenant. Any signs of an imminent invasion by a figure apparently answering to Gog must therefore be tempered by a recognition that such an invasion will happen *after* God's intervention in regathering His people and welcoming them into the new covenant blessings- a situation not currently seen in the land of Israel.

Ezekiel 34:29 *I will raise up to them a plantation for renown, and they shall be no more consumed with famine in the land, neither bear the shame of the nations any more-* Shame for sin is a major theme with Ezekiel. The days of shame would come to an end (Ez. 16:54; 34:29; 36:15; 39:26)- if Jerusalem accepted shame for her sins. But Ez. 44:13 says that the sins of the Jerusalem priesthood were such that in the restored temple, they would bear their shame in that they would never again minister in it. Likewise the Jewish priesthood who persecuted Jeremiah at this time were to bear a shame that would last for ever (Jer. 20:11). And yet the hope of Israel was that they would eternally be unashamed, world without end (Is. 45:17). The resolution of this

may be in God's willingness to count them totally righteous by grace, upon their repentance. And Ezra "blushed" [s.w. "ashamed"] because of Israel's sins (Ezra 9:6), and Jeremiah at this time cast himself down in shame because of them (Jer. 3:25). This representative intercession for Judah had some effect. Just as the Lord Jesus bore the shame of Israel and all sinners on the cross (Is. 50:6), and yet because of that He would not be ashamed eternally (Is. 50:7). He was to become representative of the repentant Israel of God; for the same words are used of how they too would have unashamed faces eternally (Is. 54:4). But the Jerusalem priesthood refused to take shame, they were unashamed of their whoredoms (Jer. 3:3; 8:12). Ezekiel's appeal in Ez. 16 was so that they would recognize their sins, and be ashamed (Ez. 16:2). There was time for them to do so right up until they were led captive, in the final attempt to make them realize their shame. For when they went into captivity, then God intended that they would be "ashamed" (Jer. 22:22). The final vision of Ezekiel, of the potential that was possible in a restored Zion, was in order to make the exiles ashamed of their sins when they realized the possibilities they had wasted and yet which were still possible by grace (Ez. 43:10,11). But they didn't respond to that vision, they refused to build and operate such a temple system; because they refused to be ashamed in exile, although it was God's intention that they should be. And so it is for us as a new Israel to be ashamed for our sins, and identify with the Messiah figure who would bear Israel's shame and thereby emerge eternally unashamed.

Ezekiel 34:30 *They shall know that I, Yahweh their God, am with them; and that they, the house of Israel, are My people, says the Lord Yahweh-* Having God as their God was a repetition of the covenant promise to Abraham: "I will be their God". The new covenant deal with Judah was to be based upon the promises to Abraham. The "they" refers to the nations of :30 who had abused Israel; they were to perceive that amazingly, this sinful people were truly the people of Yahweh. His grace to them would be understood and noticed, and would serve to convert the nations.

Ezekiel 34:31 *You My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, are men, and I am your God, says the Lord Yahweh-* God didn't want Judah to miss the wonder of it all; they really were men, but they were His sheep. His being their God parallels His promise to be their shepherd; He was more than a shepherd to them, but their God. They would be released from prison in Babylon to free pastures (Is. 49:9 s.w.). The tragedy was that this continual statement of such amazing love and care was disregarded by them.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 35

Ezekiel 35:1 *Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me saying-* The entire section from Ez. 33-39 outlines the possibility of the exiles repenting and a Divine kingdom being reestablished in Israel, with Judah joined by the repentant remnants of the ten tribes and the surrounding nations. In the prophecies against the seven Gentile nations in Ez. 26-32, all are envisaged as coming to "know Yahweh", i.e. to enter relationship with Him; except Edom. The unforgiveable sin, it seems, is of hatred of ones' brother as Esau / Edom / Seir hated Jacob / Israel. And so the total elimination of "Mount Seir" was intended as coming at this time of restoration. It didn't, then, because the wider prophetic picture didn't come about, and has been transferred, reapplied and rescheduled to our last days. But see on :9.

Ezekiel 35:2 *Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir and prophesy against it-* This prophecy isn't just inserted here for no reason. It follows on the prediction that Judah shall be saved by God's grace, and made to "dwell safely", which I pointed out in the commentary on chapter 34 is the language of Israel rewarded for obedience to the Old Covenant. They were not obedient to that covenant, but under the new covenant of grace introduced in Ez. 34:25, they are counted as if they were obedient and given the blessing for obedience, even though they were disobedient. Seeing God's righteousness has been imputed to Israel, now we read of the judgment of Seir / Esau / Edom, who mocked Judah's unrighteousness at the time of her exile, and joined in the judgment upon her. So now, Judah is counted righteous, and those who judged her for her unrighteousness are now judged.

Ezekiel 35:3 *And tell it, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out My hand against you, I will make you a desolation and an astonishment-* The very phrase used about the judgment upon Judah which Edom / Seir participated in bringing about (Ez. 6:14; 33:28,29). See on :1. In commentary upon the book of Revelation, I have noted that the seals refer to judgments upon Israel in the last days, but then the essence of those judgments is found again in the later judgments poured out upon the beast system which brings those judgments. Edom / Seir / Esau's descendants (the Arabic peoples surrounding Israel) are therefore very much associated with the latter day Babylon who is the beast.

Ezekiel 35:4 *I will lay your cities waste and you shall be desolate; and you shall know that I am Yahweh-* This could imply an ultimate repentance by Seir / Esau, leading to the final reconciliation between Jacob and Esau. Or it could mean that in the death throes of condemnation, they come to know Yahweh- but all too late. Just as those who condemned the Lord Jesus will be resurrected and say "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!", but tragically all too late. See on :1,9,11,12.

Ezekiel 35:5 *Because you have had a perpetual hatred-* The age old tension between Esau and Jacob. But "perpetual" is literally "old" or "ancient". The "enmity" is the same word as in Gen. 3:15, and the 'ancient' enmity strengthens the allusion. They were the seed of the serpent at enmity with Israel, the seed of the woman; which considering Judah's deep sin at this time, reveals how God by grace still saw them as His special people of purpose.

And have given over the children of Israel to the power of the sword in the time of their calamity- The prophecy against Edom in Obadiah 13,14 makes the same point, as in Ps. 137:7, giving more detail as to Edom's abuse of Judah at the time of the Babylonian invasion.

At the time when the punishment of their iniquity had an end- There is no very solid evidence for the total destruction of Edom in the terms of this prophecy as a result of their viciously joining in with the Babylonian judgment of Judah. Neither was the Babylonian invasion "the time when the punishment of [Judah's] iniquity had an end". Such language has to refer to our last days; and so we are to look for a latter day Seir / Edom / Esau's descendants who will join in the assault upon Israel by the latter day Babylonian, and who will receive their judgment in the terms of this prophecy. For God's words here shall finally come true. With Israel today surrounded

by Esau's descendants, the required scenario is ripe for fulfillment. See on Ez. 35:14 *When the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate.*

Ezekiel 35:6 *Therefore, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you. Since you have not hated blood, therefore blood shall pursue you-* See on Rev. 6:9. "Edom" means 'red', hence the play on the word 'blood'. The idea of pursuit suggests the revenger of blood. And it was God who would avenge the blood of His people, upon Edom. Edom is held far more culpable than Babylon- because they were behaving like this against their brother.

Ezekiel 35:7 *Thus will I make Mount Seir an astonishment and a desolation; and I will cut off from it the one who passes through and the one who returns-* The one who returns may refer to the returning exiles, the returned / repentant ones [as they were envisaged], who would skirt around mount Seir and not pass through it. Or the idea may be as GNB "I will make the hill country of Edom a wasteland and kill everyone who travels through it". The area would gather the reputation of being haunted, a place to be avoided by travellers.

Ezekiel 35:8 *I will fill its mountains with its slain. In your hills and in your valleys and in all your watercourses shall they fall who are slain with the sword-* All these terms are used elsewhere about the judgment upon Israel at the hand of her invaders (e.g. Ez. 6:3). What is done to Israel will be done to her invaders. Those who destroy the earth / land of Israel will be destroyed (Rev. 11:18). See on :11 *I will do according to your anger.* But there was no such wholesale murder of the Edomites at the time; they continued for centuries. The intended prophetic scenario for that time didn't come about because Judah didn't repent and the Kingdom wasn't reestablished under the new covenant and a Messiah figure, as was potentially possible. And so Edom wasn't totally destroyed either, although these things will have their final fulfilment in the last days.

Ezekiel 35:9 *I will make you a perpetual desolation, and your cities shall not be inhabited; and you shall know that I am Yahweh-* Heb. "your cities shall not return", whereas even though Jerusalem was as Sodom, yet she and Samaria would be cities which returned to their former estate (Ez. 16:55). But Edom would not share in such a revival. I noted on :1 that in the prophecies against the seven Gentile nations in Ez. 26-32, all are envisaged as coming to "know Yahweh", i.e. to enter relationship with Him; except Edom. The unforgiveable sin, it seems, is of hatred of ones' brother as Esau / Edom / Seir hated Jacob / Israel. And so the total elimination of "Mount Seir" was intended as coming at this time of restoration. They would only "know Yahweh" in that as explained on :11,12, they would all too late come to know that Yahweh had heard their insults and remembered their harsh attitude to their brother in his time of rightful judgment for sin.

Ezekiel 35:10 *Because you have said, These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it-* Edom thought that by siding with Babylon in the destruction of Jerusalem (Ps. 137:7) they would be granted possession of Israel by Babylon. But this didn't happen. So although they didn't get their desire, yet their desires were still judged.

Whereas Yahweh was there- Perhaps it is to the physical presence of the Angel in the land (see on Dt. 11:12) that this refers. Ezekiel's prophecy closes with the

statement that "Yahweh is there" (Ez. 48:35), but in essence, His presence was just as real in the land at the time of Judah's exile as it will be in the Kingdom. This has profound relevance to our own sense of Yahweh's presence; for He is essentially with us now just as really as He will be in the Kingdom age. And it continues a theme developed in Ezekiel through the cherubim visions- that the presence of Yahweh was just as much with Judah in captivity as it had been with them in the days of temple worship before the exile.

The Divine presence as symbolized by the cherubim Angels was in the land until Judah went into captivity; hence the cherubim removed from Jerusalem. But here we read that "the Lord was there" after the fall of Jerusalem. Yet God's intention was that His people would return, the Angel cherubim of glory would return, and again it would finally be true that "the Lord is there" (Ez. 48:35). See on Ez. 3:23. And so God speaks of His presence as still being there. It's a case of 'now but not yet'.

Ezekiel 35:11 *Therefore, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, I will do according to your anger, and according to your envy which you have shown out of your hatred against them-* See on Ez. 35:8. What we feel about others is often done to us. Edom will be judged according to what they did or intended to do to God's people.

I will make Myself known among them, when I shall judge you- God's Name is articulated in the condemnation of the wicked. This is why His judgments will make the world learn righteousness (Is. 26:9). There is here a difference between "them" and "you". The "you" is Edom (:12) and the "them" is Israel and Judah (:10). When God's people know Yahweh, i.e. re-enter relationship with Him, then Edom would be judged; they would only 'know Yahweh' (see on :9) insofar as they would "know" then that Yahweh had heard their insults against their brother Jacob (:12).

Ezekiel 35:12 *You shall know that I, Yahweh, have heard all your insults which you have spoken against the mountains of Israel, saying, They are laid desolate, they have been given us to devour-* God listens to the words of pagan nations. His knowledge is total, and this should influence our walk before Him. Verse 13 continues the theme: "I have heard". See on :1,9,11. Edom thought that by siding with Babylon in the destruction of Jerusalem (Ps. 137:7) they would be granted possession of Israel by Babylon. But this didn't happen. So although they didn't get their desire, yet their desires were still judged. And the full judgment of Edom for these things is yet future, for not every detail of these judgments against her came true at Ezekiel's time. This is a sober warning to us concerning our desires and feelings against others, even against those who are under rightful judgment for their sins.

Ezekiel 35:13 *You have magnified yourselves against Me with your mouth, and have multiplied your words against Me, which I have heard-* They had spoken against God's people, but whoever touches Israel touches the apple of God's eye. He was and is intensely manifest in us His people. He is extremely sensitive to all evil done to us. And at that time, Judah were rightfully under condemnation for their sins. But all the same, even in that state, God still identified with His sinful people under judgment. How much more does He do so with us who are in His dear Son.

Ezekiel 35:14 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: When the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate-* Another indication that this prophecy is of the latter days, at the time of the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. The same words for "the earth rejoices" are used about the time of the Kingdom when God reigns in Israel (1 Chron. 16:31;

Ps. 67:4; 96:11; 97:4). But the nations of the *eretz* / earth were intended to repent after the judgments of and upon Babylon, and thus come to joy. That joy was to be in Zion, the reestablished temple system where the presence of Yahweh would be (Ps. 48:2; Jer. 33:9; Lam. 2:15). The joy of Edom's heart was the destruction of Zion (Ez. 36:5), so their exclusion from the eternal joy of the restored Zion is appropriate.

Edom would differ from the other nations in that they alone would not rejoice. Thus in the prophecies against the seven Gentile nations in Ez. 26-32, all are envisaged as finally coming to "know Yahweh", i.e. to enter relationship with Him; except Edom. The unforgiveable sin, it seems, is of hatred of ones' brother as Esau / Edom / Seir hated Jacob / Israel. But see on :9.

Ezekiel 35:15 *As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do to you. You shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, even all of it; and they shall know that I am Yahweh-* As noted on :1, Edom / Esau is the only one of the seven nations judged in Ez. 26-32 who doesn't in the end come to "know Yahweh", into relationship with Him. So here we do not read that "you", Edom, "shall know...", but rather that "*they* shall know that I am Yahweh", referring to the nations of "the whole earth" / *eretz* promised to Abraham in :14. But see on :9.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 36

Ezekiel 36:1 *You, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of Yahweh-* "Mountains" here may be an intensive plural for the great mountain, Zion, "the ancient high place" of :2. The theme may continue from Ez. 35 which speaks of the specific desire of Esau / Edom to destroy Zion and possess it (as in Ps. 137:7). But on :14 I discuss how the stress on the mountains is because these were the location of Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh; Ezekiel 6 has made this connection very clear. Here, verse 15 will specifically state of the mountains "that neither shall you cause your nation to stumble any more". In this way the mountains "bereaved" Israel of its people, quite literally in that child sacrifice was practiced there. The new covenant, the new deal, was to as it were enforce their faithfulness to Yahweh by permanently stopping the idolatry that took place there. Hence the repeated statements that the mountains would be transformed.

Ezekiel 36:2 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because the enemy-* The specific enemy in view may be Edom; see on :1. As explained in commentary on Ez. 34:28, the new covenant with Israel of Ez. 34:25 will mean that Israel are counted as righteous, as having been obedient to the old covenant when in fact they were not; and therefore the blessings of the old covenant will come upon them. One of those blessings was victory over their enemies, as mentioned frequently in Lev. 26.

Has said against you, Aha! and, The ancient high places are ours in possession- Sadly, the Gentiles envied the way Israel used the mountains / hills as idol sanctuaries. But this could be an intensive plural, referring to the great high place- Jerusalem and the temple mount. And this continues to be the "ancient" argument between Jacob and Esau / Edom / Seir, which is the "enemy" in view in the preceding chapter (Ez. 35). Edom is mentioned specifically here in 36:5. See on :5 *That have appointed My land to themselves for a possession.* The argument of Esau / Edom was that the high places were *their* inheritance or "possession". The Koran and the hadith

twist around the Biblical record of the promises to the Jewish fathers, to the intent that the land of Israel was promised to Esau and Jacob / Israel / the Jews was the son rejected from the inheritance. The picture presented here in Ez. 36, whereby Israel's enemies insist that *they* are the rightful inheritors of Palestine and the supreme high place of the temple mount, is exactly relevant to the Muslim claims of today. See on :3 *You became the possession of the rest of the nations.*

"The high places" are consistently the idol shrines. God was willing to reverse everything. He would forcibly take away idolatry from His people, and indeed turn those very places into places reflecting His saving grace. This explains why there is so much prophecy about the mountains / high places, and other areas where idolatry was focused.

Ezekiel 36:3 *Therefore prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh. Because, even because they have made you desolate and swallowed you up on every side-* Israel's latter day enemies (see on Ez. 35:5,14 for the latter day relevance) are likened to a beast with a huge mouth, which is exactly the imagery of the latter day beast prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. "Every side" suggests that what is now known as Jordan will become more intensely anti Israel.

So that you became the possession of the rest of the nations- The Hebrew translated "rest" is also translated "posterity". Esau / Edom / Seir / the Muslim Arabs claim that *they* are the posterity who according to the Koran were promised the land of Palestine as their possession. See on :2 *The ancient high places are ours in possession.*

And you became the talk and evil gossip of the nations- Exactly the scenario we see developing today, with anti-Israel gossip and rhetoric rife amongst the nations around Israel.

Ezekiel 36:4 *Therefore, you mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord Yahweh. Thus says the Lord Yahweh to the mountains and to the hills, to the rivers and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes and to the cities that are forsaken, which are become a prey and a mockery to the other nations that are all around-* The forsaken cities refer primarily to those which had already fallen before Jerusalem fell. In the latter day application, the picture is of present day Israel destroyed and the thriving cities such as Tel Aviv and Haifa left in ruins. Such widespread desolation in rural areas was not seen after the Babylonian invasion, although Ezekiel's prophecies had predicted it. The scenario didn't fully happen then; perhaps because of the link between desolation and repentance. God foreknew that wouldn't happen, and so the total desolation prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days.

Ezekiel 36:5 *therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Surely in the fire of My jealousy have I spoken against the residue of the nations, and against all Edom-*

We note God's absolute passion. "Jealousy" is injured self-consciousness; He is so involved in us and with us, and His emotions are deeply involved with us.

The residue of the nations refers in the first instance to the remains of the nations judged by Babylon at the same time as Judah. Edom is singled out for special mention. In the prophecies against the seven Gentile nations in Ez. 26-32, all are envisaged as coming to "know Yahweh", i.e. to enter relationship with Him; except Edom. The unforgiveable sin, it seems, is of hatred of ones' brother as Esau / Edom / Seir hated Jacob / Israel. And so the total elimination of "Mount Seir" in Ez. 35 was intended as coming at this time of restoration. It didn't, then, because the wider prophetic picture didn't come about, and has been transferred, reapplied and rescheduled to our last days.

We sense God's intense fury with Edom for supporting the Babylonians, urging them to raze the temple to the foundation. Edom thought they could possess the land, hence Ez. 35 has spoken so much of Edom's judgment. They appear to have started building forts on the mountains of Israel. Hence the insistence that Israel shall be eternally possessed by God's people and not Edom. Note God's fury with Edom at this point. But He had just sent Judah to Babylon in fury, taking away their king in His wrath. He presents as highly emotional, and so He is.

That have appointed My land to themselves for a possession with the joy of all their heart, with despite of soul, to cast it out for a prey- Again we see the concept of "possession". The Muslim Arabs are convinced from the Koran and hadith that Palestine is their rightful possession, and this language is likewise found in the position statements of the PLO and similar terrorist organizations. Ps. 83:11,12 records how the leaders of the latter day invasion will focus upon the idea of possession of the holy places in Jerusalem: "Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession".

Ezekiel 36:6 *Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and tell to the mountains and to the hills, to the rivers and to the valleys, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I have spoken in My zeal and in My wrath, because you have borne the shame of the nations-* This and other prophecies frequently mention the "shame" which will be upon Israel at the hands of their latter day enemies. This is because the Koran repeatedly speaks of the "shameful doom" to come upon the Jews because they do not accept Mohammad. "They shall be held up to shame in this world" (2:114). The scene speaks clearly of the expectations and desires of Israel's Islamic neighbours.

But "shame" can be seen as a reference to Baal, "that shameful thing" as the prophets describe it. Hills, rivers and valleys were all locations of the idol shrines, and this shame was to be removed. The shame for sin would be dissolved by the new covenant.

Ezekiel 36:7 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: I have sworn saying, Surely the nations that are around you, they shall bear their shame-* The focus of Bible prophecy is upon the peoples of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, "the nations that are around" Judah.

Ezekiel 36:8 *But you, mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel; for they are at hand to return-* The idea is that there would be a resurgence of fruitfulness just before Judah left Babylon, so that when they arrived there would be abundant fruit for them ready to eat. This presupposes a specific time for the exodus from Babylon, which would have been when Babylon fell by Divine judgment. All these possibilities were precluded by Judah's lack of repentance. And so the rest of the scenario didn't work out at the time, although it will do in the last days. In fact after dribs and drabs of exiles returned after the decree of Cyrus, they found a famine in the land (Hag. 1), rather than trees loaded with fruit for them. And these famine conditions continued into the time of Malachi. This reflected their lack of repentance.

"At hand to return" surely suggests that this revival could have happened at Ezekiel's time. Likewise :32 NET "I am about to act". Those who were in exile could themselves have returned. Such huge potential was wasted. But as noted on :37, which seems the 'end stress' of the prophecy, all they had to do was ask for it, to want it. And so much would've been given. It may seem barely believable- until we reflect

how many of those near and dear to us steadfastly refuse to simply say "yes" to the offer of grace in the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 36:9 *For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn unto you-* Elsewhere we read that God will turn unto Israel when they turn unto Him (Zech. 1:3 "Return to me", says Yahweh of Armies, 'and I will return to you', says Yahweh of Armies"). But there is no mention here nor in Ez. 34 of any such turning or repentance of Israel. The covenant of grace introduced in Ez. 34:25 and expanded upon later here in chapter 36 means that God intervenes by grace alone to treat His beloved people as if they are more spiritual than they are. And in the New Testament, He is known for giving repentance and not just forgiveness; He turns hearts by His Spirit acting upon the human spirit (Acts 3:26; Acts 11:18). Jer. 31 has described Israel saying "Turn me, and I shall be turned"- and *then* repenting. The initiative in this turning is always from God.

And you shall be cultivated and sown- Along with :8, the implication is that in the very last days, the land of Israel will be uncultivated and barren when overrun by Edom / Israel's neighbours. This could be due to a scorched earth policy by Israel, or the use of weaponry which destroys the fertility of the land. Such a scenario is now imaginable.

Ezekiel 36:10 *And I will multiply men on you, all the house of Israel, even all of it; and the cities shall be inhabited, and the waste places shall be built-* This multiplication of men depended upon those "men" returning from exile. But most of them preferred to remain in Babylon. This multiplication of men was to be in response to Judah's prayer (:37 AV); and this was lacking. So we are reading here of potentials. The multiplication refers to the multiplying of Abraham's seed- for those within that covenant. And the promises to Abraham were the basis of the new covenant offered Judah. But they chose not to accept that new covenant, and so the promised multiplication didn't happen.

Ezekiel 36:11 *I will multiply on you man and animal-* The destruction commented upon in :9 is going to be so major that the majority of animals and people are destroyed. This is the kind of picture we encounter in the prophecies of the land's final turmoil in Revelation; we recall that Zechariah predicts the cutting off of the majority of Jews in the land. The reference to animals suggests the use of fearsome weaponry which leaves the land physically and literally desolate. The increase and multiplication of men in Israel would be a sign that again they were in receipt of the covenant blessings (Lev. 26:9).

And they shall increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited after your former manner, and I will do better to you than at your beginnings; and you shall know that I am Yahweh- It was obedience to the covenant that would result in becoming fruitful and increased (Lev. 26:4). They had not been obedient to that covenant, and yet the blessings are given- because the new covenant offers those blessings simply by grace. "Increase and be fruitful" is the term used about how things were in the *eretz* at creation (Gen. 1:22,28). A new creation is in view. This is the language of a restoration of the previous kingdom "after your former manner... at your beginnings", rather than a totally unprecedented new entity. The kingdom of God to come upon earth at the Lord's return is a reestablishment of His Kingdom as it was previously in the form of Israel (Ez. 21:25-27). As noted on :8, the idea is that there would be a resurgence of fruitfulness just before Judah left Babylon, so that when they arrived there would be abundant fruit for them ready to eat.

Ezekiel 36:12 *Yes, I will cause men to walk on you, even My people Israel-* The emphasis on such literality could have been because the very people to whom Ezekiel was preaching in Babylon could have been the very ones who would again walk in the literal land of Israel. The period to be spent in captivity was flexible, in accordance with their repentance. It could have been less than 70 year (see on Ez. 4), and in reality it turned out to be longer than 70 years.

And they shall possess you, and you shall be their inheritance- The emphasis being on the word "their", seeing that the Muslim Arab argument is that the land and Jerusalem are *their* Divine inheritance. See the earlier comment about the significance of the language of "possession" in this prophecy.

And you shall no more henceforth bereave them of children- The old system had bereaved them of their children because they sacrificed them to the idols. But this was to be no more.

Ezekiel 36:13 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because they say to you, You are a destroyer of men, and have caused bereavement in your nation-* The byword was that Israel was a cursed land, those who lived there always seemed to die. This was to be turned right around, as the land was to become associated with life and blessing. These words were those of the unfaithful spies (Num. 13:32), so the idea was that if Israel had faith, unlike them, and re-entered the land in faith- then this wrong impression of the land would be changed.

Ezekiel 36:14 *Therefore you shall destroy men no more, neither cause bereavement in your nation any more, says the Lord Yahweh-* God comes over as very sensitive as to what people think of Him. He even changed His plan to destroy Israel after Moses pointed out that the nations would mock His ability to save. This is not because God is as it were overly interested in His image, but because He wishes human salvation so earnestly, and wishes to clear up misunderstandings and misrepresentations. We should have this same motivation in any debates we may enter regarding interpretation.

Israel and Judah worshipped idols on the mountains. This is a major theme throughout the prophetic criticisms of Israel. The high places had led them to adultery against God and hence their judgment. In this sense the mountains devoured men. God says that this will not happen ever again, but that therefore means that He will stop Israel worshipping idols and make them loyal to Him for ever. This making loyal and faithful is exactly what the new covenant is all about. This explains why the high places and hills and mountains of Israel are spoken of so often in the new covenant prophecies. God was going to forcibly stop idolatry and unfaithfulness to Him, making His beloved loyal to Him.

Ezekiel 36:15 *Neither will I let you hear any more the shame of the nations, neither shall you bear the reproach of the peoples any more, neither shall you cause your nation to stumble any more, says the Lord Yahweh-* The literal hills of Israel were the location of their high places and idol worship. It is latter day idolatry which will bring about the predicted devastation of Israel.

Shame for sin is a major theme with Ezekiel. The days of shame would come to an end (Ez. 16:54; 34:29; 36:15; 39:26)- if Jerusalem accepted shame for her sins. But Ez. 44:13 says that the sins of the Jerusalem priesthood were such that in the restored temple, they would bear their shame in that they would never again minister in it. Likewise the Jewish priesthood who persecuted Jeremiah at this time were to bear a shame that would last for ever (Jer. 20:11). And yet the hope of Israel was that they

would eternally be unashamed, world without end (Is. 45:17). The resolution of this may be in God's willingness to count them totally righteous by grace, upon their repentance. And Ezra "blushed" [s.w. "ashamed"] because of Israel's sins (Ezra 9:6), and Jeremiah at this time cast himself down in shame because of them (Jer. 3:25). This representative intercession for Judah had some effect. Just as the Lord Jesus bore the shame of Israel and all sinners on the cross (Is. 50:6), and yet because of that He would not be ashamed eternally (Is. 50:7). He was to become representative of the repentant Israel of God; for the same words are used of how they too would have unashamed faces eternally (Is. 54:4). But the Jerusalem priesthood refused to take shame, they were unashamed of their whoredoms (Jer. 3:3; 8:12). Ezekiel's appeal in Ez. 16 was so that they would recognize their sins, and be ashamed (Ez. 16:2). There was time for them to do so right up until they were led captive, in the final attempt to make them realize their shame. For when they went into captivity, then God intended that they would be "ashamed" (Jer. 22:22). The final vision of Ezekiel, of the potential that was possible in a restored Zion, was in order to make the exiles ashamed of their sins when they realized the possibilities they had wasted and yet which were still possible by grace (Ez. 43:10,11). But they didn't respond to that vision, they refused to build and operate such a temple system; because they refused to be ashamed in exile, although it was God's intention that they should be. And so it is for us as a new Israel to be ashamed for our sins, and identify with the Messiah figure who would bear Israel's shame and thereby emerge eternally unashamed.

Ezekiel 36:16 *Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me saying-* Lest there should be any sense that this great program of restoration was in any sense downplaying or disregarding Israel's sin, the balance is now corrected.

Ezekiel 36:17 *Son of man, when the people of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their way and by their doings. Their way before Me was as the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity-* A menstruating woman was to have a hiatus in her intimate relationships with her husband and she could not enter the sanctuary for worship. Hosea spoke in the same way, of how Israel would have a period of enforced separation from God, to bring them to Him. God very graciously uses this figure, suggesting their uncleanness is just for a limited time, and soon He will resume intimate relationships with them. As discussed on :8, we continually have the impression that the exile [of both Israel and Judah] was temporary and would very soon be gloriously reversed; but Israel refused that potential. And this is how God currently looks upon Israel. See on :25. At Ezekiel's time, He was prepared to restore relationship with them by washing them from their blood through the new covenant. But they were unwilling.

Ezekiel 36:18 *Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had poured out on the land, and because they had defiled it with their idols-* The pouring out of blood is again associated with idolatry. The reference is to the sacrifice of children and perhaps other categories of people to the idols. We note the parallel between the pouring out of Divine wrath, and their pouring out of blood. The phrase 'to pour out blood' occurs multiple times in the Mosaic law; the idea was that life, represented by the blood, was to be poured out to Yahweh. Instead, they had poured out life to idols. And this can be done today, so easily, in the pouring out of life's minutes and hours to images and modern day idols.

Ezekiel 36:19 *And I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. According to their way and according to their doings I judged*

them- The reference to "the nations" could suggest that God also has in view the ten tribes here. This is God being positive; because He did not carry out the full extent of the threatened judgments, the majority of them, "the poor of the land", remained in Judah; and at this very time of restoration, Ezra reflects that God had punished them "less than our iniquities deserve" (Ezra 9:13).

Ezekiel 36:20 *When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name; in that men said of them, These are the people of Yahweh, and are gone forth out of His land*- God accepts that the exiles had not repented as they ought to have done. The idea seems to be that the nations realized that the exiles had been exiled because of their sins, and noted that they continued in them. Child sacrifice to Moloch is specifically described as profaning God's Name (Lev. 18:21), and that is the context here (:18). It seems they continued to do this in exile, at least initially. And yet they still carried God's Name, despite having broken covenant with Him. This is proof for all time that God never gives up with His people, even if they give up with Him.

Ezekiel 36:21 *But I had respect for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went*- "Respect" is the word elsewhere translated "pity". The wonder of God's grace was that His eye did spare and He did pity at the restoration (also Joel 2:18; Mal. 3:17 s.w.), just as His eye had spared them in the desert (Ez. 20:17). Whereas in His wrath He had said that He would never again pity Judah (Ez. 5:11; 7:4; 8:18; 9:10). This reveals the emotion of God, His pity even for the spiritually weak, and how this triumphs over His judgment. Ezekiel speaks as if God's people had already gone amongst the nations; he may have in view the ten tribes as well, for it was God's intention to regather them along with Judah.

Ezekiel 36:22 *Therefore tell the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I don't do this for your sake, house of Israel, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went*- Clearly although there had not been the intended repentance of the exiles in captivity, yet God by all means sought reasons, even excuses, to still restore His beloved people. And so He cites here the need to stop His Name being mocked as a reason for restoring Israel. As mentioned several times in this exposition, the final salvation of Israel under the new covenant is not because of their repentance or spirituality, but by grace alone, and because God respects the grace and pure love which is bound up in His Name / essential personality. It is this salvation of Israel by such pure grace that will cause the nations to gasp at God's love for His people: "I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes" (:23).

Hosea has shown how the Name of God involves both His gracious, loving salvation- and also His judgment of sin. These two poles are in some kind of conflict within Him, but His Name develops in that He comes down on the side of love and grace toward Israel. Therefore their salvation is not because of their repentance, but because of His Name. Because of Him and how He finally is. Is. 43:24,25 says the same: "You have bought Me no sweet cane with money, nor have you filled Me with the fat of your sacrifices; but you have burdened Me with your sins. You have wearied Me with your iniquities. I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins". Ezekiel talks about God's "Name", Isaiah "for My own sake". His Name is Him, He Himself, His very own "sake". But it is exactly this amazing grace that leads to repentance and being ashamed of our ways (:32). Earlier in Ez. 14 and Ez. 18 there have been appeals for

repentance, but there was no response. God now in any case forces through His plan for Israel, just as He does with us.

God had said He would destroy Israel and make of Moses a new nation. But He relented of that, and in Ez. 20:22 we see the picture of His internal struggle, working for His Name's sake, for the sake of the principles incorporated within His Name. So it is an intrinsic part of His Name and essential personality that He changes His judgments from pity. When the Psalmist of Ps. 109:21 asks for God's grace, He asks God to "do" or "work" for the sake of His Name, and not bring about a threatened judgment. Jeremiah likewise understood this and asks God to still be gracious to Israel despite their lack of repentance- through working for His Name's sake (Jer. 14:7). To save by grace was therefore working or doing according to His Name's sake, rather than according to human merit (Ez. 36:22). Thus by working for His Name's sake, the repentant exiles would come to 'know Yahweh' (Ez. 20:44), they would come to see who He essentially is. And He is revealed as the very opposite of a stone faced, unchanging, insensitive God, which was then the standard conception of a deity.

Ezekiel 36:23 *I will sanctify My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am Yahweh, says the Lord Yahweh, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes-* The returned exiles however did just what a previous generation had done before the exile. They profaned the Name (Ez. 36:20), the Sabbath and also the covenant and temple (Mal. 1:12; 2:10,11), in that they saw it all as mere religion, and the fire of a true relationship with the Almighty was smothered.

All the "I will..." statements allude to His Name, I will be who I will be. His revival of Israel is for the sake of that Name, and experiencing that Name makes us "know [experientially] that I am Yahweh". "I will sanctify my great name" (v 23); "I will take you...and gather you...and bring you into your own land" (v 24); "I will sprinkle clean water upon you" (v 25); "I will put my spirit within you" (v 27); "I will be your God" (v 28); "I will deliver you..." (v 29); "I will make the fruit of the tree" (v 30).

The taking of Israel out from the nations would lead to the nations knowing Yahweh's Name. This didn't happen in the 20th century. The idea is that they had been disgusted at the moral depravity of Israel, and this had reflected badly on their God. He appeared merely a God of judgment. But they would see His extreme grace in saving them without their repentance, and thus they would know His Name as it really is- of grace triumphing over the pole of judgment.

Ezekiel 36:24 *For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land-* Time and again in the context of the restoration it is emphasized that God would return to His exiled people if they returned to Him (Zech. 1:3; Mal. 3:7). And they didn't return to Him- most chose not to return to the land, and those who did for the most part did not return to their God in their hearts. The whole basis of Israel's covenant relationship with God was that if they were exiled from the land for their sins, they must repent and *then* God would return to them (Dt. 30:1-10). Yet God graciously states to the exiles: "I am returned unto you" (Zech. 1:16; 8:3). Here was grace indeed. Passages like Ez. 36:24-31 therefore speak as if God's grace to the exiles was effectively a new covenant- which has in essence been extended to us. Having stated the conditionality of His 'returning' to His people, and recognizing they hadn't fulfilled their part of the conditions- God all the same returns to them, such was and is His almost desperate desire for relationship with His beloved people. This is a lesson for us in our relationships with

others- to continue our acceptance and 'return' to them, even if they don't fulfill their part of the deal. For this, day by day, is how our God deals not only with us but with His weak and wayward people as a whole.

This verse repeats the words of the new covenant offer in Jer. 32:37. But they generally refused to be gathered from 'all nations'. This element of the new covenant is now articulated through the great commission, inviting people from all nations to the covenant; calling out of the nations a people for His Name.

Ezekiel 36:25 *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you-* A reference to the water which cleansed a woman from the uncleanness of her separation from her husband (Num. 19:9 Heb.). Israel have been likened to a woman unclean by reason of menstruation in :17. We note throughout that the initiative is with God in this work of cleansing. They were taken from among the many nations that comprised Babylon / Persia; they were brought, as many as could be bothered to go, to their own land. They were cleansed there (s.w. Ezra 6:30; Nehemiah 12:30). But they became uncleaned through allowing Tobiah into the temple chambers, by trading on the Sabbath, and by marrying Gentiles (Nehemiah 13:9,22,30). The priesthood needed to be "cleansed" again (Mal. 3:3 s.w.). The promise of Ezekiel 36 sounds unconditional- as if, whoosh, God would make His sinful people righteous regardless of their own will. And so some have misunderstood the operation of God's Spirit in our own days. But although not directly stated, the promise of entry into the new covenant, whereby God would encourage obedience through the work of His Spirit, was conditional. Judah could have entered the new covenant there and then, with all its requirements for a Messiah figure to abrogate the Mosaic law. But they turned back to their uncleannesses, they would not keep God's statutes, and their potential Messiah figures failed to appear. Yet again, the promise of entry into a new covenant was deferred, to be fulfilled in a new Israel who are sprinkled through the waters of baptism. The promise was fulfilled, but in a far different context to that intended.

The word for "sprinkle" is nearly always used about the sprinkling of blood. The idea seems to be that blood will wash and cleanse as water does. The new covenant here was therefore confirmed and made operative by the Lord's blood, the blood of the new covenant. So as Paul says, His death confirmed the new covenant.

But ritual water sprinkling is nearly always used for the consecration of priests (Ex. 29:4) and Levites (Num. 8:7). And it was done by priests to priests. The priesthood was corrupted. So God Himself would be the priest, and would turn Israel into a nation of priests, as originally intended.

Ezekiel 36:26 *I will also give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh-* see on 1 Sam. 10:9. The new covenant involves God on His initiative giving His people a new psychology ("within you") that makes them obedient (:27). This same gift of a holy spirit is likewise available to all who accept the new covenant today. "Also" suggests that the new heart and spirit is given at the same time as the regathering of :25. The word is redundant otherwise. So it is hard to see the return of some Jews to Israel in the 20th century as fulfilling this, seeing this return wasn't accompanied by a change of their hearts nor entry into the new covenant. These prophecies play on the word *shub* meaning both to return and to repent. The return was to be associated with repentance. In Ez. 11:19 and 18:31, Israel had been told to get a new heart and spirit. They hadn't done so, and now God says that anyway, He

will give them this, as it were enforcing it upon them because He wants them for Himself.

This "new heart" matches the new covenant promise of Jer. 32:39: "I will give them one heart and one way". To sing "Lord, give me an undivided heart" is to ask for this to happen now. This again is without conditions. It is a heart transplant operation, unilaterally decided upon by God. "Out of your flesh" encourages us to imagine a literal heart transplant operation. This is how carefully and delicately God would work.

Hearts of flesh rather than stone imply sensitive, responsive hearts. This is what Hosea wanted from Gomer, and what God wanted from Israel. Hearts that were for Him, sensitive and not hard to Him. For love is sensitivity. 2 Cor. 3:3 alludes to this verse and applies it to the new covenant experience which we now have, and which Israel are yet to experience: "you are a letter of Christ, delivered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on tablets of human hearts... who made us adequate to be servants of a new covenant not based on the letter but on the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life... But their minds were hardened, for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains, because in Christ it passes away. But to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face seeing the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord, the Spirit".

The great restoration prophecies of Jer. 23:1-8 and Ez. 34:1-31 speak of the flock of Israel going astray due to bad shepherds, being saved by the good shepherd, being delivered / gathered, and then returning to the land. The Hebrew word *shub* means both 'to return' in the sense of returning to the land, and 'turning' in the sense of repentance. But these restoration prophecies are packed with allusion to the great shepherd Psalm 23. Here, David says that the good shepherd 'causes me to repent' (Ps. 23:3 Heb. "He returns / restores my soul"). This is matched in Ez. 36 by the idea of God *giving* Israel a new heart. And the Lord's amazing parable of the good shepherd (Lk. 15:1-7) brings together Ps. 23 and also these restoration passages, in speaking of how He goes out and finds the lost sheep and brings it back home. The sheep is found, and accepts being found- there is no actual mention of repentance. Thus the 'return' of Judah to their land was intended as a work of God- He would make them return, He would give them repentance [note how Acts 11:18 speaks of God granting men repentance]. This is all such wonderful grace. The even more incredible thing, though, is that Judah refused to accept this grace; they didn't 'return' to the land because they saw no need to 'return' to God. They willingly forgot that they were only in Babylon because of their sins; to 'return' to the land was a 'return' to God, which He had enabled. But they were like the lost sheep refusing to sit on the shepherd's shoulders, preferring to sit in a hole and die... and this is the warning to us. For truly, absolutely all things have been prepared for us to enter the Kingdom. It's only those who don't want to be there who won't be.

36:27 *I will put My Spirit within you*- This is the same idea as developed in the valley of dry bones prophecy, where God causes His Spirit to enter into Israel and revives them (Ez. 37:5). The Corinthians were given the Spirit potentially, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1). Like many today, they wasted the potential. And the same was true of Judah at the restoration. Ezra 9:9: "For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us [s.w. "put" my spirit] a reviving, to set up the house of

our God, and to repair the desolations". They revived the stones out of the heaps (Nehemiah 4:2). A new spirit was potentially given to them, God put in the heart of men like Nehemiah to revive the work (Nehemiah 2:12 s.w. "what my God put into my heart to do for Jerusalem"). But this didn't force them to be obedient. They chose not to be, and so the promised kingdom blessings of corn etc. were replaced by famines, in the times of Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi. Judah were forgiven at the restoration; but they failed to live the life of response to that grace, and therefore the spirit did not continue with them.

And cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My laws and do them- God under the new covenant gives a spirit of obedience, He makes us obedient to Him. The same causative power is referenced in the many prophecies that Yahweh would "cause" the captives to "return", to repent, and then return to the land.

We notice the clear parallel with the new covenant of Jer. 31:33, which says that God would put His law within them; here, "my spirit I will put within you". The spirit of God is in His word, the law of Moses was intended to produce the spirit of Christ, ultimate spirituality. But God promises to instill this within His people, to make them internalize His perfect law. Jer. 31:33 continues: "And I will be their God, and they shall be My people". This is matched here in Ez. 36:28: "And you shall be my people, and I will be your God".

Ezekiel 36:28 *You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be My people, and I will be your God-* This restoration of the exiles in Babylon would be all of grace, for they had not repented. But many of them preferred to remain there, as did the ten tribes in the former Assyrian empire. Such huge grace was turned down. And it's the same today. God is thirsting to make people His obedient people, His Kingdom; and most refuse because the petty issues of material life block their vision of anything else, just as with the exiles.

This is the equivalent to the statement under the new covenant of Jer. 32:38, which states [with no command to obey God] that God will make Israel His people, and He their God. This differed from the original offer of the covenant in Jer. 7:23: "Obey my voice, and I will become your God and you will become my people". It is in the Spirit of Yahweh in Hosea concluding that somehow He will make His beloved Israel "His" even though they are unfaithful to Him.

Ezekiel 36:29 *I will save you from all your uncleanness, and I will call for the grain and will multiply it, and lay no famine on you-* There are many links discernible between Ezekiel and Zechariah, as they both prophesy concerning the same scattering and restoration of Israel. Here the connection is with Zech. 9:17 "Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids... how great is His goodness" (in forgiveness). This was potentially possible at the restoration, but as Haggai and Malachi reveal, there were instead famines and the potential blessing wasn't poured out.

The grace shown by God to His people, reflected in Hosea's grace toward Gomer, was especially shown to the exiled Jews in Babylon. By grace, Hosea and God granted forgiveness to their women in order to lead them to repentance (Hos. 2:16; 7:1). Hosea wanted to call Gomer and her children "my people", and to give them grain and all the good things that went with a marriage relationship (Hos. 2:24). But this is the very language of Ez. 36:24-31 about God's intentions for the restoration from Babylon- the people would be cleansed, called "my people", given grain and all God's blessings- in the hope that *then* they would repent and loathe their

immorality and unfaithfulness. Such is God's grace that His acceptance *leads to* repentance, rather than repentance being a condition of His grace and acceptance. Hosea's attitude to Gomer says it all.

But the exiles refused all this grace. And so as Haggai and Malachi records, the exiles had famine laid upon them. "Save" is *yasha*, component of 'Yahoshua', Jesus, Yah's salvation or saving. Finally this wonderful salvation was to be fulfilled in Him, and in we who say yes to it.

Ezekiel 36:30 *I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field, that you may receive no more the reproach of famine among the nations-* These are all blessings for obedience to the covenant. But that obedience as explained in the previous verses, is given by God directly upon their hearts. Their having the fruit of the spirit means that the physical land would respond in fruitfulness. This was the potential available for the exiles if they had repented; they would have returned to a land full of fruit. But most of them didn't return and those who did, didn't return to God in their hearts. And so as Haggai records, they experienced famine. But the words will have their main fulfilment at the time of the Lord's return and the full reestablishment of the Kingdom on earth. They don't apply to any usage of agricultural technology in 20th century Israel; that was a multiplication of harvest by human strength, whereas what is in view here is something miraculous, directly from God, and associated with the repentance of His people.

Ezekiel 36:31 *Then you shall remember your evil ways and your doings that were not good; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations-* Note the chronology. They are made obedient, by grace, and *then* they realize how wicked they have been and repent of it. The goodness of God leads them to repentance. It cannot be over emphasized that God is not facing off against man over an open Bible, and telling us that if we repent, then He will forgive us. Here we see God taking the initiative and forgiving Israel without repentance, cleansing their hearts, making them obedient- and that experience of grace leads them to repentance. On a far lower level, we see the same in our human relationships. A policy of 'Forgiveness upon repentance' rarely works; the grant of forgiveness, frankly and sincerely, is that leads the sinner to repentance and restored relationship.

The self loathing for sin is spoken of in Ez. 20:43. The idea originally had been that the remnant would repent in exile and then be restored. But they didn't. And so the Divine hope was that by restoring them in impenitence, they would remember their sins and loathe what they had done. It's the same reason why Jesus broke His bread with as yet impenitent sinners- because He as a doctor was trying to bring sinners to repentance. We note that it was the exiles with Ezekiel who were to loathe themselves for their pollutions, or that was the intention. It was they there in exile who were still offering their children to their idols, "to this day" (Ez. 20:31). Their self loathing uses the word translated "grieve" regarding God's grieving for Israel's idolatry in the wilderness (Ps. 95:10). They would come to see their sins as God saw and felt them; that is part of repentance. But initially it had been God's plan that they would grieve or loathe their sins whilst in captivity in Babylon (s.w. Ez. 6:9). But then the plan in Ez. 20:34-38 was different; seeing they had not done so, they would be forcibly brought out from Babylon into the undefined "wilderness" situation, where God would purge the rebels from the rebellious house, and then the remnant would be allowed to return to the land; and only then would they loathe themselves for their

sins. But now in Ez. 36:21 the grace was extended even further- it was after the restoration of the kingdom conditions in the land that they would be thus provoked to loathe their former sins. God's grace is such that He amends His plans if by any means He might save some. He has that same passion for human salvation today.

The chronology is in sharp contrast to that of the old covenant in Lev. 26:40-42: "If they confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers... and also recognize that because they walked contrary to Me, ... if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled, and they then accept the punishment of their iniquity; then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham; and I will remember the land". Here, there is no "if... then". God will circumcise their heart, remember the [re]newed covenant made to Abraham and the fathers, and only *then* will they confess their sins. This is proactive grace extraordinaire. And this is the same chronology of Jer. 31:18,19: "Turn me, and I shall be turned; for You are Yahweh my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I struck on my thigh: I was ashamed, yes, even confounded".

Ezekiel 36:32 *Not for your sake do I this, says the Lord Yahweh, be it known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, house of Israel-* Having been unable to achieve their repentance in exile, God now tries another way. Instead of abandoning His program of restoration because of the lack of repentance, He offers to restore them anyway by pure grace, in the hope that this would be appreciated and elicit from them an appropriate shame. But even this was refused by most of Judah and the ten tribes; they preferred to remain in the world rather than participate in the restored Kingdom of God. "Ashamed and confounded" is the same Hebrew phrase used by Ezra in his prayer at the restoration (Ezra 9:6). He was taking note of Ezekiel's prophecy here, but the majority didn't. The term is also used of condemnation at the last day (Ps. 70:2; Is. 41:11; 45:16); in repentance, we are to recognize that our condemnation would be just, and as it were feel as if we are condemned at the judgment seat; and thence we shall know the wonder of forgiveness, salvation, and the change of verdict which Romans 1-8 speak of.

"Do I this" suggests immediately, NET "I am about to act"; see on :8. God was about to do this. But the exiles wasted such huge potential. The implication of :37 in the NET is that these things would happen if Israel asked for them. God had opened that possibility, He had allowed them to ask for them. But they didn't: "This is what the sovereign LORD says: I will allow the house of Israel to ask me to do this for them: I will multiply their people like sheep". All the stress that "I will..." do these things was conditional upon the exiles wanting it.

Ezekiel 36:33 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In the day that I cleanse you from all your wickedness, I will cause the cities to be inhabited and the waste places shall be built-* There is a connection between Judah's forgiveness and the rebuilding of the land. The returned exiles were forgiven, they did rebuild... but they didn't repent, despite this huge initiative of God's grace. The suggestion here could be that the rebuilding would be achieved miraculously. Perhaps the latter day fulfilment of this will be in the new Jerusalem literally coming down from God out of heaven, ready built (Rev. 21:2).

Ezekiel 36:34 *The land that was desolate shall be cultivated whereas it was a*

desolation in the sight of all who passed by- "Cultivated" is the word used of how Adam before the fall was intended to "till" the *eretz* (Gen. 2:5,15). And :35 specifically talks about Eden. The final fulfilment will be at the Lord's return, when the original situation in Eden shall be restored. To claim this applies to Jewish settlers cultivating the land of Palestine in the latter half of the 20th century is to wrest this passage completely out of its context. And contrary to what many seem to think, Palestine was not "desolate" before their arrival. The British Census of Palestine recorded Jerusalem as having a population of 157,000 in 1944.

Ezekiel 36:35 *They shall say, This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden-* One of many hints that Eden was in fact the *eretz* promised to Abraham. The restoration of Israel makes it clear that this prophecy has its major fulfilment in the last days, when the Kingdom is established physically upon earth. In any case, there were no previous examples of this happening- and God's word shall come true.

And the waste and desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited- "Ruined [Heb. 'beaten down'] cities" is the phrase specifically used about what Babylon did to Judah (Is. 14:17). They really could have been fortified by God at Ezekiel's time. They would marvel at this because the rebuilding was to be miraculous, perhaps a literal miracle was potentially in view; the latter day fulfilment of this will be in the new Jerusalem literally coming down from God out of heaven, ready built (Rev. 21:2).

Ezekiel 36:36 *Then the nations that are left around you shall know that I, Yahweh, have built the ruined places and planted that which was desolate. I, Yahweh, have spoken it, and I will do it-* Ezekiel's prophecies of Israel's regathering had their primary fulfilment in the restoration. The other nations that the Babylonians had placed in Israel would "know that I the Lord build the ruined places", by the miraculous rebuilding of the temple amidst great opposition and against all odds. But the idea of :37 seems to be that this would only happen if Judah prayed for it.

Ezekiel 36:37 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: For this also will I be inquired of-* Previously, as noted on Ez. 20:3,31, they had not been permitted to inquire of God. The elders who came to Ezekiel are in the same category as those in Judah who did not seek / inquire of Yahweh, although they did externally (Jer. 10:21). We can pray and come to God's word, when in reality we are not doing so from our whole heart and are doing this simply on the level of religious interest rather than wholehearted devotion. They would only 'find' God if they 'sought' with their whole heart (Jer. 29:13). But now in the new covenant, they would seek God with their whole heart and so inquire of Him.

This could be the end stress of this section. All this unconditional making of Israel righteous, changing their heart- had to be asked for. It was theirs for the asking. And they didn't even want it. But we surely do. And so the new covenant is offered to us and we are taken out from the nations for the sake of His Name.

By the house of Israel, to do it for them. I will increase them with men like a flock- The idea may be that all this great potential would come about if Israel really prayed for it. "The house of Israel" suggests Israel and Judah would unite at the restoration, as envisaged in several of the restoration prophecies. "Inquired" could as well be translated 'worshipped'. Israel will eternally worship God for His grace. The original text however is unclear. Some variants of the Hebrew and LXX read: "I will also further reveal My grace to the house of Israel, in that I will multiply their people

as a flock" [see the Russian Synodal version]. This fits admirably with the theme of grace which dominates the chapter.

Ezekiel 36:38 *As the flock for sacrifice, as the flock of Jerusalem in her appointed feasts, so shall the wasted cities be filled with flocks of men; and they shall know that I am Yahweh-* There is a parallel between the men and the flock. They were to respond to all this grace by becoming living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1).

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 37

Ezekiel 37:1 *The hand of Yahweh was on me and He brought me out in the Spirit of Yahweh, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones-* The Spirit comes into these bones, thus continuing the teaching of Ez. 34:25 and chapter 36, that God will give a new heart to latter day Israel. "The valley" suggests a specific valley in view, and I suggest in the latter day fulfilment, it is the valley of Armageddon. Although initially it was the valley near the Chebar of Ez. 3:22, from where the exiles could have been revived. They were being offered a new deal, a new covenant seeing they had broken the old one, which would be eternal in that they would be given a new heart (Ez. 36) which would never again be able to sin: "I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will place them and multiply them and will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore" (Ez. 37:26). As discussed on Ez. 36:8, that generation could have been revived and those of Rachel's children slain by the Babylonians (Jer. 31) could have been resurrected. Hence the connection with the valley / plain where the exiles were currently located as Ezekiel gave this prophecy. These are the bones in the pot of Ez. 24:1-14, boiled dry by the Babylonian invasions; they are specifically, initially, relevant to the exiles with whom Ezekiel was sitting in the Chebar valley. The bones are unburied, suggesting they had been slain in wartime and not the death of old age, and not given any burial rites. This was the curse for breaking the covenant in Dt. 28:26, specifically applied to those who went into exile in Jer. 34:20, that Israel's bodies would be left unburied on the open fields of the valleys. Jeremiah laments that many Jews were left unburied by the Babylonians. They had broken the covenant- but God was going to force through the fulfilment of the new covenant with them. The figure is reversed two chapters later, when Gog's army is left as unburied bones in a valley. This vision primarily concerns the exiles with whom Ezekiel was and the possibility of a reversal and resurrection at that time. After the news that Jerusalem has fallen arrives with the exiles in Ez. 33, the rest of the prophecy from Ez. 34-37 is full of positive new covenant blessing. The judgment for their sins had happened, as predicted by Ezekiel earlier in his prophecy. But it seems God was now going to force through the new covenant with them, even to the point of resurrecting and saving them. Hosea has said the same, speaking of how God will ransom Israel from the power of the grave (Hos. 13:14), and raise up Israel "on the third day" (Hos. 6:1-3).

Dan. 12:2 may appear to contradict this, by speaking of how although "your [Daniel's] people" would be delivered (Dan. 12:1), there would be a resurrection where some receive eternal life and others "shame and everlasting contempt". But those terms "shame" and "contempt" are often used of the Gentile nations around Israel and Judah; possibly those resurrected to shame are the Gentile abusers of God's people during their exile. It was those nations who had shamed and despised [s.w. "contempt"] Israel and Judah in exile (this is stated very often, s.w. Neh. 1:3; 2:17; 4:4; 5:9; Ps. 44:13; 79:4; Is. 4:1; 25:8; Jer. 24:9; 29:18; 44:12; 51:51; Lam. 5:1; Ez.

5:14; 16:57; 21:28; 22:4; 36:15; Dan. 9:16; "reproach" is s.w. "shame"). Those who had shamed and reproached God's people would be the ones who experience shame and reproach at the day of judgment at the resurrection. Thus Ps. 79:12 "Render unto our neighbours sevenfold their reproach wherewith they have reproached". This will come true at their judgment at the resurrection. Thus Egypt will finally have "shame and reproach" (Is. 30:5) as will Edom (Jer. 49:13), the very words here used of the shame and reproach given to those rejected after resurrection to judgment.

But there can also be a specific latter day application of these things. The bones in that valley connect with the picture developed in chapters 34-36 of the final destruction of Israel and the people in the land just before the Lord's coming. The earthquake associated with their revival (:7) is that which brings down the cities of the nations in Revelation, and is perhaps also referred to in Zech. 14 as occurring when the Lord Jesus sets foot on earth. The significance of the earthquake is totally missed by those who misinterpret the vision as referring solely to the national revival of the state of Israel in the 20th century. I suggest that the vision of Ezekiel 37 speaks of their literal resurrection and a new heart being given them. Ezekiel 39 then speaks of a revived Israel burying the multitudes of their invaders in the valley- surely the same valley is in view. What they did to Israel shall be done to them, as the prophets frequently say will happen.

Elsewhere in these notes on Ezekiel I have commented that there are multiple allusions to the garden of Eden. This is to be restored on earth at the Lord's coming. The idea of bones becoming a living person very much alludes to the creation of Eve, the first Biblical reference to "bones" (Gen. 2:23). The symbology is appropriate to the restoration of Eden which is to come at the Lord's return, and not to the Zionist creation of the state of Israel in the middle of the 20th century. See on :6. The recreation of a body into which the spirit is breathed likewise alludes to Gen. 2:7.

Ezekiel 37:2 He caused me to pass by them all around: and, there were very many in the open valley; and, they were very dry- God as it were augmented the pile of firewood by adding the bones out of the boiled dry cauldron to it (Ez. 24:5). The resurrection and revival of these dry, charred bones in Ez. 37 is therefore all the more miraculous, just as in Ez. 15 the charred vine twigs were to be revived and used by God. The language of the restoration is used of us in the New Testament; this is how amazing is His ability to use we who were rendered worse than useless by sin. We see here the power of the Spirit and the prophetic word to revive that which was totally destroyed. They are later called "these slain" (:9); and so these "very many" bones are initially talking about those slain during the Babylonian invasion and capture of Jerusalem: "You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled its streets with the slain" (Ez. 11:6).

Ezekiel 37:3 He said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? I answered, Lord Yahweh, You know- This continues the idea of Ez. 33:10, where Israel pine away in their sins and ask "How should we then live?". The question is whether Israel can really be forgiven of the enormity of their sins. The revival of the bones therefore speaks of their forgiveness and spiritual restoration, rather than the faithless creation of a Zionist entity by a group of Jewish agnostics and Eastern European atheists which happened in the 20th century. God's response in Ez. 33:11 is to say that Israel must turn from their sins and "live". Beginning in Ez. 34 we saw however that God as it were gives up on the idea of Israel repenting and decides to send His Spirit into

them, binding them into the new covenant- grace indeed. Here we see the same- the Spirit is sent into the bones and they are revived, made to live; rather than them coming to spiritual life themselves.

Over 45 times we read the word "life" in Ezekiel. Usually the context is that the repentant and righteous will live, but the disobedient will die and not live. And Israel were disobedient. Yet they would be made to live by God's grace shown through the work of His Spirit. That is what the new covenant is all about; the reversal of condemnation by grace and His Spirit. Paul in Romans develops this point- that God's grace works out through the work of His Spirit. His grace, *charis*, is the word used for the gift of His Spirit. This promise of life to dead bones is the answer to Israel's miserable complaint that they were dead in sins: "Our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we waste away because of them, how can we live?" (Ez. 33:10-11). And the promise of the Spirit is likewise the answer to those who feel hopelessly dead in sins. God didn't want them to die but to live, and so He had urged them to repentance (Ez. 18:32; 33:11; cp. 3:16-21). But they chose death over life. But by grace He still gives them life.

The revival is now, but it will come to full term at the resurrection of the body. The resurrection, future aspect to the promise is what helps us cope with the fact that our spiritual transformation now is clearly so incomplete and partial. Speaking of the same work of the Spirit, Paul can say that we see in a mirror in darkness, with just partial transformation of our image, just some parts changed and just seeing / knowing some parts of Him; but then in completion, face to face.

Ezekiel 37:4 Again He said to me, Prophesy over these bones, and tell them, you dry bones, hear the word of Yahweh- Note the parallel between God's Spirit and His word. Ezekiel appears to represent the latter day Elijah who will bring about this resurrection and revival through his latter day ministry; and again, this speaks of the latter days, not of Israel's political fortunes in the 20th century. The grace of it all is in the fact that dry bones can't hear God's word, neither can the dead exiles whom the bones represent. So obedience is not the basis for God's action- as so often stated, it is because of His Name, His essential love for Israel.

The idea of dryness has been used earlier in Ez. 17:9,10 for how Judah had been a healthy vine that was now dried up. The same figure is in Ez. 19:12 "it was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up its fruit. Its strong rods were broken off and withered". Likewise the idea that "our hope is lost" (:11) has been used in Ez. 19:5 of how the lioness of Judah "saw that she had waited and her hope was lost". Ezekiel is saying that his prophecies of condemnation and permanent destruction of God's people were going to be reversed. By the grace of the new covenant; and, as he labours, not because Israel had repented but because of the grace associated with God's Name. God's Name, as Hosea explains, involves a struggle between the pole of His grace and that of His judgment, with His love and grace finally winning out.

Ezekiel 37:5 Thus says the Lord Yahweh to these bones: I will cause spirit to enter into you, and you shall live- God takes the initiative; He no longer awaits their revival on their own initiative (Ez. 33:11), now He causes His Spirit to enter and transform them; and this is the token of the new covenant which we too have entered by grace. Ezekiel 37 had its primary fulfilment in the return under Ezra. Then, Israel was given "a quickening" (Ezra 9:9 LXX), in fulfilment of how the dry bones in captivity were revived. At that time, Judah *could* have fully revived. But most of them chose to stay in Babylon. And so the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied. But this gift of the

Spirit is part of the promise of the new covenant, the new heart and spirit of Jer. 30,31; Ez. 20,36 etc. And God is willing to give that to all who enter it by baptism today.

We note that what happens here had been Ezekiel's personal experiencing at the time of his first calling (Ez. 2:2). The Spirit had entered him, and he stood upon his feet to serve Yahweh. All Israel were going to have the same experience- on a national level, they were to become Yahweh's servants as much as Ezekiel had been.

Ezekiel 37:6 I will lay sinews on you, and will bring up flesh on you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am Yahweh- The language of creation; see on 37:1 *bones*. It could be that the literal resurrection of those slain by the Babylonians was in view. But this was transferred to refer to the spiritual enlivenment possible for those within the new covenant. The sinews of flesh are perhaps intended to contrast with how Israel had previously had "iron sinews" (Is. 48:4); the idea is that now they had been given a heart of flesh, a soft heart to God's ways, rather than a hard heart. Many times, Israel had been bidden "know Yahweh", to have relationship with Him- and they had refused. The work of the Spirit however is to make them "know Yahweh" (:13,14 too). This is part of the same theme of Ez. 36- a new heart and Spirit will be given to God's people, apparently without their requesting it. The vision clearly speaks of the bodily resurrection of the last day [if scripture interprets scripture, that conclusion is unavoidable], but also of spiritual revival now. This is exactly the position we are in. The resurrection to eternal life is related to our possession of the Spirit now- "if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11). Therefore those "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for... the redemption of our bodies" at the resurrection (Rom. 8:23). Just as the Lord Jesus was put to death in the flesh but was made alive by "the Spirit of Christ" which He had in His life (1 Pet. 3:18).

Ezekiel 37:7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. As I prophesied, there was a noise- This meant that the "whole house of Israel" was to stand up from their graves and return as a mighty army to the land. The "noise" is s.w. in Ezra 1:1 about the "proclamation" of Cyrus for Judah to return to the land. All of God's people didn't return; the majority preferred to stay in Babylon.

And an earthquake- Heb. 'a shaking'. The cherubim spoke of God's people. The sound of the cherubim Angels which Ezekiel heard was like the noise of an earthquake (Ez. 3:12 LXX). Now he hears the "noise" of "shaking" or earthquake as the bones of Israel in exile come together by the spirit / Angelic operation of Yahweh (Ez. 37:7). The same word is used about the latter day events in Israel when the latter day 'king of the north' invades (Is. 9:5; 29:6; Jer. 10:22; 47:3). And the same word is soon to be used in Ez. 38:19 for the earthquake which will happen when Gog is destroyed, and which will happen at Christ's return to save a Jerusalem which has fallen to her enemies (Zech. 14:5). They may well refer to the same event- for events will happen quickly at the time of the Lord's coming and the meaning of time may well be changed. See on :9.

And the bones came together, bone to its bone- There was to be a unity between the ten tribes and Judah, brought about by the experience of repentance, forgiveness and the work of God's Spirit. But this didn't happen at the restoration from Babylon; the nobles continued to oppress the people.

Ezekiel 37:8 *I saw, and, there were sinews on them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them-* See on :6. The Divine intention had been that the exiles repented, and then He would return them to Zion, having miraculously judged Babylon and also released the ten tribes from their captivity. But they wouldn't repent, and so God brought them back to their land anyway. This perhaps is the significance of the bodies being rebuilt but still lacking the Spirit / breath. Yet the allusion is clearly to the creation of Adam, who was likewise created and then given the Spirit. This is to be Eden restored, a new creation. But the exiles stubbornly refused all this. The whole prophetic scene here has been transferred to our days, when any man in Christ is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) and filled with the Spirit within. And this is to happen nationally to Israel in the last days.

"No breath in them" references similar statements about idols. Israel had become like that which they worshipped, and yet even from that hopeless situation, God was able to revive them. Just as in Hosea, His people had refused His overtures and turned to idols, but still He wanted them as His own- and He would get them, through His Spirit.

Ezekiel 37:9 *Then He said to me, Prophecy to the wind, prophecy, son of man, and tell the wind-* God makes His Angels spirits / winds. Is this the command to Michael, Israel's Angel which comes into action for them in the last days (Dan. 12:1) to start to revive Israel? He is called forth from his exalted place dwelling between the four cherubim Angels. The language is reminiscent of that in Gen. 2:7, where the Angel breathed into man the breath of life, which caused him to stand up upon his feet (cp. Ez. 37:10)- and here the Angel is being asked to do the same, to Israel. Further connections between the "wind" and Israel's Angel are in Jer. 4:11-13.

But the meaning in reality is that the prophetic word was to be the source of the Spirit entering into the repentant exiles, if they repented. For the wind / spirit / breath is presented as under the control and bidding of Ezekiel the prophet.

Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Come from the four winds, breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live- The Spirit came from four places (Ez. 37:9)- just as there were four cherubim. As the sound of the cherubim was as of a great army (Ez. 1:24), so revived Israel stood up as a great army (Ez. 37:10). The Angel cherubim would work with God's disillusioned and broken people, to revive them, so that they would become like the guardian Angels of Israel above them. The point was that the Angel cherubim system which Ezekiel had seen at work amongst the captives was able to gather them together, and give life to the nation. And yet that didn't happen to those exiles- because they didn't walk in step with the spirit. The potential was that just as the exiles had been scattered to the four winds, so they would be spiritually revived wherever they were, and brought to Zion.

The revived bones represent those who had been "slain", the children of 'Rachel' for whom she wept because they were not. The slain Jews could have been resurrected then; but the whole program has been deferred to our last days.

Ezekiel 37:10 *So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up on their feet, an exceedingly great army-* See on :9. The potential was that God would have used them as an army to destroy Babylon; " You are my battle axe and weapons of war: and with you will I break in pieces the nations; and with you will I destroy kingdoms; and with you will I break in pieces the horse and his rider; and with you will I break in pieces the chariot and him who rides

therein; and with you will I break in pieces man and woman; and with you will I break in pieces the old man and the youth; and with you will I break in pieces the young man and the virgin" (Jer. 51:20-22). The Jews who had been slain by the Babylonians would be resurrected and in turn become a mighty army who would judge Babylon. This is the meaning of the repeated "with you...". The strong emphasis upon 'breaking in pieces' recalls the little stone of Dan. 2 cut out from the great mountain (Babylon) which was to destroy the kingdoms of men then dominating Israel and become a great kingdom of God on earth. This potential didn't happen; but it shall do finally in the last days.

Ezekiel had experienced the same personally, in the same "valley" (see on :1). He had been as dead, and the Spirit came to him, revived him, and set him on his feet to do God's work (Ez. 2:2; 3:24). His physical revival was to be that of Israel. A literal resurrection is therefore in view here, regardless of what other dimensions there are to the revival. The two stage re-creation here, forming the dead body and then putting spirit into it, recalls man's creation in Gen. 2:7. Here we have a new creation, realized now when we are "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17); and yet clearly looking ahead to the "not yet" of literal resurrection and transformation at the Lord's return. Physical, literal resurrection is so clearly in view here; limiting it to some highly doubtful connection with Israel's becoming a state in 1948 seems to miss so much. The two stages are also seen in Ezekiel's personal experience; he fell on his face as dead, but then the Spirit of God entered him and he stood up as God's prophet and priest (Ez. 1:27; 2:2). He became representative of what God was to do to all Israel.

Ezekiel 37:11 Then He said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are totally cut off- The valley of dry bones vision in Ez. 37 depicted Israel in captivity as bones waiting to come together and return to the land as a great army. Jer. 8:1 and other passages earlier in Ezekiel (Ez. 6:5; 24:4) had described both Judah and Israel as dry bones. The feeling of those bones was that "our bones are dried and our hope is lost" (Ez. 37:11). Judah in captivity felt that they had no "hope", that God had cast them off, and that they were unable to have a full relationship with Him outside the land. However, it seems that this was a rather convenient piece of theology for them- they were doing well in Babylon, and despite the opportunity to return to the land, they largely chose to remain in Babylon. "The whole house of Israel" repeats the great prophetic theme- that both Israel and Judah were to revive and return to Zion. But they would not (see on :22). The reason why this didn't happen is the same reason as to why people aren't revived today; the exiles thought they were just too far gone, they had lost their hope and were too lifeless to be revived, so they may as well remain in Babylon and live their lives out there, for better or for worse. This is exactly the reason why people refuse to accept the work of the Spirit in their lives today; they lack the faith to believe that from an apparently hopeless human situation, God can revive.

"Cut off" is a status defined in Ps. 88:5 as meaning God would never remember them again, they had died the death of Divine condemnation. This sets up the wonder of God's resurrection of these cut off, condemned, dead bones. Just as David in Ps. 88:5 felt during his life that he was at this point, so did they; but from that they were lifted up in the power and grace of resurrection. This is how low we have to get- a stage beyond merely mouthing the words "I know I'm a sinner". We have to feel condemnation, as Peter did as he wept bitterly in the darkness [both of which are the fate of the condemned]. But from there, we can be revived by the Spirit. The problem

was that the exiles in Babylon didn't feel "cut off", which precluded the great spiritual revival of the new covenant which was then potentially possible. It has been offered to us in our age. And so "cut off" suggests they were cut off from their people through condemnation (Num. 9:13), cut off from the temple, from the holy space of Israel [as they understood it], cut off from God, cut off from Israel as a people, cut off from the covenant. They had no "hope" of the Kingdom, they had lost it. The idea is of salation through resurrection even for the condemned of Israel. This is the grace of the new covenant. The Old Testament clearly teaches the condemnation of those who leave the covenant, and the salvation of those who abide in it. But just as the wages of sin is death yet we are quite illegitimately saved from this by grace in Christ, so it seems the historical Israel, at least up to the time of the end of the old covenant in Christ, shall be resurrected. By grace alone. And so all Israel shall be saved, and we share Paul's marvel at the depth of God's grace and eternal love for Israel. And that love is for us too under the new covenant.

There seems an allusion to Ps. 88:4-7, which implies that being cut off from God is permanent: "I am like a man who has no help, set apart among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom You remember no more- they are cut off from Your hand... Your wrath lies heavily upon me". But the point is that apparently irreversible condemnation in death can be reversed. Just as their wound was "incurable" but was cured; or as Hosea puts it, they had been mauled to death and consumed by the Divine lion, but would be resurrected. The wonder of it all is that Israel themselves considered they were beyond salvation. But God didn't and the new covenant is about His grace in saving them despite their belief that they were beyond saving. This is grace in its most radical form.

"Behold, they say..." continues a theme in Ezekiel- that God knows the very words of the exiles and the sayings they have. Ez. 12:21 is an example: "What is this proverb that you have about the land of Israel: saying, 'The days grow long, and every vision comes to nought'". Likewise Ez. 18:2: "What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you". See too Ez. 11:3; 33:24. The simple point is that the exiles, who felt forgotten by God, were to know that He looked carefully at their thoughts and heard all their words. And their depressive words were going to be mightily upended by His prophetic plan. This all provides comfort for those in depression and with the sense that God is distant.

Ezekiel 37:12 Therefore prophesy and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel- God really would have done this at the restoration from Babylon, but the exiles lacked the faith in these simple words. For them to be addressed with these words, we can conclude that it is spiritual revival which is in view. Although a literal resurrection may also have been possible then. The resurrection is presented here as happening before they enter the land of Israel. That resurrection would be by such grace that they would know Yahweh through it (:13); something which didn't happen in any figurative 'resurrection' of the state of Israel in the 1940s. Those Jews who emigrated to Israel in the 1940s and 1950s died without knowing Yahweh nor having any spiritual revival. "My people" is a hint that God has unilaterally accepted them again as His people. For during their great divorce, as explained in Hosea, God has called them lo-ammi, 'not My people'. But

He is as it were forcing through His purpose with them here, by resurrecting them and calling them "My people" once again.

Ezekiel 37:13 You shall know that I am Yahweh, when I have opened your graves, My people, and caused you to come up out of your graves- The opening of the graves precedes the coming into the land of Israel (:12). It cannot be that the opening of graves refers to a revival of Israel after the holocaust in Europe; for they did not then 'know Yahweh' before entering the land. Rather I suggest does this refer to the literal resurrection of Jews killed during the Babylonian invasions and perhaps also to those killed during the latter day desolation of the land. Radical Islam speaks of burying the bones of every Jew now alive in Israel. If this happens, then this prophecy will have a comfortable literal fulfillment. The way a revived Israel then bury the bones of their abusers in Ez. 39 would be a way of demonstrating that the judgments meted out upon Israel by her latter day enemies are then meted out to the invaders.

This whole section concludes with the comment that Israel would know Yahweh through being gathered back to the land through resurrection and spiritual transformation. This knowing of Yahweh means knowing His amazing grace. If indeed the historical Israel of the time are resurrected and transformed, they will spend eternity marvelling at His grace. Thus Ez. 39:28,29: "They shall know that I am Yahweh their God, in that I caused them to go into captivity among the nations, and have gathered them to their own land... neither will I hide My face any more from them; for I have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel". To have the Spirit is therefore to see God's face, to be in open relationship with Him because of the assurance that sin has been dealt with.

Ezekiel 37:14 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, Yahweh, have spoken it and performed it, says Yahweh- This alludes directly back to the vision of the Angel-cherubim's spirit being placed in the "wheels" of natural Israel in Ez. 1:20,21. The placing of the Spirit within them was to be associated with their return to the land; being "placed" there suggests God's work. This isn't what happened in the 20th century revival of the state of Israel; although that was not without significance. For the prophecies require an invasion of the land in the last days and suffering of Jews within it, and so they had to be gathered there for this to happen. The phrase "place you in your own land" is used in Is. 14:1 of the time when the Gentiles "shall be joined with them and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob". This is yet future, but it was potentially possible at the time of the restoration from Babylon. But sadly the Gentiles mocked Judah for continuing serving their idols, and were hardly encouraged to connect with the hope of Israel.

In the first context, the subjects of resurrection are those who had died outside the land. Clearly the exiles are in view. The vision is in the valley / plain, the same as that of Ez. 3:22 where the exiles were. Those who were dying in exile would be resurrected and return to the land- that is the message. They would be 'placed in their own land', or "I will bring you home". We could argue that they failed to realize this amazing potential. Or that this whole plan was reapplied to spiritual Israel. Or that quite simply, they will be resurrected by pure grace alone at the last day.

Ezekiel 37:15 The word of Yahweh came again to me, saying- The unity of God's people was and remains a major concern with God. The common experience of grace

and repentance was intended to unite Israel with the Gentiles (see on :14) and also to unite Judah with the ten tribes.

Ezekiel 37:16 *You, son of man, take one stick and write on it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions. Then take another stick and write on it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions-* Unity between Israel and Judah was a major dimension of the new covenant. "Joseph" is used here to make the point- he was the one separate from his brethren and in this sign, he is now joined to his brethren. There are many links discernible between Ezekiel and Zechariah, as they both prophesy concerning the same scattering and restoration of Israel. Here, the connection is with Zech. 10:6 "The house of Judah... the house of Joseph... they of Ephraim". There was envisaged a unity between Judah and Israel [Ephraim] at the restoration, but it never came about. And finally Zechariah breaks his sticks, as if to say the potential prophesied by Ezekiel was not going to happen in the restored community; although it shall come finally true in the last days.

There is a massive stress upon the unity which would be achieved under the new covenant. "The whole house of Israel" were to experience unity through the resurrection (:11). And now the acted parable of the united sticks is used to preface the dramatic presentation of Israel's spiritual revival under the new covenant. The word 'one' is used 11 times in Ezekiel 37:15–28 (verses 16 [2 times], 17 [3 times], 19 [2 times], 22 [2 times], and 24 [2 times]). This is a huge emphasis. This unity is predicated upon the one King who reigns over them represented by the one stick or ruling rod. This is the sceptre of Messiah, called "David" here in Ez. 37 because it suggests the resurrection of David, and the Messiah being his descendant: "there will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms" (Ez. 27:22). For those who have accepted the new covenant, unity under King Jesus is in fact a sign of being in the covenant. Whilst it is a case of "now but not yet", it is also so that actions of disunity with those in the covenant are actually a denial of that covenant.

Ezekiel 37:17 *Join them yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand-* The intention was that the prophetic word of Ezekiel would be the basis for the unity of God's people; this unity would happen through his hand. But they didn't take him seriously, and so this didn't happen at the time of the restoration. "Join" is the word used for the exiles joining or coming near to Yahweh (Ez. 44:16; Zeph. 3:2); as to this day, our connection with God becomes our connection with our brethren, and we cannot have one without the other. 'Becoming one' continues the allusions to the creation; it is the phrase used about "man" becoming one flesh through the union of Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:24). The joining together of the sticks matches the coming together of the dry bones, bone to bone is marched by stick to stick. The stick is really a ruling scepter; the idea is that the unity of God's people is connected with His reigning over them, being accepted as their Lord. Unity between His people is required for His Kingdom reigning over them. But again, it is now but not yet. We are to live in unity with all others in the new covenant, and the cup of the covenant is to be the bond of that. But unity between persons eludes us in this life, and we will only experience it under the Lord's literal kingship at His return when "we shall be changed".

Ezekiel 37:18 *When the children of your people shall speak to you saying, Will you not show us what you mean by these?-* Ezekiel performed the miracle before their

eyes. The message was obvious because the sticks were clearly marked (:16). Failure to understand God's word nearly always has a moral basis. They naturally recoiled at the idea of such unity with those whom they considered inferior. And so they make out that they don't understand, even though the explanation given in :19 is really only stating the obvious from what the miracle of the joined sticks had itself taught.

Ezekiel 37:19 *Tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his companions; and I will put them with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in My hand-* See on Ps. 80:2 and :18. Ezekiel's hand was to be seen as God's hand (:17 "in your hand"). The rods represented leadership and kingship; the hand of Ephraim was to no longer hold a stick, neither would Judah; God's hand would hold the united stick. There was to be a new, Divinely appointed kingship. ten tribes were all the same.

"I will take" is Heb. "I am about to take". We see here the huge potential that was available right then for the exiles. They wasted so much Divine potential; He so wanted to act to end the exile and resurrect those who had been "slain" (:9).

Ezekiel 37:20 *The sticks whereon you write shall be in your hand before their eyes-* The idea is that Ezekiel's hand was to be seen as representing God's hand (:17,19). They were to see with their eyes that in a miraculous way, God through Ezekiel's word could unite Israel and Judah with Him as king, holding the rod or stick which represented rulership. But as ever, petty parochialism meant that this great potential didn't happen at that time.

Ezekiel 37:21 *Say to them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations where they are gone, and will gather them on every side and bring them into their own land-* "Take... gather... bring" suggests they were to be assembled and then brought together back to Zion. This never happened with the exiles; the gathering together by the river Ahava (Ezra 8:15,21,31) was a very small fulfilment, but the majority weren't interested. The fulfilment therefore has to be in the last days. The same words "take... gather... bring" are found in Ez. 36:24, where this is to happen *before* they are sprinkled and given a new heart by the work of God's Spirit (Ez. 36:25,26). It is this new heart which would empower the exiles from whatever background to become "one nation" (:22). Unity is a gift of the Spirit, beyond our human achievement- but we must be open to receive it.

Ezekiel 37:22 *I will make them one nation in the land on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all; and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all-* "Make them one nation" suggests that unity is brought about by the work of God on men's' hearts; see on :21. This is the interpretation of how God made the two one stick (:19 s.w.). It was a psychological miracle of the spirit that He was willing to perform, just as the two sticks had miraculously become joined in Ezekiel's hand. Remnants of the 10 tribes had been taken into captivity along with the two tribes; it *could* have been that at the restoration, the difference between Israel and Judah was ended and one Messianic King reigned over them. This was likewise in view in Is. 11:13; Jer. 3:18; Hos. 1:11 etc.. But they refused. The majestic prophecy of Jer. 23:5-7 had prophesied that when Israel returned from Babylon, "the branch" would rise and save them "and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth", i.e. establish the Messianic Kingdom (cp.

Ps. 72:2; Is. 9:7). But Zerubbabel, the “branch-from-Babylon”, lead the people back from Babylon, half heartedly built a temple- which faithful men wept at, when they saw how feeble it was compared to that which should have been (Ezra 3:12). And then he beat it back to Babylon. Significantly, Neh. 7:7 describes Zerubbabel as being at the head of twelve leaders of the returning exiles, who are called “the people of Israel” (cp. Ezra 2:2).

Some of the ten tribes did return with Judah. Thus “the Jews” is used synonymously with “Israelite” (Neh. 2:10; 4:1; 5:1,8; 7:73; 12:47). 12 he-goats and 12 bulls were offered for “all Israel” in Ezra 6:17; 8:35. But still Judah and Israel remained divided; and no “prince” arose to fulfil the prophecies. The intended unity between God's people will only happen in the last days when they are bound together by their repentance and experience of forgiveness.

Ezekiel 37:23 Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will save them out of all their dwelling places in which they have sinned and will cleanse them. So shall they be My people, and I will be their God- Not serving idols is paralleled with no longer being divided (:22). Idolatry in whatever form leads to division amongst God's people. The existence of only one God is therefore a demand for total unity between His worshippers- for their whole hearts will be for Him and not for anything else. Paul, writing to those who thought they believed in the unity of God, had to remind them that this simple fact implies the need for unity amongst us His children, seeing He treats us all equally as a truly good Father: "If so be that God is one... he shall justify the circumcision by faith, and [likewise] the uncircumcision through faith" (Rom. 3:30 RV).

"Their dwelling places" are the places in exile to where they had been scattered. But they were the places in which they had sinned by idolatry. This supports the impression that the exiles whom Ezekiel was addressing were idolaters still at that time. LXX "out of all their backslidings", as in Hos. 14. Those slipping back hopelessly can be stopped from that by the power of God's reviving Spirit.

"They will be my people, and I will be their God" repeats the promise to Abraham of Gen. 17:7,8. Being God's people [through being made not to sin any more and to be faithful to Him] and Yahweh being their God is therefore a fulfilment of the promises to Abraham- which are the basis of the new or renewed covenant. Thus Peter perceives that those promises imply being "turned away" from our sins (Acts 3:25,26).

We must be aware that the idolatry mentioned here is the idolatry of the exiles with whom Ezekiel was living and working. For they were the ones 'defiling' themselves with idols, as Ez. 20:30,31, spoken to the elders of the Jewish exiles, is explicit: "Tell the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Do you defile yourselves in the way of your fathers? and do you play the prostitute after their abominations? Shall I be inquired of by you, house of Israel? As I live says the Lord Yahweh, I will not be inquired of by you".

Ezekiel 37:24 My servant David shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd. They shall also walk in My ordinances and observe My statutes and do them- This is clearly the same “prince” as referred to in Ezekiel 45-48. The restoration prophecy of Jer. 30:9 speaks of a returned Judah serving “David their king, whom I shall raise up unto them”- implying that David would have been resurrected at the restoration, if all had gone according to what was possible? But Zech. 6 offers other

potential fulfilments for the prince in Zerubbabel and Joshua; but these also didn't come about. And so the final fulfilment will be in the Lord Jesus. Likewise Cyrus could have been Yahweh's shepherd at the restoration (Is. 44:28). There were so many potentials possible, just as there are in our lives and those of so many. God's enthusiasm and interest in us given our failures as a race and His people... is so wonderful. He must be so thrilled when we at least try to respond and allow His plans to progress in us.

Ezekiel 37:25 They shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they shall dwell therein, they and their children and their children's children, forever: and David My servant shall be their prince for ever- Had Judah repented at the time of the restoration, a Davidic ruler would have been raised up, Zerubbabel is the most obvious candidate (see on Zech. 6). He would have reigned "for ever", perhaps for an age. But he dropped the baton, or at least Judah were unwilling for this scenario. And so the prophecies were reinterpreted and rescheduled for total and eternal fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. "The prince" of the envisaged restored temple in Ez. 40-48 refers to this same individual. "The prince" of Ezekiel 40-48 is hard to understand as an immortal being such as the Lord Jesus. "The prince" of Ez. 21:27 was Judah's last ruler- so "the prince" later in Ezekiel would appear to be a promise of a restored monarchy. Yet tragically, the royal family chose to remain in Babylon.

The restoration was to be associated with the appearance of a potential Messiah figure. This is a point repeatedly made in so many prophecies of the restoration. Take Is. 61:1-4: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison [Babylon] to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion [the "poor of the land" allowed to remain after the Babylonian invasion], to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness [cp. how they sat and wept by the rivers of Babylon]...And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations". And there are many other such prophecies which connect the appearance of a Messiah with the rebuilding of Zion. Haggai prophesied to encourage the people to get on with building the temple (Ezra 5:1), and yet he spoke of the desire of all nations (Messiah) coming with an earthquake and glory filling the temple (Hag. 2:7). I submit that this is a prophecy of what *could* have happened at that time, but it has been deferred to the second coming of the Lord Jesus. The cherubim visions of Ez. 1,9 and 10 are applied in the New Testament to the glorified Christ (Rev. 2:18; 1 Pet. 4:17; 2 Pet. 2:4-9). This surely implies that they were ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah; and perhaps we are to understand that they could have had fulfilment in a Messiah figure at the time of the restoration.

Ezekiel 37:26 Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will place them and multiply them and will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore- They had broken the old covenant, and so a new covenant was offered- which would last eternally and would achieve peace with God. It could only last eternally because the possibility of Israel breaking their side of it would be removed, through the work of the Spirit in their hearts. This would be the

fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, for it was those promises which spoke of their 'multiplication'. The promises to Abraham are to this day the basis of the new covenant, which we too can enter, although the exiles refused it. "My sanctuary" appears parallel with "my tent" (:27,28). The essence of this will finally come true as described at the end of Revelation- God will Himself dwell with men. In the context of the possible scenario at the exile, they could have witnessed this dwelling of God with them by building the temple system of Ez. 40-48, into which the shekinah glory of God would have entered to represent His dwelling with them. But they didn't build it as commanded, and so they precluded the possibility of all this.

Ezekiel 37:27 My tent also shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people- Although the exiles were commanded to build the temple of Ez. 40-48, they were to be aware that essentially God doesn't dwell in temples made with hands. He had always made that point by dwelling in a tent. And this is therefore brought to view again here.

Ezekiel 37:28 The nations shall know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary shall be in their midst forevermore- The sanctuary God envisioned originally was one which *His* hands made (Ex. 15:17; Ps. 78:69). The permission to build a temple with human hands was a concession to human weakness; although the word is used many times in Ez. 40-48 of the temple Israel were to build. But they refused to do so as commanded. The essence of the sanctuary was to be Messiah; He was to be a sanctuary for God's people (Is. 8:14). And this was and is how Yahweh shall eternally tabernacle with His people.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 38

Ezekiel 38:1 The word of Yahweh came to me saying- Ezekiel 38 must be understood within its context. Ezekiel was a captive in Babylon, and the book bearing his name records series of prophecies which he gave. Ez. 33:21 – 39:29 is a complete section within the book. I understand Ez. 33:21,22 to mean that Ezekiel opened his mouth and gave the six prophetic utterances in this section on the night before the exiles received the news that Jerusalem had fallen. It was on the fifth day of the tenth month of the 12th year of the exile (Ez. 33:21). Ezekiel's mouth was opened by Divine inspiration that evening, and he gave these messages through the night until the messenger arrived in the morning with the news that Jerusalem had fallen. Each of the six messages begin with the rubric "Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying...". The message has been that Judah shall enter a new covenant, although there will be terrible times of trouble and judgment for both her and her enemies. Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, and so it is understandable that the invasion described in chapter 38 alludes to the Babylonian invasion, but climaxing in the good news that Messiah's coming will save Judah and all Israel. The message was that the tragedy of losing Jerusalem was to be repeated again, on an even grander scale, in the last days- and yet it was to be but a prelude to Messiah's triumphal coming and the permanent establishment of God's Kingdom based in Israel. The various nations listed in Ez. 38 may well have been those who were confederate with Babylon in the historical invasion of Judah- this would have been their relevance to Ezekiel's initial audience of captives in Babylon. Ten nations from within the land are listed in total,

plus Persia- and Revelation speaks of an entity, a “beast”, dominated by Babylon but having ten horns, or powers, associated with it. These would correspond to the ten toes of the image of Daniel 2. The significance of the nations listed is that they are from every point of the compass around Jerusalem: Gomer and Togarmah from the North, Persia from the East, Cush from the South and Put / Tarshish from the West. The common description of the invasion of Judah by ‘all the nations round about’ thus comes to term in the prophecy of Ez. 38.

There *could have been* the restoration promised in Ezekiel 35-37, followed by the invasion by the surrounding nations in Ezekiel 38, and then the judgment of those nations and establishment of the restored Kingdom as detailed in Ezekiel 39, followed by an obedient Judah building and operating the temple of Ez. 40-48. Ezekiel 37 had its primary fulfilment in the return under Ezra. Then, Israel was given “a quickening” (Ezra 9:9 LXX), in fulfilment of how the dry bones in captivity were revived. At that time, Judah *could* have fully revived. But most of them chose to stay in Babylon. If there had been a full revival, then the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 would have taken place. It has been suggested that there was a primary fulfilment of Ezekiel 38/9 in an unrecorded invasion of the land at the time of the restoration. However, historical evidence for this is severely lacking. And yet the Scythian tribes such as Magog, Gomer, Meshech, Tubal etc. are all recorded as being the scourge of the Middle East at that time. They were marauding into more prosperous areas “to take a spoil”, especially “cattle and goods”, at around Ezekiel’s time. They could so easily have turned their attentions toward Israel. That invasion *could* have happened; but it didn’t. But because Israel were not faithful the temple was not built properly, and therefore the Ezekiel 38 invasion didn’t happen, and therefore Yahweh’s intervention and establishment of His Kingdom as described in Ezekiel 39 didn’t occur. In some ways, the Ezekiel 38 invasion and 39 defeat *could* have occurred but instead has been deferred until the last days... because through that invasion the establishment of the Kingdom is led into. This suggestion makes sense of the thorny problem of Ezekiel 38:11 stating that the invasion would come at a time when Judah would be living in unwallled towns, without bars nor gates, “at rest”- which is the very language of Jer. 30: 10, that the restored Judah would be “in rest and be quiet”. The same word is used in Zech. 1:11 to describe how the land was “at rest” when the captives returned to rebuild Zion.

We must also factor in that Haggai and Zechariah outline a scenario in which the Jewish exiles would rise up against Babylon / Persia, and before Zerubbabel the great mountain of Babylon / Persia would have become a plain. And so the image of Dan. 2 would have been brought down at that point.

Haggai 2:6 says that "Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land". In a "short time", God would yet once more (GNB) shakes the heavens and earth as He had done at Sinai. The potential was that soon after Haggai's words [in "a little while"] there would be direct Divine intervention involving earthquakes and the shaking of all nations (Hag. 2:7) to support the re-establishment of God's Kingdom in Israel under the Messianic rulership of Zerubbabel. This is also foreseen in Zech. 14, where the earthquake is seen as creating a new plateau upon which a new temple could be built. This plateau was also seen in the opening of the Ez. 40-48 vision of the commandments as to how to build the new temple complex. This could be brought about by the shaking / earthquake which could have come at the end of the Ez. 38 invasion: "in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel... all the men who are on the surface of the earth, shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall and

every wall shall fall to the ground" (Ez. 38:19,20). Had Judah accepted the new covenant offered to them in Ez. 33,34, they would have revived as in Ez. 37, the Ez. 38 invasion and earthquake would have happened and then on the resultant plateau, the new temple would have been built. Despite Judah's failures to engage with these things, Haggai and Zechariah were saying that if the people wanted, they could have the earthquake and temple. God really was trying to force through His saving purpose.

But it didn't happen then. Judah didn't repent, and Zerubbabel beat it back to Babylon. These words have therefore been reapplied and rescheduled, to the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross and to the final literal establishment of the Kingdom at His second coming; in this context they are quoted in Heb. 12:26-28.

Zech. 2:9 gives more possibilities: "For, behold, I will shake My hand over them"- an idiom for direct Divine action in the destruction of Babylon (Zech. 2:7). Although Babylon had fallen to Cyrus, he left the city intact. The total destruction of the city envisioned in the prophets didn't happen at that time- perhaps because God's people weren't ready to leave as they should have done. For the exit of the Jews from Babylon was envisaged as preceding Babylon's total destruction (Isaiah 13,48; Jeremiah 50,51). Although the people hadn't left Babylon, God now gives another scenario- they could leave now, and then Babylon would fall as predicted. Ezra leads another group from Babylon in response to this call (Ezra 7), but again there was very limited response to his efforts to get the Jews to leave. We marvel at God's desire to somehow make it all work out. We note too how what happens amongst nations is directly related to the readiness of God's people to respond. Thus the Persians reversed the decree to rebuild the temple because God's people didn't really want to build it. Darius could easily have failed to regain control of Persia and Persia would have fallen before Zerubbabel; had the Jews left Babylon, the city would have been reduced to rubble as prophesied.

Zech. 2:9 goes on to say that "They will be a spoil to those who served them". The NET brings out how immediately Persia was to fall by internal division: "I am about to punish them so that they will be looted by their own slaves", or "by those who were once their servants". This began to happen on the death of Smerdis as the subject tribes and territories began to rebel. The tribes of Ez. 38 could have risen to power and invaded the recently revived state of Judah. This was what could have happened and was set to. But Judah just didn't respond despite all God's enthusiasm, and so Darius stabilized the empire and it continued another 200 years. And the Scythian tribes were overcome by Darius rather than becoming strong enough to attack Judah.

Ezekiel 38:2 Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog- This chapter speaks of an invasion of Israel at some point after the Jews have returned to their land (Ezekiel 37) and before the establishment of God's kingdom on earth (Ezekiel 39,40). This latter day invader will be destroyed by Divine intervention. The language is clearly based upon the historical Assyrian: Ez. 38:4 = Is. 37:29; Ez. 38:7 = Is. 8:7; Ez. 38:8 = Is. 8:8; 10:3; Ez. 38:9,10 = Is. 28:2; 8:9,21; 10:3,7; Ez. 38:11 = Is. 37:24; Ez. 38:12 = Is. 10:6; Ez. 38:19 = Is. 30:27; Ez. 38:22 = Is. 29:6; 30:30; Ez. 38:19,20 = Is. 29:6; 30:25; Ez. 38:23 = Is. 10:15; Ez. 39:10 = Is. 33:1. See on :17; Ez. 39:3. Rev. 20:8 defines "the nations which are in the four quarters of the land" as being "Gog and Magog"; clearly the Ezekiel 38 Gog is being defined as the epitome

of the nations along the borders of Israel, who both historically and currently are Israel's main enemies.

Gog is a personal name, he will be the *rosh* or prince / caliph of the invading group of nations. The only Biblical Gog was an Israelite who went away from the core of Israelite worship and lived on the East of Jordan, and later assimilated into the Assyrian territories and lived on the banks of the Euphrates (1 Chron. 5:4-9,25,26). The Biblical Gog is therefore from the far northern boundary of the land promised to Abraham, the ends of the *eretz* / earth. Gog is described as coming from his homeland in the uttermost parts of the north (Ez. 38:15). His origin will be on the northern edge of the land promised to Abraham- which is the Euphrates River. This, then, is the location of Magog; which would explain why there are no cuneiform inscriptions bearing this name. It is simply the land of Gog, and its exact location is irrelevant- it's simply presented as a territory on the far northern border of the land promised to Abraham. We can look for the latter day Gog to be born somewhere along the Euphrates River.

The usage of the term Gog suggests that this invasion is being made and led by a false Israel. And we find that idea continued when the invaders are described as "a great company" (Ez. 38:4,7,13,15); yet the *qahal* is a term usually used about the congregation of Israel (Ps. 22:26; 35:18; 40:10,11; Ezra 10:1). Gog is "the chief prince" (Ez. 38:2), but this term is elsewhere used only of the chief princes of the tribes of Israel (Num. 10:4; 36:1). The invaders "come to a land", Israel (Ez. 38:8)- using the very expression used of how *Israel* were to "come to a land", that of Israel (Lev. 14:34; Num. 15:2; 34:2; Dt. 8:7; 17:14; 18:9; 26:1; 32:52). Likewise the beast / whore in Revelation is described in terms of Solomon's Kingdom, trading in the same goods, and associated with the number 666 as Solomon was (1 Kings 10:14). The point may be that the beast / whore system is a fake Israel, a mock Kingdom of God. Which fits ISIS and Islam. The anti-Christ doesn't mean so much 'against Christ' as 'that which appears as Christ', in the place of Christ. And likewise there is a fake Kingdom of God, a pseudo-Israel... which is what Islam created when Mohammed in the Quran twisted the Genesis record to make the Arab peoples 'Isaac' and the Jews from Jacob as 'Ishmael'. And this would explain why the codename for the leader of the invasion is Gog, an apostate Israelite who likewise lived on the Euphrates.

It's worth noting that some versions of the LXX in the apocryphal book of Sirach 48:17 speak of Gog coming to Jerusalem at the time of the Assyrian invasion at Hezekiah's time. This would definitely associate Gog with the leader of an Assyrian invasion. It's also interesting that the LXX of Dt. 3:1,13; 4:47 speaks of "Og king of Bashan" as "Gog". Bashan refers to the area of the Golan Heights- the northern entrance to Israel, on the border with Syria. This is exactly where the IS are building up their forces and this would be the logical invasion point into Israel.

Haman "the Agagite" is surely another prototype for Gog; Agag and Gog are very similar original words. The similarity is not simply in the similarity of the names. The "wicked device" or plan of Haman to destroy the Jews (Esther 8:3,5; 9:25) is described with the very same word used of how Gog thinks up an evil plan against Israel (Ez. 38:10).

We should note that "Gog" occurs in another place in the LXX, but not in the Masoretic Text: "Thus has the Lord God shewed me; and, behold, a swarm of locusts coming from the east; and, behold, one caterpillar, king Gog" (Am. 7:1). Israel's

enemies are typically described as coming from the north, because armies from Babylon and Assyria [to the East of Israel] would follow the transport routes along the Euphrates and then come down from the north into Israel- rather than marching across the trackless desert. But Gog is described as coming "from the east". This makes sense if Gog is a person, rather than a nation or army. His origin was to the east of Israel. The "locusts" whom he leads connect with the Assyrians being called locusts (Is. 33:4), and the locusts of Rev. 9:3,7 being paralleled with thousands of horsemen coming against Israel from the Euphrates. Before dismissing the LXX too quickly, remember that the vast majority of Old Testament quotations found in the New Testament are from the LXX, and that version is often preferred over the Hebrew [Masoretic] Text. Yet Amos intercedes: "Repent, O Lord, for this. And this shall not be, saith the Lord". This would suggest that the Gog invasion was conditional and was forestalled by the intercession of Amos; thus not only Ezekiel 40-48 would be conditional prophecy, but Ezekiel 38 and 39 also.

The chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him- I calculate ten nations in Ez. 38 [cp. the ten horns on the beast] on the basis that *rosh* is a proper noun meaning 'chief prince' and doesn't refer to any nation bearing the name *rosh*. There was no such nation. All attempts to force this word into equivalence with the Kievan *rus*, from whence 'Russia', are opportunistic and cavalier in the extreme. Because two words contain two identical letters when transliterated doesn't mean they are one and the same word. Further, I understand "Are you come to take a spoil?" in Ez. 38:13 to not be a challenge, but rather said with the implication 'Are you going to spoil them? We will come too!'.
In Ezekiel 27:13, Meshech and Tubal are mentioned as being sellers of slaves to Tyre; and in Ezekiel 32:26, they are spoken of as "instilling terror in the land of the living." Meshech is thought to be a people called the Moschi dwelling in the Caucasus mountain regions according to Assyrian inscriptions. Tubal is thought to be a people called the Tibareni dwelling on the Southeast shores of the Black Sea [perhaps from whence modern Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia]. But whoever they were, they were connected with the nations of Genesis 10; for all the nations of Ez. 38 are found in that list. We note that none of the descendants of Shem in Gen. 10 are found here in Ez. 38. The nations of Gen. 10 were all peoples within the *eretz* promised to Abraham; the area which was flooded and then repopulated after the flood, which is the context of Gen. 10.

Ezekiel 38:3 And say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal- "Chief prince" means just that; it is facile to try to interpret "rosh" ["chief"] as a proper noun. The word occurs very many times in the Bible and simply means "chief". The same phrase chief prince" often occurs about the princes of the tribes of Israel (Num. 1:16; 7:2; 10:4; 36:1 etc.).

Ezekiel 38:4 I will turn you around- There are many similarities between Assyria and the Gog invasion. The two invasions of Gog (or three? Ez. 38:4,8,10; or four if v. 4 implies two invasions: "I will turn you back... and bring you forth"- again) find their basis in Assyria coming up several times before the final onslaught on Jerusalem.

We naturally want to know who precisely the specific nations refer to. But readers of Ezekiel will have been struck by the fact that a number of the nations listed have already been mentioned in Ezekiel- in prophecies which predict or describe their destruction. Tyre (Tarshish), Meshech and Tubal have all been described as having

come to their end (Ez. 27:13; 32:5,26,27). The impression, therefore, is that there will be a latter day *revival* of these nations. And that is what we are seeing happening in the lands around Israel, whose peoples and geographical areas were dormant and insignificant for centuries- until their revival in recent times. A coalition of those nations will arise which includes those territories or ethnic groups. And their intention is clearly and ultimately to invade Israel and destroy the Jews. Radical Islam is already in control of much of the *eretz* / land promised to Abraham. Indeed, Ez. 38:4 opens the prophecy by saying that God will 'return' Gog [AV "turn thee back"], and the Hebraism is well translated elsewhere as 'restore the fortunes of...'. A revived Gog means a revived Assyria / Babylon. The question is, why does Ezekiel not specifically mention Assyria / Babylon as the leader of this group of nations? Why refer obliquely to them as 'Gog'? The answer may be that because Ezekiel was a captive in Babylon at the time, he referred to them under this code name. Peter does the same in referring to Rome under the code name of Babylon (1 Pet. 5:13). It may be that some of the other nations mentioned in Ez. 38 are likewise code names- because it is very hard to conclusively demonstrate that some of the nations or peoples bearing exactly those same names existed in Ezekiel's time. The description of Gog's destruction in Ez. 39 is likewise hard to take literally, and this may mesh well with 'Gog' being used as a codename. See the later notes on Ezekiel 39.

Put hooks into your jaws, and will bring you out- Gog is manipulated with hooks in his jaws (Ez. 38:4-6). This alludes to how the Assyrians presented themselves in steles and other art forms as putting hooks in the mouths of those they conquered. The Zincirli Stele pictures Esarhaddon holding Egypt and Tyre by hooks in their jaws; Assyria "took Manasseh captive in hooks" (2 Chron. 33:11 Heb.). The point is, that what Assyria did to others is effectively being done to the latter day Assyrian by God. This is the very picture of Rev. 13:10- the beast who led God's people into captivity shall be taken into captivity by God at the last day, and hooks being put in the jaw is the very picture of captivity. Gog and his entity is the beast of Revelation. Indeed, the whole language of putting hooks in the jaws is based upon God's word to Assyria, that He would put hooks in their jaws and a bridle in their mouth (Is. 37:29)- as if they were an aggressive beast.

The idea is found far back in Gen. 27:40, where Jacob made a promise about the relationship between Jacob (Israel) and Esau (forefather of many of the nations living in the land promised to Abraham). Jacob predicted that although Esau would be beneath Jacob, there would come a time "when you shall have dominion [Heb. 'to trample down', which will happen when Israel and Jerusalem are trodden down by Esau's invasion of the last days, and will rule or have dominion over Jacob]; and you [Esau] shall break his [Jacob's] yoke from off your neck". This suggests that the families of Esau are again presented as a beast that must be controlled. Jacob's words have so far had no significant fulfilment; but they will do, however briefly, when the beast of Esau takes over Israel and dominates the Jews.

With all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed in full armour, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them handling swords- One cannot miss the emphasis in Ezekiel 38 on the many "horses and horsemen", and the type of armour described ("Bucklers and shields") gives the impression of many well armed cavalry men. Notice Ez. 38:15 too: "All of them riding upon horses". Why this emphasis on cavalry? The Angels are described as horse riders in Zechariah and Revelation; the horses in the chariots of Zech. 6 are also Angels), and there is the obvious connection

with the Angel-cherubim chariot. Further Angelic language is found in Ez. 38:20 "My presence"; Ez. 39:7 "The Holy One".

Rev. 9:14-18 describes how 200,000,000 horsemen came from just beyond the Euphrates (exactly where the jihadist hordes have come), using "fire and smoke and brimstone" to punish God's apostate people. This was John in the first century struggling under 'the tyranny of words' to describe modern warfare. "By these three was the third part of men killed", suggesting that this invading army has three aspects to its work. The huge number of horsemen must allude to the "great company" of horsemen of Ez. 38:4, which we have shown (:2) to be rooted in the Assyrian invasion. The 200,000,000 horsemen of Rev. 9:16 may correspond to the fact that history records the strength of the Assyrian army which came against Jerusalem as being 200,000 men. The jihadist culture is full of allusion to horsemen, seeing themselves as the revival of previous horse-mounted Islamic warriors. The motif is common in jihadist promotional videos. Jerusalem was truly "compassed with armies" by the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem, and perhaps the Lord has this in mind when He predicted that Jerusalem would again be like this in the last days.

Ezekiel 38:5 Persia, Ethiopia and Libya with them, all of them with shield and helmet- We note the lack of reference to Babylon and Assyria in the list of ten nations. The primary, potential application of the prophecy was to the repentant captives standing up as a great army in Ez. 37, destroying Babylon and returning to Zion along with the repentant ten tribes and the six nations of Ez. 26-32 who repent and "know Yahweh". They would come to a land made miraculously fruitful for them (Ez. 36). The nations listed here in Ez. 38 are those from all around the compass who then come up to invade the reestablished kingdom of God with its Messianic king. But the invasion is unsuccessful. This prophetic scenario however didn't happen, because the humans involved in it refused to repent. This invasion by various peoples and the Scyths, who were not confederate with the two contemporary power blocks of Babylon and Egypt, could have happened; but it didn't, and so the essence of it will be fulfilled in the last days. I have suggested on Rev. 20 that the Ez. 38 invasion is there described as happening around the return of the Lord Jesus. This would then be the scenario of Psalm 2, with the Lord Jesus enthroned in Zion, surrounded by His enemies, but easily destroying them.

I have explained elsewhere that the latter day beast with ten horns is to dominate the *eretz* / land of Israel, the area promised to Abraham from Egypt to the Euphrates. The ten toes of Daniel's image are rooted in the earth / land, and these are the basis for the ten horns in the later development of that vision in Daniel 7 and Revelation. This entity is dominated by a charismatic leader, the little horn; also expressed in Revelation as the whore riding the beast. In Ezekiel 38, we have ten nations plus Persia, led by an individual called Gog [reading *rosh* not as a nation but as "chief prince", as it is always elsewhere translated]. Those ten nations are all from within the land promised to Abraham, because they are extracted from the list of nations in the land in Genesis 10. The picture presented is of ten nations or leaders [horns, toes] from within the land promised to Abraham- perhaps to be fulfilled in an Islamic caliphate dominating that area, with ten leaders or factions or peoples under its control. *Plus* Persia- Iran. It's unthinkable given current geopolitics that such an invasion would happen and Iran would not get involved. They will- according to Ezekiel 38. It's also worth noting that Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish appear to join in the invasion as a separate entity. We are left wondering whether this has relevance to the three horns mentioned separately in Dan. 7:8,20,24.

Another approach is to consider that this refers to an entity of nations from immediately outside the land promised to Abraham, who are distinct from the nations within the *eretz* / land promised to Abraham. The nations of Ez. 38 who invade Israel after the Lord Jesus has returned are not those within the *eretz* / land / earth. They are those in the "sea" of nations immediately surrounding the "land" promised to Abraham. The geographical areas include therefore Iran, Egypt and Turkey. Thus when we read that Togarmah comes from "the north border [AV "quarters"]" (Ez. 38:6), this refers to the northern limit of the land / *eretz* promised to Abraham. Perhaps this is the equivalent of the "beast of the sea" of Rev. 13 which is presented as related to but separate from the "beast of the earth / land". We can look to these areas joining together under one charismatic leader, "Gog", to seek to repeat the invasion of the land and people of Israel by the latter day Assyria / Babylon. This is why although Assyria isn't mentioned, the invasion of Ez. 38 is full of allusion to the prophetic language concerning the Assyrian invasion [hooks in the jaws, etc.]. It will be a foolhardy repeat of the behaviour of the entity within the "land" / *eretz* which was destroyed by the Lord's coming. The invasion of Ez. 38 is clearly that of the "Gog" of Revelation, which occurs after the Lord's return and establishment in Jerusalem, when the people dwell securely in unwall'd villages- the language of the Kingdom. There is repeated emphasis that Elam [Persia] uses a bow and quiver (Is. 22:6; Jer. 49:35); perhaps a reference to Iranian usage of missiles against Israel. protected by a defensive shield and helmet (Ez. 38:5). Iran has developed missile technology to the point that they are a major exporter of military missiles; Iran has invested and developed missile technology [both offensive and defensive missiles] rather than an air force. This may be the latter day equivalent of the bows and quivers which feature in the prophecies about Persia.

Ezekiel 38:6 Gomer, and all his hordes- Gomer is thought to have been the Cimmerians, who occupied central Turkey in the days of the Assyrian empire [perhaps the forerunners of the Kurds, who came to live within the *eretz* promised to Abraham].

The house of Togarmah in the uttermost parts of the north and all his hordes; even many peoples with you- The names of the peoples mentioned are solely relevant to the land promised to Abraham. Thus when we read that Togarmah comes from "the north border [AV "quarters"]" (Ez. 38:6), this refers to the northern limit of the land / *eretz* promised to Abraham. The allusion to the Genesis 10 list of nations in Ez. 38 would therefore be to signal that the peoples of the land, the kings of the land, would come up against Israel in the last days- and the only outside nation who joins in is Persia / Iran. And that is absolutely unimaginable today! The numerical value in the Hebrew for the term *Gog and Magog* is seventy- and there are 70 peoples listed in the table of nations in Gen. 10. There is no need to become fixated by issues of historical geography in trying to locate where these peoples may have once lived- they are all within the land promised to Abraham. Any reference to Russia, Turkey, Europe etc. is thereby made inappropriate.

Nearly all of the nations mentioned occur in the table of nations in Genesis 10. Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Cush [AV "Ethiopia"], Put [AV "Libya"], Gomer, Togarmah, Dedan, Tarshish and Sheba are all mentioned there- in fact, all of them apart from Persia (Iran is beyond the land promised to Abraham). The connection between Ezekiel 38 and the Genesis 10 table of nations must therefore be highly significant. That table of nations served as an explanation to ancient Israel of the origins of the nations in the *eretz* / land promised to Abraham. They wondered why

they were attacked and opposed by the peoples of the land- and Moses was given Genesis to explain to them the context of geography and history in which they were situated. Genesis and the Pentateuch are God's version of history, geography and geopolitics for His people. Given this relevance to the situation in the land promised to Abraham, it is foolhardy to speculate that Shem, Ham or Japheth refer to Africans, Europeans etc. Ham refers specifically to "Canaan", and his servitude under Shem [Israel]; the predicted tension between Shem and Ham refers to the Jew-Arab tension, and not any other tension such as between black people and white European colonialists. This is just wishful thinking, and reflects the cavalier, opportunistic usage of Bible verses for which 19th century Western European theologians have become famous.

Ezekiel 38:7 Be prepared, yes, prepare yourself- The idea is that this confederacy would prepare themselves and yet be confirmed in their own freewill direction by being prepared by God. The 'preparation' is for military action (s.w. Ez. 7:14; Nah. 2:3).

You, and all your companies who are assembled to you, and be a guard to them- They assemble together in order to "take a prey" (:13); according to Ez. 36, the returned exiles could have come to a land miraculously fruitful and prosperous. This would explain the attraction, at the time of the restoration, for the war weary nations to come and take a prey. Gog personally would be a guard to these nations, as if they feel that under his charismatic leadership, they can come to no harm.

Ezekiel 38:8 After many days you shall be visited. In the latter years- Gog was to "be visited". This is Angelic language. The related passage in Is. 24:21-23 also speaks of the Gog confederacy: "And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall punish (Heb. 'visit') the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered together in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited. Then... the Lord of Hosts (Angels) shall reign". There are clear parallels with Gog's confederacy being visited by God, after they have been 'imprisoned' by Gog in order to support Gog's invasion. Gog is to be a "guard"- 'a prison' (s. w. Gen. 42:19)- to the other nations (38:7). "The host of the high ones that are on high (Heaven), and the kings of the earth upon the earth" refers to both the Angels and their earthly charges. The Isaiah passage implies a gathering together of the confederacy associated with a first Angelic 'visiting', followed by a "many days" period after which there will be a second Angelic visiting and the final invasion. The phrase "many days" does not necessarily imply a very long period of years- "Jacob... mourned for his son many days" (Gen. 37:34)- not more than twenty years at the outside. A woman could have "an issue of her blood many days" (Lev. 15:25). "Ye abode in Kadesh many days" (Dt. 1:46). Shimei "dwelt in Jerusalem many days" (1 Kings 2:38). These two Angelic visitings are spoken of in Ez. 38 too: "I (the Angels) will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth". And secondly "After many days thou (Gog) shalt be visited" by the Angels; "things (shall) come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: and thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwallled villages" (v. 10,11). This thinking was a result of Angelic visiting of Gog- to achieve their purpose of making both Assyria and Gog invade Israel, the Angels acted and will act directly on the hearts of the leaders of those nations.

I observed on Ez. 4 and elsewhere that the length of the exile was flexible. But perhaps that was the "many days" in the primary application of this prophecy.

You shall come into the land that is brought back from the sword- The word for "brought... back" is to be found in the references to Judah's return at the restoration (Ezra 2:1; 6:21; Neh. 7:6; 8:17). The same word is to be found in Ezekiel 38:8 and 39:27, where again, the invasion is to happen once Judah had been 'brought again' from captivity. Judah returned, and yet they didn't rebuild the temple as they were commanded. Therefore the invasion didn't come, and therefore the Kingdom wasn't then established. As if knowing this, Hos. 6:11 had prophesied [otherwise strangely] that Judah would reap their punishment, *when* they returned from captivity. They returned [s.w. 'bring again'], but not to the Most High (Hos. 7:16). They were brought back from the sword perhaps in the sense that Ezekiel's earlier prophecies had predicted they would be totally destroyed by the sword; but they were saved or brought back from this by grace.

That is gathered out of many peoples- The various provinces of the Babylonian and Assyrian empires. The latter day application could be to the state of Israel established on the basis of immigrants from many peoples. But it could also be that there will be a latter day scattering of Jews from Israel after the various latter day invasions, and they are to return from that scattering before "Gog" invades.

On the mountains of Israel, which have been a continual waste- Ezekiel 37 and 38 predict that when the Jews have returned to their land, then there will be a ten nation invasion by a group of surrounding nations, headed up by 'Gog' - which is to be destroyed by the direct intervention of God to establish His Kingdom. This invasion is to be after the Jews have returned to their land, and will begin with an incursion onto "the mountains of Israel" - which are bordering Syria, the Golan heights: "In the latter years you shall come into the land that is brought back from the sword, that is gathered out of many peoples, on the mountains of Israel, which have been a continual waste; but it is brought forth out of the nations" (Ez. 38:8). Only since 1948 and the uprise of serious Arab powers around Israel could this prophecy come true. All we're waiting for is the Arab confederacy to push into the Golan Heights. And we could view the news on the internet or turn on the telly - and find it's happening. Any moment now. And the next step will be the actual return of Christ to earth.

But it is brought forth out of the peoples- This 'bringing forth' was by grace, because they had not met the required spiritual preconditions - in that they had not in fact cast away their idols (see on Ez. 20:6-8). They were caused to be brought forth (s.w. Ez. 20:10; see note there). And it was to be the same in the exodus from Babylon. This Divine 'causing to go forth' was by the Spirit, for those who left captivity did so because their minds were stirred up by the Spirit to do so, even though they were not spiritually qualified for the restoration (Ezra 1:5). They had been commanded to "go forth" from Babylon (Is. 52:11 s.w.) but it was God who caused them to do this by the grace of His Spirit's operation on their hearts. The same is true of our exodus from this world through the water of baptism. It is all of grace and confirmation of the smallest desire to do so; and so this causing to go forth was by God's "mighty hand" (Ez. 20:34 s.w.).

And they shall dwell securely all of them- The invasion occurs when Israel dwell safely, without bars and gates. This is indeed the language of the Kingdom of God on earth, and the idea of Israel dwelling safely has been used in Ezekiel to describe the situation for Israel after they have repented and accepted Christ (Ez. 34:25,27,28). It could be that the invasion happens after Christ has returned and the little stone has begun to establish Kingdom conditions in the land of Israel. This would then fit with

Psalm 2, which describes the kings of the earth [a term used by the Islamic jihadists about themselves] attacking Jerusalem with Christ enthroned there. But this need not make us think that therefore Ezekiel 38 is irrelevant to present conditions. Because Christ could return today and establish His Kingdom in Jerusalem. But the enemies of Israel, Gog and his followers, would have been moved into a position whereby they could immediately then attack Him. Or it could be that in line with predictions in Daniel 8 and 11, Israel make a covenant with their enemies which appears successful, and then when all are saying "peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes". But the very same words are used about Hazor's confident state just before the Babylonian invasion: "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has made a plan against you and formed a purpose against you. Rise up, advance against a nation at ease, that dwells securely, declares the LORD, that has no gates or bars, that dwells alone. Their camels shall become plunder, their herds of livestock a spoil" (Jer. 49:30,31). As Babylon invaded Hazor, so the latter day Gog, as a revived Babylon-Assyria, will invade Israel. Hazor was not then in the Kingdom of God; the language rather speaks of self confidence and assurance. This is indeed how the Hebrew word translated "safely" in Ez. 38:14 is elsewhere used (Jud. 8:11; 18:7 "they lived carelessly"; Job 11:18; Prov. 3:29; Is. 32:17 "assuredness"; Is. 47:8 "carelessly"; Ez. 28:26 "with confidence"; 30:9 "careless"; 39:6 "carelessly"; Mic. 2:8 "securely"). Such a position could be brought about by an Israeli military victory against her enemies, or by a peace agreement which appears to hold.

Ezekiel 38:9 You shall ascend, you shall come like a storm, you shall be like a cloud to cover the land, you, and all your hordes, and many peoples with you- For "ascend" and "come", see on :16; Ez. 39:2. Gog comes as a "storm" to cover the land. This is the very language and Hebrew word *shoa* used of the Assyrian invasion in Is. 10:3. And of course the *shoa* is the term used by Jews today to describe the Nazi holocaust. That is to come again- but in "the land" promised to Abraham. The ascent and covering of the land like a cloud could refer to a massive airborne invasion; or perhaps the mushroom cloud of nuclear weapons. Covering the land with a cloud means that the sun and stars are no longer visible (s.w. Ez. 32:7), and perhaps in this sense some of the imagery of the Olivet prophecy and Revelation will come literally true over the land of Israel; the heavenly bodies will no longer be visible for a brief period, as a sign that the final end is about to come.

Ezekiel 38:10 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: It shall happen in that day, that thoughts shall come into your mind, and you shall devise- As noted on :11,16 and Ez. 39:2, Gog's freewill is emphasized, although he is Divinely confirmed in that freewill. Or perhaps the thoughts that come to Gog's mind are from God, but Gog does the devising of an evil plan. Thoughts coming into the mind is a phrase which could refer to a memory returning, although not necessarily; the phrase is used like this in Jer. 51:50. The invasion would therefore in this case be motivated by a desire to settle the ancient scores between Israel and her neighbours the Arabs.

An evil plan- The very same words used about the plan of Haman the Agagite, the man of Gog, to liquidate the Jewish population (Esther 8:3; 9:25). The actions of Gog in Ez. 38 are clearly based upon Haman's evil plan. The same phrase is used about the leader of Assyria, who was to devise an evil plan against God's people and thereby Yahweh Himself (Nah. 1:11).

Ezekiel 38:11 You shall say, I will go up to the land of unwallled villages- Zech. 2:4

had foretold that "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein", seeing that Yahweh Himself would be as a wall of fire around her to protect her from her adversaries (Ezra had recognised this promise, that God would be a wall to them- Ezra 9:9). Note how this prophecy is introduced by an Angel with a measuring reed measuring out the rebuilt Zion (Zech. 2:1), just as we have in Ezekiel 40. But Judah disbelieved the promise of a Divine wall of fire, and insisted on building a physical wall to protect them; and the record in Nehemiah has plenty of reference to their setting up of bars and gates in their fear (Neh. 3:3,6,13-15). By doing so they disallowed the fulfilment of Ez. 38:11, and thereby precluded what was prophesied as subsequently following. If they had trusted Him and paid their tithes, their cattle would have multiplied, and the Scythian tribes would have come down to seek to take them, as Ez. 38:12,13 foretold. But as it happened, their cattle were diseased and their agriculture not blessed because of their dilatory attention to Yahweh's house that lay waste (Haggai 1:11). So therefore there was no invasion, and no victory against the nations, and no Kingdom established at that time. See on :1.

"Go up" is "ascend" in :9,16. The thought of Gog is that he and his coalition will "ascend and go up". But the same words are used in :16 of how God will make them ascend and go up. God will work through their own desires and magnify and confirm them; this is how He places hooks in Gog's jaws to manipulate him. But the manipulation is not total, but rather a confirmation of men in that which they themselves wish to do.

I will go to those who are at rest, who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls and having neither bars nor gates- See on :1. Israel dwelling in 'peace and safety' in Ez. 38 could refer to the conditions of the Messianic Kingdom; or it could refer to a sense of security which arises in literally the very last days before the Lord's return, as a result of some peace agreement being reached. Whenever the invasion happens chronologically is not our immediate concern; what is significant is the preparation of the geopolitical situation to enable such a situation. And that is what we are seeing now developing.

There is much evidence that the Kingdom starts initially in Jerusalem and then spreads worldwide slowly. Many of the prophecies concerning it are addressed to "Jerusalem" and "Mount Zion". The stone of Daniel 2 hits the earth and grows from there to cover the earth. It is logical if it hits the earth at Jerusalem, where all the kingdoms of men represented by the metals will be present, gathered together against Jerusalem. It appears that the unworthy having been destroyed, a colony of saints is established around Jerusalem, living in Kingdom conditions. They live in "the land of unwallled villages... dwelling safely all of them... without walls, and having neither bars nor gates" (Ez. 38:11)- Kingdom language. The Angels give Gog the "evil thought" of invading the "land of unwallled villages", apparently after the invasions of the land as a whole. The people living there are "gathered out of the nations"- capable of reference to the saints (Mt. 25:31-34) who have just been gathered from all nations. The great wealth which attracts Gog must be due to the Kingdom conditions there- the Arab invasions of Zech. 14 (which must be before the second coming, seeing that Jerusalem is ransacked) will have devastated the land of its present wealth. The sudden prosperity reported around Jerusalem will no doubt intrigue the world, and prove a fatal attraction.

Ezekiel 38:12 To take the spoil and to take the wealth- It could be argued that because Ezekiel 38 doesn't specifically describe any success of the invasion or suffering of Israel, that it therefore describes a futile attack on the Lord Jesus once He is established in Jerusalem. However, the absence of such language doesn't mean that the invasion will not be successful. It could be that the focus of Ezekiel 38 and 39 is upon the final destruction of the invader, and therefore the suffering of Israel is not mentioned- because that is not the burden of these oracles about Gog. The perspective is not so much upon Gog's conflict with Israel, but rather upon Gog's conflict with God. The prophecy is elevating the issue far higher- Gog is to have a showdown with God through making this invasion. Gog comes to take spoil (Ez. 38:12,13). But Zech. 14:1 uses the same word in predicting that Jerusalem will indeed be captured by the final invaders, the women raped, and "your spoil shall be divided in the midst of you". We must also give due weight to Ez. 39:22: "The house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God, from that day forward". It is their salvation from Gog and the process of Gog's destruction which persuades Israel that Yahweh is their God "from that day forward". That reads very awkwardly if they have already repented and are sitting happily in God's Kingdom when the Ezekiel 38 invasion happens.

Having repeatedly said that sinful Jerusalem would be given for a prey (Jer. 15:13; 17:3; Ez. 7:21; 23:46) we read that the latter day invasion of Israel comes as a great company (as in Ez. 23:46) to "take a prey" or "spoil" (Ez. 38:12,13); but that invasion is not to be successful, unlike the previous historical invasions which took Jerusalem for a prey. The implication therefore is that Jerusalem finally repents, and so shall not be given for a prey in the very last invasion.

To turn your hand against the waste places that are now inhabited, and against the people who are gathered out of the nations, who have gotten livestock and goods- "The waste places that are now inhabited" in the latter day context probably refers specifically to the temple area/old city of Jerusalem which will have been the scene of much bitter Israeli/Arab fighting. Thus the final onslaught of Gog and his followers occurs, this time with Christ and the redeemed in Jerusalem, thus fulfilling Psalm 2: "The kings of the earth (cp. Is. 24:21) set themselves... against the Lord, and against His anointed (Christ)... yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion". Rev. 20 describes how Gog and Magog will push the saints back into Jerusalem with Christ, until He breaks out upon them again.

Who dwell in the middle of the land- The invasion comes against "the navel of the land" (Ez. 38:12). This could be a reference to the ultimate 'high place', Jerusalem. Both the Bible and Judaism speak of 'going up' to Jerusalem or 'coming down' from there. The language of Israel and Zion being lifted up is used of the Kingdom situation- another evidence that this invasion happens after the Lord has returned and is enthroned in Zion. The Greeks wrote of their sanctuaries at Dydima, Miletus and Delphi as being 'the navel of the land'; so there could be a reference to the temple mount. Or it could allude to how the land currently inhabited by Israel is the highest point in the land promised to Abraham, from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt. Just as Assyria's focus was upon Jerusalem, so the latter day Assyrian will have the same interest. And that fits an Islamic Assyrian, for Jerusalem is the burning issue for Islam. The many allusions to the Assyrian invasion which we find in Ezekiel 38 are specifically alluding to how Assyria came up against *Jerusalem*. Gog 'ascends' against the once wasted mountains [an intensive plural for *the* great mountain- Zion?], he 'comes up' against the land (Ez. 38:9,11,16; 39:2- quite some emphasis). The language of 'ascent' is relevant specifically to 'going up' to Jerusalem specifically.

And Rev. 20:9 has Gog's armies specifically coming up against Jerusalem. The jihadist Magazine *Dabiq* number 4 (October 2014) is clear that whatever battles are going on in Iraq and Syria, their focus ultimately is Jerusalem: "We perform jihad here while our eyes are upon al-Quds" (p.4).

Ezekiel 38:13 *Sheba, Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish*- These three nations make up a total of ten nations who come against Israel, inviting connection with the ten nations of Psalm 83, the ten toes of the latter day image and ten horns of the latter day beast. The ten nations of Ez. 38 are from the points of the compass around Israel, going around clockwise. The picture is of Israel's enemies coming at her like a whirlwind from all points of the compass. There may not, therefore, be undue significance in the actual names of the nations- rather is the picture being created of all the surrounding nations, from every point of the compass, coming against Israel under the leadership of Gog as their *rosh* or "chief prince". Isaiah 23 clearly associates Tyre with Tarshish; Jonah's journey to Tarshish was clearly to some point known to people living in Israel at his time, rather than to some unfamiliar place such as Britain. Sheba and Dedan were sons of Abraham through Keturah, and are therefore ancestors of some Middle Eastern peoples (1 Chron. 1:32). Dedan is noted in Jer. 25:23 as being an associate of Tyre / Tarshish who will be confederate with latter day Babylon, and will drink the same cup of judgment given to Babylon. So this group of three nations, whilst mentioned separately, are hardly on Israel's side in the last days. "The calamity of Esau" will come upon Dedan (Jer. 49:8), for Dedan was within the territory of Edom which is Esau (Ez. 25:13). The men of Dedan worked for Tyre as "traffickers" (Ez. 27:15), so we can understand the association of Dedan with the merchants of Tarshish / Tyre. These three nations along with most of the others mentioned in Ez. 38 are all taken from the table of nations in Genesis 10, which refers to the peoples within the land promised to Abraham, which is the focus of Bible prophecy. The Bible therefore has very little to say about nations outside of that area.

It could be argued that this verse suggests that the other nations so far listed are somehow under the leadership of Tyre. It has been observed that the nations listed in Ez. 38 were all the historical allies of Tyre against Babylon. They formed an alliance to resist Babylon, which failed and was defeated. Their attack on Israel here likewise fails. The primary fulfilment may be that this alliance under Tyre went to fight against Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon within the territory of Israel, and was defeated.

Sheba, Dedan and the merchants of Tyre / Tarshish are the nations of the extreme East and West of the land promised to Abraham. The picture is of Israel's enemies coming at her like a whirlwind from all points of the compass. There may not, therefore, be undue significance in the actual names of the nations- rather is the picture being created of all the surrounding nations, from every point of the compass, coming against Israel under the leadership of Gog.

Sheba is the same word translated "Sabeans" in Job 1:15; the people of Sheba fell upon a peaceful member of God's people whilst he lived in "peace and safety" without bars or walls and "took away" his cattle and goods, and slew the servants with the edge of the sword. These are the very same Hebrew words used about the behaviour of the people of Sheba in Ez. 38:13. Tarshish is associated with those who are *against* God's people, not with them or defending them.

The "merchants" are attracted to the "silver and gold" perceived to be in Israel. Hence ISV renders: "Businessmen based in Sheba, Dedan, Tarshish...".

The nations with Gog are defined in Ez. 39:18 as "the princes / kings of the earth"- the leaders of the peoples within the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham. These

are the same “kings of the earth / land” which are so often mentioned in Revelation as coming against God’s people as part of the beast entity (Rev. 6:15; 16:14; 17:2,18; 18:3,9). This alludes to the kings of the earth who are raised up from the borders of the earth / land and come with Babylon to invade Israel (Jer. 50:41). The very idea of ‘the borders of the earth’ suggests that ‘the earth’ doesn’t refer to a sphere like the globe, but rather to a specifically defined territory. That territory is the land promised to Abraham. When we read that all “the kings of the earth” came from the very ends of the earth to hear Solomon’s wisdom, we likewise are to understand “the earth” as the land promised to Abraham. The Queen of Sheba was at the end of that earth / land; but the kings of New Zealand or Hawaii didn’t come.

Tarshish is associated with Tyre in Is. 23:1: "The burden of Tyre. Howl you ships of Tarshish...". It could be that "Tarshish" strictly referred to the isle off the coast of Tyre to which the Tyrians fled when under attack. Hence Is. 23:6: "Pass over to Tarshish! Wail, you inhabitants of the isle!". Tarshish is associated with gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks (2 Chron. 9:21)- not exactly things which Britain is famed for. To suggest that 'Tarshish = Britain' one would have to read passages such as Jonah going to Tarshish as referring to Britain. This equation just doesn't work in the various Biblical references to Tarshish. At best it would refer to the trading ships of Tyre, which become as it were a trademark term for any long distance trading vessel.

Readers of Ezekiel will have been struck by the fact that a number of the nations listed have already been mentioned in Ezekiel- in prophecies which predict or describe their destruction. Tyre (Tarshish), Meshech and Tubal have all been described as having come to their end (Ez. 27:13; 32:5,26,27). The impression, therefore, is that there will be a latter day *revival* of these nations; the invasion could have happened in Ezekiel's time, but the potential prophetic scenario didn't then happen. And that is what we are seeing happening in the lands around Israel, whose peoples and geographical areas were dormant and insignificant for centuries- until their revival in recent times. A coalition of those nations will arise which includes those territories or ethnic groups. And their intention is clearly and ultimately to invade Israel and destroy the Jews. Radical Islam is already in control of much of the *eretz* / land promised to Abraham.

With all her young lions- The "young lions" of Tyre could refer to "all her kings" [as in the Jewish Targum on this phrase], "all her traders", "all her leaders" (ESV) or "all her villages". The same Hebrew word translated "young lions" is rendered "villages" in Neh. 6:2. "Young lions" has been used in Ezekiel to refer to princes (Ez. 19:2; 32:2). The Biblical references to young lions associate them with aggression; they are used to describe the Assyrian invaders of Israel (Is. 5:29; 31:4), and it is clear enough that 'Gog' of Ezekiel 38 is portrayed as a latter day Assyrian invader of Judah. "Young lions" be appropriate language for those who are part of the Assyrian invasion, and not for those against it. The same figure is used for other invaders, such as the Babylonians: "The young lions have roared at him [Israel] and yelled, they have desolated his land" (Jer. 2:15; 25:38; 51:38). The imagery of lions and young lions is heavily associated with Israel's neighbouring enemies, especially Assyria and Babylon. The suggestion that the imagery of 'young lions' suggests 'former colonies' or those raised under the influence of another is simply not supported by the majority of references to "young lions" in the Bible. The common picture is of aggression, and particularly aggression against God's people. There is a Hebrew phrase which means "young lions", but that is not what is used here; one Hebrew word alone is used, and it could be fairly rendered "growling lions" as ISV. So the idea of youth or of them having been raised by a mother lion is not necessarily present.

Shall say to you: Have you assembled your company to take the wealth?- The Hebrew implies that these three nations will join in with the invasion, rather than challenge it. This was noted by Harry Whittaker, and see Jacob Milgrom and Daniel Israel Block, *Ezekiel's Hope: A Commentary on Ezekiel 38-48* (Wipf & Stock, 2012) p. 12.

To carry away silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods, to take great spoil?- Ezekiel 38 describes the desire of the invaders to take the wealth and houses of the land of Israel. This is precisely the language used in the Koran regarding how Moslems have a duty to take these things from the disobedient children of Israel: "Allah brought those of the People of the Scripture... down from their strongholds, and cast panic into their hearts. Some ye slew, and ye made captive some. And Allah caused you to inherit their land and their houses and their wealth, and land ye have not trodden. Allah is ever able to do all things" (Sura 33.26,27). The jihadists are carefully observant of the Koran and Hadith, which so often are garbled versions of the Bible, doubtless because Mohammad first heard the Bible in an oral form or by rumour passed on by travelers. But by their careful observance of their holy books, the jihadists will in fact fulfil Bible prophecy exactly.

The Koran teaches that Moslems who go to battle with the Jews will not only win but will be rewarded with much spoil: "And much booty that they will capture. Allah is ever Mighty, Wise. Allah promiseth you much booty that ye will capture... that it may be a token for the believers" (Sura 48.19,20). The enthusiasm of the Ezekiel 38 invaders for "spoil" and "prey" is therefore appropriate for Islamic jihadist invaders.

Ezekiel 38:14 Therefore, son of man, prophesy and tell Gog, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In that day when My people Israel dwells securely, shall you not know it?- The idea seems to be as in GNB and LXX: "Wilt thou not arise in that day, when my people Israel are dwelling securely...?". Perhaps the sense is that Gog realizes that the people are "dwelling securely" as the reestablished kingdom of God, and consciously wishes to attack an entity clearly under God's protection and blessing.

Ezekiel 38:15 You shall come from your place out of the uttermost parts of the north, you, and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses- See on :4. The "horses" suggest the Scythian hordes of Ezekiel's day which surrounded Israel, who could potentially have fulfilled this prophecy. "Uttermost parts of the north" is not the best translation; if read literally it would refer not to Moscow, as wrongly claimed, but to the very northernmost parts of the Arctic. But such a literal reading is unwarranted; the original clearly means 'from the very northern border / side', and the side or boundary in view is that of *eretz* Israel. And already the jihadist factions are massing on the northern borders of *eretz* Israel.

A great company and a mighty army- Human armies are often described in Angelic language because there are Angels controlling them. This is also the case here with the Gog invasion, which is fitting seeing that Angels were behind the initial Assyrian invasion which is the prototype of that of Gog. They are described as "a great company, a mighty army"- reflecting the mighty Heavenly host. The language here is a parody of Jer. 31:8, which speaks of the "great company" (s.w.) of Israel coming from the north and returning to Zion. And it is a revived Israel who in Ez. 37 stand up as a "mighty army". The invaders are therefore presented as a fake, imitation Israel. This image is exactly that of their jihadist enemies, claiming to be the true seed of Abraham, who are massed on the northern borders of the *eretz*.

Ezekiel 38:16 And you shall come up against My people Israel, as a cloud to cover the land. It shall happen in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, that the nations may know Me, when I shall be sanctified in you, Gog, before their eyes- "I will bring you..." means that Gog's desire to ascend and go [s.w. "bring"] against the land in :11 is confirmed by God; see on :11. The 'coming up' or ascending is because God makes them come up (Ez. 39:2 s.w.). At every step, Gog's freewill is allowed but is confirmed. God works through human sin; the whole intention of Gog's latter day destruction is to bring the remaining nations to "know Yahweh", to enter relationship with Him.

Ezekiel 38:17 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Are you he of whom I spoke in old time by My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for many years that I would bring you against them?- This invader was repeatedly spoken of by the prophets- it can't refer therefore to Russia but to Assyria / Babylon, of whom the prophets repeatedly speak. And yet the invasion is clearly in the last days. Assyria, therefore, must be revived in some way. The nations listed in Ez. 38 are never spoken of in the prophets as invading Israel; it is usually Babylon and Assyria who are in view. And so we can detect here another case of prophetic transference. The prophecies about Babylon and Assyria are to be transferred to this coalition of the last days; which is why, as pointed out on :2, this invasion is full of allusion to the Assyrians.

Ezekiel 38:18 It shall happen in that day, when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, says the Lord Yahweh, that My wrath shall come up into My nostrils- This Divine wrath would lead to a literal shaking in Israel (:19). The metaphor is used repeatedly of God's anger with Israel resulting in Him taking them out of their land (e.g. Dt. 29:28). That wrath is now transferred to their abusers. Even in this we see God's love for His people. A more human God would have felt that all His faithless people had suffered was justified; but His wrath with those who so abused them is of itself a testament to the depth of His love for His sinful people.

Ezekiel 38:19 For in My anger and in the fire of My wrath have I spoken, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel- This could be the same earthquake as spoken of in Ez. 37 which causes the resurrection and revival of Israel. The chronological conflicts (for at this stage Israel are apparently already revived and living safely in their land) need not concern us once we realize that we are reading apocalyptic here. We are not being necessarily given a chronological sequence of events, but rather snapshots from various points in the overall saga. This especially needs to be appreciated in understanding the book of Revelation.

Ezekiel 38:20 So that the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the animals of the field and all creeping things which creep on the earth, and all the men who are on the surface of the earth, shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall and every wall shall fall to the ground- The impression given is that this is more than a theophany, with God symbolically and metaphorically 'coming down'; but the literal coming down of God to earth, or the land promised to Abraham, resulting in the fulfilment of the final parts of Revelation, where God Himself dwells with men. Absolutely every strata of creation will be aware of this presence. It is the language of Nah. 1:5 about the destruction of Assyria,

and also of the theophany at Sinai (Ps. 68:8). For the destruction of Israel's enemies is to be associated with God claiming Israel finally and fully for Himself in eternal covenant. Walls falling to the ground is the language of the fall of all Israel's historical enemies: Babylon (Jer. 51:44), Syria (1 Kings 20:30) and the Canaanites in Jericho (Josh. 6:5).

Ezekiel 38:21 I will call to all My mountains for a sword against him, says the Lord Yahweh- This is quoting from Jer. 25:29, where the context is of a group of neighbouring nations invading the land and a sword being called upon them. There are several other links with the nations of Ezekiel 38 when we look closer at Jer. 25:19-26. Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish (Jer. 25:22,23) are also part of the invading force in Ezekiel 38, not against it. "All the kings of the north, far and near" (Jer. 25:26) of course includes Gog from the north. These nations all had their part in the Babylonian invasion, which is why they were to be punished in the end after Israel's restoration from captivity (Jer. 25:12). Ezekiel was prophesying about the time of the restoration- after Ez. 38,39 he goes on to give commands about how to rebuild the temple on their return from captivity. This is the context in which Ezekiel alludes back to Jer. 25.

Every man's sword shall be against his brother- The manner of Gog's destruction also hints at the origin of Gog and those with him. They will be destroyed by every man's sword turning against his brother. But this is the very language of the curse upon Ishmael, the forefather of so many of the Moslem people who now live in the territory of the land promised to Abraham (Gen. 16:12).

Ezekiel 38:22 With pestilence and with blood will I enter into judgment with him; and I will rain on him and on his hordes and on the many peoples who are with him, an overflowing shower, and great hailstones, fire, and sulphur- Entering into judgment could imply that God is pleading with them even in their last moments for their repentance. The destruction of the Gog invasion by fire (Rev. 20:9) is exactly as here in Ez. 38:22; 39:6. It is the same invasion in view. It didn't happen as was potentially possible in Ezekiel's time, and so it is transferred to the last days for fulfilment. I would go with Harry Whittaker's suggestion that this invasion by Gog of Rev. 20:8 is when the 1000 year reign is established [not "expired" as in AV]; this would fit with the beast / Gog coming against Christ once He has returned and Israel are dwelling confidently and safely. The beast is destroyed at Christ's return, and yet has a revival. This is very much the theme of the various prophecies about the beast receiving a deadly wound but reviving. Yet the chronological issues should not overly concern us. I have elsewhere explained that Bible prophecy is conditional, and therefore there are various possible outcomes and sequences of events. And further, it seems likely that the nature of time will be compressed or changed around the time of the Lord's return.

Ezekiel 38:23 I will magnify Myself, and sanctify Myself, and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am Yahweh- It could have been that at the restoration, Yahweh would have been magnified from the border of Israel (Mal. 1:5 s.w.). But this prophetic scenario was precluded at the time by Israel's lack of repentance. But it shall come ultimately true in the last days. This is the purpose of all this blood and judgment; to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth, where the remaining nations "know Yahweh", i.e. enter relationship with Him. "Magnify" is the word used in Joel 2:20,21 and Mic. 5:4 of how God will "do great

things" in destroying the northern invader; and those great things are in the end for God in the sense that they are for His beloved people.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 39

Ezekiel 39:1 You, son of man, prophesy against Gog and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech, and Tubal- It is unclear whether Ez. 39 is a repeat of the situation in Ez. 38, or whether Gog attempts to come up a second time. The language is so similar to Ez. 38 that I would come down on the side of thinking that this is typical apocalyptic genre, describing the same events from a slightly different angle; in Ez. 39, the focus is more upon the judgment of God.

Ezekiel 39:2 And I will turn you around, and will lead you on, and will cause you to come up from the uttermost parts of the north; and I will bring you on the mountains of Israel- The repeated emphasis is that God causes Gog to come up, He brings or makes Gog to "go" against Israel. But it was of Gog's own freewill that he himself decided to do these things; see on Ez. 38:11,16. Rev. 20:8 parallels all the nations in the earth / land with Gog: "To deceive the nations which are in the four quarters / borders of the land / earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle". The language of deceit is also picking up that of Ezekiel 38 about Gog. "I will drive you forward" (Ez. 39:2, AV "leave the sixth part of thee") appears to be a Hebraism meaning 'I will deceive you' ; see Jacob Milgrom and Daniel Israel Block, *Ezekiel's Hope: A Commentary on Ezekiel 38-48* (Wipf & Stock, 2012) p. 20. Gog is led into the conflict by God, and the entire showdown is not so much between Gog and Israel as between God and Gog. The events in the Middle East are not, therefore, running out of control. All is carefully planned and executed by God, just as the historical Assyrian was a rod in Yahweh's hand, manipulated by Him.

"The mountains" may be an intensive plural referring to the great mountain, Zion, which is the goal of jihadist domination at this time. For "uttermost parts of the north" see on Ez. 38:15.

Ezekiel 39:3 And I will strike your bow out of your left hand, and will cause your arrows to fall out of your right hand- Assyrian bas-reliefs frequently show them posing with their bows. This is another Assyrian allusion; see on Ez. 38:2,17. The idea may be that the military technology in which they trusted is to be removed. The Scythian tribes were famed for their horses and archery; these were the peoples who could potentially have fulfilled the prophecy at Ezekiel's time, but that scenario was precluded by Israel's impenitence.

Ezekiel 39:4 You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you, and all your hordes, and the peoples who are with you. I will give you to the birds of prey of every sort, and to the animals of the field to be devoured- The "mountains" may be an intensive plural for the great mountain, Zion, the focus of radical jihadist attention at this time. And it is the city of God which Gog focuses upon according to the interpretation of this passage in Rev. 20. Dan. 11:45 likewise says that the final destruction of the northern invader will be upon "the glorious holy mountain". The wild animals would then refer to the surrounding nations who are converted to God's perspective upon the invaders,

who come up to Zion to destroy the remnants of Gog's coalition, and turn to Yahweh themselves. The birds which Abraham successfully drove away in Gen. 15 referred to the surrounding tribes of the *eretz* which Abraham feared would persecute him at that time. And they likely refer to the same peoples in this latter day application.

"Hordes" is a word only used by Ezekiel. It refers to bands of marauders, and is more appropriate to the Scythians than to the organized regiments of Babylon or Assyria. The Scythians could have fulfilled the prophecy in Ezekiel's time, but Israel's impenitence precluded the entire scenario envisaged in Ez. 33-48.

Ezekiel 39:5 You shall fall on the open field; for I have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh- The fall will be upon the great mountain of Israel, Zion (:4), so the idea of "the open field" is that they will not be buried, but fall in the open and be devoured there (:4); the classic shame for people of Ezekiel's time.

Ezekiel 39:6 I will send a fire on Magog, and on those who dwell confidently along the sea coasts; and they shall know that I am Yahweh- The destruction of Gog by fire is also spoken of in Rev. 20, confirming our suggestion there that Revelation 20 describes this same event. The sea coasts would refer to the maritime powers in the confederacy, Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish. But "the coastal lands" of the land could also refer to the Gaza Strip. The latter day Assyrian will therefore have connection with the Palestinians in Gaza- which is exactly what we are seeing today. We can note that they are described as living peaceably, "confidently", like Israel in Ez. 38; this might support the suggestion that the peace and safety in the land is brought about by an Israeli-Arab peace accord that appears to last.

This sending of fire uses the same Hebrew phrase used of the final sending of Divine fire of judgment upon Gaza and Tyre (Am. 1:7,10). These are the sea coasts who support "Magog". And the wonder of it all is that some of them will finally come to have relationship with Yahweh, to "know Yahweh".

Ezekiel 39:7 My holy name will I make known in the midst of My people Israel; neither will I allow My holy name to be profaned any more: and the nations shall know that I am Yahweh, the Holy One in Israel- This surely alludes to the similar language used in Lev. 22:31,32 about the sanctification of God's Name in Israel as a result of their obedience to Him. We can therefore see in this a hint that the invasion leads to Israel's repentance. The language here suggests that both Israel and the nations will be in permanent, eternal relationship with God, and Israel will never again profane His Name. The only way for these things to be really true is by a change of nature, to eternal, sinless nature. And therefore the main fulfillment will be at the Lord's return.

Ezekiel 39:8 Behold, it has come, and it is done, says the Lord Yahweh; this is the day about which I have spoken- As noted on :7, the implication of the language is that this is all to be fulfilled in the last days. And this final coming of the Kingdom was so certain that it was as if it had already come and was done in Ezekiel's day. If this was the final reality, then they in his day should have lived the kingdom life there and then.

Ezekiel 39:9 Those who dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall make fires of the weapons and burn them, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the war clubs, and the spears, and they shall make fires of them seven

years- Understandable concern has been raised concerning the seven months of burning Gog's corpses, and the rather unreal feel of the punishments of Gog and the cleansing of the land in Ezekiel 39. Notice the usage of the number seven. There are seven enemies of Israel listed in the opening part of Ezekiel 38, joined in later by another three. The enemies have seven weapons (Ez. 39:9), seven years' worth of fuel is provided by burning them (Ez. 39:9), and it takes seven months to burn the corpses (Ez. 39:12). One wonders whether we are intended to read the 'sevens' literally, or whether this is a device to indicate completeness. If indeed the language here is figurative, then we are the more encouraged to read 'Gog' as a codename rather than seek for a literal historico-geographical reference for him. The simple point is that the invaders will have an array of military technology which will be brought to nothing and permanently destroyed.

Ezekiel 39:10 They shall take no wood out of the field, neither cut down any out of the forests; for they shall make fires of the weapons- These wooden weapons are understandable if indeed Ez. 38 and 39 had a potential primary fulfillment in Ezekiel's time or soon after. This is the invasion and victory that could have happened at the restoration. There seems an intentional contrast with how when Israel first entered the land, they retained the wooden images of the Canaanite tribes (Jud. 1:27,28). The Maccabees tried to obey this command by burning anything that belonged to the Seleucids and Antiochus who had desecrated the temple. But clearly the prophesy was not then fulfilled, at best that was a foretaste of the future cleansing.

And they shall plunder those who plundered them, and rob those who robbed them, says the Lord Yahweh- There is no indication that the invasion of Gog to "take a prey" was successful; and so his followers are judged for what they intended doing, i.e. robbing and plundering, even though they didn't actually do it. This serves as a reminder for all time that we are judged according to our dreams and intentions, whether or not we actually fulfill them; as the sermon on the mount makes clear enough.

Ezekiel 39:11 It shall happen in that day, that I will give to Gog a place 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. There shall they bury Gog and all his multitude; and they shall call it The valley of Hamon Gog- See on :17. This would be close to the location of Sodom and Gomorrah, which likewise suffered "eternal fire" in that their destruction was to be an eternal lesson for others (Jude 7). The allusion is to the highway which then passed through that valley, connecting Syria with Petra and Egypt. This likely has more relevance to the potential fulfillment at Ezekiel's time than to anything in the latter days.

Ezekiel 39:12 Seven months shall the house of Israel be burying them, that they may cleanse the land- For the significance of "seven", see on :9. The lament had been that the land had not been cleansed of Israel's sins (Ez. 22:24 s.w.). Now the land was to be permanently cleansed of all sin, Jewish and pagan, by the repentant Jews themselves.

Ezekiel 39:13 Yes, all the people of the land shall bury them; and it shall be to them for a renown in the day that I shall be glorified, says the Lord Yahweh- "A renown" is literally "a name". The name we shall be given eternally will be a reflection of who we are and what we have done in this life, just as Yahweh's Name is the same- a

reflection of His character and history. Those who are involved in burying Gog's followers will it seems have this as part of their eternal Name, which will itself be a part in the final glorification of Yahweh's Name in His people. See on :16.

Ezekiel 39:14 After the seven months are over, men will be chosen to travel through the land in order to find and bury those bodies remaining on the ground, so that they can cleanse the land- The AV suggests that the travellers themselves will help these appointed men: "passing through the land to bury with the passengers those that remain upon the face of the earth, to cleanse it". There is also the implication that some of the bodies might have been missed, and after seven months there has to be a check made. This all sounds very human, and relevant to the primary fulfillment potentially possible in Ezekiel's time rather than to the last days.

Ezekiel 39:15 They shall go up and down the land; and when anyone sees a man's bone, then shall he set up a sign by it, until the undertakers have buried it in the valley of Hamon Gog- There is still the fear of defilement by touching dead bones; hence only "the undertakers" deal with them, and those who notice the bones simply set up a sign by them. This fear of defilement suggests that this aspect of the prophecy was particularly relevant to its potential fulfillment in Ezekiel's time rather than to the last days.

Ezekiel 39:16 Hamonah shall also be the name of a city. Thus shall they cleanse the land- Possibly it is Jerusalem which is in view, and this will be one of her names, "multitude". As explained on :13, the names given in the eternal kingdom will be a reflection of history, just as the Yahweh Name is. See on :12.

Ezekiel 39:17 You, son of man, thus says the Lord Yahweh: Speak thus to the birds of prey, and to every animal of the field: Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to My sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you, even a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood- As explained on :19, this invitation to partake of a religious meal with God is an invitation to fellowship with Him through participating in the destruction of His enemies. The destruction of the Ezekiel 38 invasion is described in Ez. 39:17-20 in terms of a great supper, and the language is the basis for the description of the final destruction of "the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies" at the 'bird supper' in Rev. 19:17,18. The nations listed in Ez. 38 are therefore the kings of the earth / land. They cannot, therefore, refer to nations outside of the land promised to Abraham (e.g. England and Russia). The emphasis upon horses in Ez. 38:4-7,9,15,22; 39:4,11 and the destruction / 'eating' of their flesh is matched by the horse mounted nations of Rev. 19:15-21 being destroyed and their flesh likewise 'eaten'. The calling for a sword against Gog is matched by the sword proceeding out of Christ's mouth in Rev. 19. It isn't therefore incidental that Revelation 20:8 goes on to use the terms Gog and Magog in describing the final enemies of God. The nations with Gog and Magog come from "the four corners of the earth / land" (Rev. 20:8), and this is alluding to how the nations with Gog in Ez. 38 are from the four compass points around Israel. This is incidental proof that the ten nations of Ez. 38 are all with Gog; "Are you come to take a spoil?" of Ez. 38:13 is therefore not a protest but rather a joining in with the group spoiling of Israel.

Ezekiel 39:18 You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes

of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan- The nations with Gog are defined here as “the princes / kings of the earth”- the leaders of the peoples within the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham. These are the same “kings of the earth / land” which are so often mentioned in Revelation as coming against God’s people as part of the beast entity (Rev. 6:15; 16:14; 17:2,18; 18:3,9). This alludes to the kings of the earth who are raised up from the borders of the earth / land and come with Babylon to invade Israel (Jer. 50:41). The very idea of ‘the borders of the earth’ suggests that ‘the earth’ doesn’t refer to a sphere like the globe, but rather to a specifically defined territory. That territory is the land promised to Abraham. When we read that all “the kings of the earth” came from the very ends of the earth to hear Solomon’s wisdom, we likewise are to understand “the earth” as the land promised to Abraham. The Queen of Sheba was at the end of that earth / land; but the kings of New Zealand or Hawaii didn’t come. “Bashan” implies the area east of the Jordan, from where the jihadists will come in the last days, and from where the Scythians would have come in the potential fulfillment.

Ezekiel 39:19 You shall eat fat until you be full, and drink blood until you are drunk, of My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you- The surrounding nations are invited to eat at the Lord's table or altar, upon which are sacrificed Gog and his followers. This invitation to eat "at My table" (:20) is an invitation to fellowship and relationship. It implies that the remaining people in the *eretz* of the last days will come to relationship with God through destroying the remnants of Gog.

Ezekiel 39:20 You shall be filled at My table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, says the Lord Yahweh- AV "There you shall be filled at My table" implies that there on the great mountain of Israel, Zion, would be the altar or table of Yahweh. "Chariots" is put for the charioteers. Participating in the destruction of Gog would be a sign of fellowship with Yahweh.

Ezekiel 39:21 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 laid on them- "Set" is s.w. "give". God is to be given glory by the remaining nations when they recognize God's hand / judgment upon them was correct. It will achieve the intended result, of eliciting their repentance and glorification of God. The returned exiles could have 'given / set glory' to Yahweh (s.w. Mal. 2:2) at the restoration, but they didn't. And so the whole scenario was transferred to the last days for fulfillment.

Ezekiel 39:22 So the house of Israel shall know that I am Yahweh their God, from that day and forward- See on Ez. 38:12. This could imply that it is not until the destruction of Gog that Israel are permanently and forever in relationship with God, even though it seems that they are already "dwelling safely" with the Lord Jesus amongst them when the Ez. 38 invasion comes.

Ezekiel 39:23 The nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity; because they trespassed against Me, and I hid My face from them: so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they fell all of them by the sword- This hiding of the face was intended to make Israel repent and seek God's face, and finally this will happen (Dt. 31:17; Is. 59:2). The nations will realize that their earlier triumphs over Israel were not due to their righteousness or human strength, but because they were used by God to take Israel captive for their sins. Israel did not "all"

fall by the sword, although this was the punishment threatened. God's grace and pity meant that the deserved judgment wasn't fully carried out. See on :24.

Ezekiel 39:24 According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions did I to them; and I hid My face from them- As explained on :23, God did not actually execute all His wrath upon His people. He did not in fact judge them "according to" their sins, but less than what those sins deserved (Ezra 9:13). But by grace He counts the judgment to have happened. This may have been simply due to His pity and grace; or maybe there was the repentance and intercession of a minority. They were like Cain, driven out of the land / sanctuary and hidden from God's face (Gen. 4:14 s.w.); and yet by grace, a way back was found for them. And it was by the hiding of God's face from them that their seeking for His face would be elicited (Dt. 31:17,18; 32:20).

Ezekiel 39:25 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Now will I bring back the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name- "The whole house of Israel" looks ahead to the final reuniting of Judah with the ten tribes which was possible at Ezekiel's time if they had all alike repented. But Rom. 11:26 gives this a wider application; "so all Israel shall be saved" is understood as meaning both Jew and Gentile alike shall comprise the "all Israel", both natural and spiritual Jews.

Ezekiel 39:26 They shall bear their shame, and all their trespasses by which they have trespassed against Me, when they shall dwell securely in their land, and none shall make them afraid- Shame for sin is a major theme with Ezekiel. The days of shame would come to an end (Ez. 16:54; 34:29; 36:15; 39:26)- if Jerusalem accepted shame for her sins. But Ez. 44:13 says that the sins of the Jerusalem priesthood were such that in the restored temple, they would bear their shame in that they would never again minister in it. Likewise the Jewish priesthood who persecuted Jeremiah at this time were to bear a shame that would last for ever (Jer. 20:11). And yet the hope of Israel was that they would eternally be unashamed, world without end (Is. 45:17). The resolution of this may be in God's willingness to count them totally righteous by grace, upon their repentance. And Ezra "blushed" [s.w. "ashamed"] because of Israel's sins (Ezra 9:6), and Jeremiah at this time cast himself down in shame because of them (Jer. 3:25). This representative intercession for Judah had some effect. Just as the Lord Jesus bore the shame of Israel and all sinners on the cross (Is. 50:6), and yet because of that He would not be ashamed eternally (Is. 50:7). He was to become representative of the repentant Israel of God; for the same words are used of how they too would have unashamed faces eternally (Is. 54:4). But the Jerusalem priesthood refused to take shame, they were unashamed of their whoredoms (Jer. 3:3; 8:12). Ezekiel's appeal in Ez. 16 was so that they would recognize their sins, and be ashamed (Ez. 16:2). There was time for them to do so right up until they were led captive, in the final attempt to make them realize their shame. For when they went into captivity, then God intended that they would be "ashamed" (Jer. 22:22). The final vision of Ezekiel, of the potential that was possible in a restored Zion, was in order to make the exiles ashamed of their sins when they realized the possibilities they had wasted and yet which were still possible by grace (Ez. 43:10,11). But they didn't respond to that vision, they refused to build and operate such a temple system; because they refused to be ashamed in exile, although it was God's intention that they should be. And so it is for us as a new Israel to be ashamed for our sins, and identify with the Messiah figure who would bear Israel's shame and thereby emerge eternally unashamed.

The AV offers "When they dwelt safely in their land". This would mean that they will reflect that they had dwelt safely earlier in their history without repentance. They would be ashamed that they had been treated as righteous when they had not been, and this realization of God's utter grace would elicit even deeper repentance.

Ezekiel 39:27 When I have brought them back from the peoples, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations- The word for "brought... back" is to be found in the references to Judah's return at the restoration (Ezra 2:1; 6:21; Neh. 7:6; 8:17). The same word is to be found in Ezekiel 38:8, where again, the invasion is to happen once Judah had been 'brought again' from captivity. Judah returned, and yet they didn't rebuild the temple as they were commanded. Therefore the invasion didn't come, and therefore the Kingdom wasn't then established. As if knowing this, Hos. 6:11 had prophesied [otherwise strangely] that Judah would reap their punishment, *when* they returned from captivity. They returned [s.w. 'bring again'], but not to the Most High (Hos. 7:16).

Ezekiel 39:28 They shall know that I am Yahweh their God, in that I caused them to go into captivity among the nations, and have gathered them to their own land; and I will leave none of them any more there- Such total restoration would be a parade example of God's grace. And in this they would "know" or experience Yahweh. His grace was the causative factor in both their exile and restoration.

Ezekiel 39:29 Neither will I hide My face any more from them; for I have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel, says the Lord Yahweh- The pouring out of the Spirit is parallel to God's face being revealed and not hidden. The activity of the Spirit is therefore in order to reveal God, to bring people into relationship with Him. Thus the Spirit is poured out as part of the new covenant with Israel in order to make them repentant, all of God's initiative, rather than as a response to their righteousness (Zech. 12:10 "the spirit of grace and supplication", as if this Spirit provokes their supplication / prayer to God; Joel 2:28). This will be the parade example of "prevenient grace".

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 40

Ezekiel 40:1 In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity- The captivity of the Jews began in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, when Daniel and his companions were carried away, thirty-two years previously. Daniel would have been seven years in captivity when Ezekiel arrived. Daniel and his three friends are presented as the only faithful ones amongst the captives, but clearly Ezekiel was there. There's no reference to their having any contact, perhaps because Ezekiel was at the exile encampment by the Chebar river.

In the beginning of the year- This phrase is used about the jubilee year, and it has been calculated that BC575 would have been a jubilee year. Perhaps the idea was that now was the time for the exiles to accept the proclamation of release, at least in their hearts.

In the tenth day of the month- The month isn't defined, which is understandable if the reference is to the proclamation of a jubilee year on the day of atonement in the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev. 25:9). The idea was that Judah had been forgiven, although they hadn't yet claimed it by repentance, and they were to now

consider the glorious potential future which was thereby possible for them. Hence the emphasis upon "on that very day" in the next clause.

In the fourteenth year after that the city was struck, on that very day, the hand of Yahweh was on me and He brought me there- The city was struck towards the end of the twelfth year of Ezekiel's captivity (Ez. 33:21). The submission of this study is that the return could have led to the establishment of the Kingdom on earth, replete with a Messiah figure and a temple according to the pattern showed to Ezekiel in Ez. 40 - 48. Parts of many of the prophets looked forward to this time, as did the restoration prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah 40-66. All of these could have had their fulfilment in the return under Ezra, but this was disabled by the poor response to the call to return. Under Nehemiah and then even in Malachi's time, these Kingdom prophecies could have had their fulfilment, but time and again Judah failed to live up to the necessary preconditions. In all this lies abundant exhortation for us; so much *could* happen but doesn't, because of our failure to live out and fulfil prophecy... instead, like Judah, we tend to assume that the time for its' fulfilment will inexorably arrive some day, regardless of our effort.

Ezekiel 40:2 *In the visions of God brought He me into the land of Israel and set me down on a very high mountain, whereon was as it were the frame of a city-* Ezekiel saw the temple as if it were already there, located at Jerusalem; he wasn't transported to Heaven to view it. And it was there, potentially, that whole glorious temple. But the captives had to return and build it. turning the prophetic word into flesh, the *logos* into reality. But they didn't. Mount Zion is called "very high" although it isn't, relatively speaking. But it was "very high" in God's purpose and Ezekiel visually got this impression.

On the south- This refers to how Ezekiel was brought to the scene from the north, from Babylon, by the cherubim.

Ezekiel 40:3 *He brought me there; and, behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed; and he stood in the gate-* This man with the measuring line is the same Angel of Zech. 2:1, who was enabling the restoration of Zion at the time of the returned exiles; but they refused to make use of the potential. The "appearance of brass" recalls the vision of Ez. 1:5, confirming that the opening vision of the cherubim is connected with Angelic activity. The line of flax would have been to measure the land areas, and the reed to measure the masonry of the buildings.

Ezekiel 40:4 *The man said to me, Son of man, see with your eyes and hear with your ears, and set your heart on all that I shall show you; for you are brought here with the intent that I may show these things to you: declare all that you see to the people of Israel-* Ezekiel was not merely to act as a transmitter of information, but to be personally involved in the message. This is the challenge to us all in any teaching or sharing of God's word. The command to declare the vision to "the people of Israel" could mean that whilst in Jerusalem, Ezekiel was to share the message with the impoverished remnant who remained there, as well as with the captives back in Babylon. There is a clear similarity with the command to Moses in Ex. 25:9; the tabernacle was to be built by Israel according to what "I show thee", you singular, Moses. The fulfilment of the potential was therefore dependent upon the faithfulness of Ezekiel in accurately sharing the vision. And that is true for all who bring God's word to others.

Ezekiel 40:5 *See, a wall on the outside of the house all around, 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-* The wall wasn't very high; it was not for defence, but to mark the difference between the sacred and profane. The measuring reed or rod is here defined as being 6 cubits plus 6 handbreadths. We recall the presence of a man's hand, Ezekiel's, within the cherubim visions (see on Ez. 10:8). That represented the human part of the whole wondrous vision; God requires human response, but would work powerfully with it. That may explain this otherwise strange measuring unit which mixed a human hand with the cubit measure.

Ezekiel 40:6 *Then he came to the gate which looks toward the east, and went up its steps: and he measured the threshold of the gate, one reed broad; and the other threshold, one reed broad-* We firstly read of the east gate because the intention was that the cherubim of glory would return through the east gate. *Contra* Henry Sulley, there is no evidence that the temple is circular. The temple can hardly face East, as we are told it will in Ez. 47:1, if it is circular. We note the use of steps (seven of them, :22), forbidden in the Mosaic system; human uncleanness would have been dealt with to some extent in the restored community.

Ezekiel 40:7 *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-* These lodges recalled the guard rooms which were commonly placed next to gates of a city. The priests were to keep the charge of these gates and not allow anything unclean to enter (Ez. 44:11). This sounds appropriate to the restored community, but not to a scenario in the Kingdom of God under the rulership of the returned Lord Jesus. See on :21. Then, this truth will be spiritually understood in the vision in which John sees no temple in the new city; "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defiles, neither works abomination, or makes a lie" (Rev. 21:27).

Ezekiel 40:8 *He measured also the porch of the gate toward the house, one reed-* The measurement given in :9 would be that of the porch in the wider sense, including the projecting side-walls upon it (2 cubits).

Ezekiel 40:9 *Then measured he the porch of the gate, eight cubits; and its posts, two cubits; and the porch of the gate was toward the house-* LXX "inward". It seems :9 is measuring the length of the porch from north to south, whereas :8 measures the depth of it from east to west.

Ezekiel 40:10 *The lodges of the gate eastward were three on this side and three on that side; these three were of the same measure: and the posts had the same measure on this side and on that side-* Nehemiah did his very best to bring the potential Kingdom of God about by urging the people to repentance and conformity to God's will, such was his perception of what was going on; that the coming of God's Kingdom was being limited by the apathy of his own people. No fewer than 24 times in Ez. 40-48 are we told that the temple was to be built by 'measure' (e.g. Ez. 40:3,5,10,21,22,24,28,29); and the same word occurs frequently in describing how

Nehemiah gave various groups of Jews their own 'measure' in the work of rebuilding Jerusalem (Neh. 3:11,19,20,22,24,27).

Ezekiel 40:11 *He measured the breadth of the opening of the gate, ten cubits; and the length of the gate, thirteen cubits-* The opening of the gate is its entire width. "The length" appears to mean effectively "the height"; the Hebrew is not specific.

Ezekiel 40:12 *And a border before the lodges of one cubit on this side, and a border of one cubit on that side; and the lodges, six cubits on this side, and six cubits on that side-* "The border" is really a barrier. The ten cubits of :11 is therefore reduced by one cubit on each side, to limit the passage to eight cubits. The implication is that there may have been crowd control problems and the guards / gate keepers needed to be able to manage any possible crush. Again, this is a scenario appropriate to a temple rebuilt by the exiles, but not to the future Kingdom of the Lord Jesus. See on Ez. 46:8.

Ezekiel 40:13 *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-* This is the entire breadth of the gate-buildings.

Ezekiel 40:14 *He made also posts, sixty cubits; and the court reached to the posts, around the gate-* It was an Angel who described to Ezekiel the nature of the temple which the exiles were intended to build; and we even read here that "He made..." [e.g. the posts of the temple]. The Angels had potentially built that temple; it was for Israel to build according to the pattern of it. The measuring now becomes making; what was potentially measured up was thereby as good as made. It all depended upon God's people to actually do it. And for each of us, there are wonderful things prepared for us to achieve for the Lord, made potentially possible, with all the host of Heaven eagerly awaiting our fulfillment of them on earth. But so very often they remain only poorly replicated by us. And the temple prophecies of Ezekiel are a classic example. See on :38; Ez. 1:1,20; 10:8; 11:24.

Ezekiel 40:15 *From the forefront of the gate at the entrance to the forefront of the inner porch of the gate were fifty cubits-* The man on the seventh step would see it clearly: first threshold, 6 cubits; three guardrooms with two intervening spaces, 28 cubits; second threshold, 6 cubits; porch, 6 cubits; projection of the side and gate-pillars, 4 cubits = 50 cubits. This length is double the breadth.

Ezekiel 40:16 *There were closed windows to the lodges, and to their posts within the gate all around, and likewise to the arches; and windows were around inward; and on each post were palm trees-* There are many links between Solomon's temple and that described by Ezekiel. The repeated stress on the cherubim / palm tree decor in both the records of Solomon's temple and also Ezekiel's encourages the idea that the prophesied temple was to be seen as a re-establishment of Solomon's (1 Kings 6:29,32,35; 7:36 cp. Ez. 40:16,22,26,31,34,37; 41:18-20, 25,26).

It's easy to assume that the temple was totally destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The fact a new foundation stone was laid doesn't actually mean that the entire structure was razed to the ground. Jer. 41:5 refers to 80 people coming to offer offerings and perform some kind of worship there even after the Babylonian destruction. There's ample historical reference to the essential ground plan and some structure still standing even after the Babylonians had effectively destroyed it and

rendered it useless (See R.S. Foster, *The Restoration Of Israel* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970) p. 28; John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) p. 325; Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: SCM, 1983) p. 291). This makes it more appealing to consider Ezekiel's vision as a blueprint for the exiles' reconstructing the existing temple, rather than a totally new structure. It's even been suggested that Ezekiel 40-42 was intended as an architectural record of the 'old' temple upon which a new one was to be reconstructed. Zerubbabel is pictured as bringing forth "the premier stone" for the temple (Zech. 4:7). This is a technical term, used in Mesopotamia about "a unit of building material removed from the former temple ruins and then incorporated into the new building" (C.L. & E.M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004) p. 270.). This demonstrates how the projected new temple was a rebuilding of Solomon's temple. The "shouts" with which it was laid (Zech. 4:7) were the "shouts" of the foundation ceremony described in Ezra 3:10-12.

Ezekiel 40:17 *Then brought he me into the outer court; and behold, there were rooms and a pavement, made for the court all around: thirty rooms were on the pavement-* Earlier Ezekiel had seen the wings of the cherubim over the "outer court" (Ez. 10:8). That outer court was now to be rebuilt. The cherubim, simply representing the operation of God for His people, would likewise be involved just as they had been in its destruction; if Judah wished to work with them.

Ezekiel 40:18 *The pavement was by the side of the gates, answerable to the length of the gates, even the lower pavement-* The length of the gates fixed the breadth of the stone pavement. Ez. 40-48 stress the "gates" dozens of times; and Nehemiah's account likewise stresses many times the attention he paid to setting up the "gates" [s.w.], as if he saw his work as fulfilling Ezekiel's words.

Ezekiel 40:19 *Then he measured the breadth from the forefront of the lower gate to the forefront of the inner court outside, one hundred cubits-* He measures the breadth of the outer court, starting from the east gate, the gate already referred to, measuring from the front of its porch.

Both on the east and on the north- "Thus with respect to the east side, and the same with respect to the north side".

Ezekiel 40:20 *The gate of the outer court whose prospect is toward the north, he measured its length and its breadth-* This becomes the standard measure of the other gates (:21).

Ezekiel 40:21 *The lodges of it were three on this side and three on that side; and its posts and its arches were after the measure of the first gate: its length was fifty cubits, and the breadth twenty-five cubits-* We have to note the emphasis upon the guard rooms in the dimensions and measuring; see on :7.

Ezekiel 40:22 *The windows of it, and its arches, and the palm trees of it, were after the measure of the gate whose prospect is toward the east; and they went up to it by seven steps; and its arches were before them-* If indeed Ez. 40-48 are conditional prophecies, this opens up the possibility that so too are many other prophecies- especially those which involve allusion to them. For example, Rev. 11:1 speaks of a

command to measure the temple- and immediately our minds are sent back to the temple being measured in such detail in Ez. 40:10, 21,22 etc. Is this to be read as a sign that we are about to receive another conditional prophecy? Assuming that Revelation was given just prior to the fall of Jerusalem in AD70, we could read the ensuing prophecy in Rev. 11 as saying that although Jerusalem and the outer court would fall to the Romans, the zealots in the inner sanctuary would be preserved, and a command to repentance would be issued by two prophets. Now of course, this didn't happen; but perhaps it could've done, potentially? Consider the possibility- both here and in so many other Bible passages.

Ezekiel 40:23 *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 one hundred cubits-* Now we are introduced to the relation of the gate (of the inner court) to the gate (of the outer court); and we see it as it were by reference to the two gates described northward and eastward.

Ezekiel 40:24 *He led me toward the south; and behold, a gate toward the south: and he measured its posts and its arches according to these measures-* Ezekiel was now close to the measuring Angel, so close he could be led by Him.

Ezekiel 40:25 *There were windows in it and in its arches all around, like those windows: the length was fifty cubits, and the breadth twenty-five cubits-* Like the windows in the gates of :22.

Ezekiel 40:26 *There were seven steps to go up to it, and its arches were before them; and it had palm trees, one on this side, and another on that side, on its posts-* Perhaps by every pillar stood two artificial palms. But literal palm trees may be in view.

Ezekiel 40:27 *There was a gate to the inner court toward the south: and he measured from gate to gate toward the south a hundred cubits-* "Gate" is literally 'an opening'. Whether there were doors upon the gates is left for us to imagine; perhaps if not, we have the impression of a welcoming openness towards the most holy space.

Ezekiel 40:28 *Then he brought me to the inner court by the south gate: and he measured the south gate according to these measures-* Ezekiel was "led" in :24, but now "brought". The Hebrew terms are different but too wide in meaning to be certain of the difference, but the idea could be of some reluctance on Ezekiel's part.

Ezekiel 40:29 *And its lodges, and its posts, and its arches, according to these measures: and there were windows in it and in its arches all around; it was fifty cubits long, and twenty-five cubits broad-* The "lodges" or "chambers" of the temple (s.w. 1 Kings 14:28) are the basis of the Lord's statement that in the Father's house are many abiding places (Jn. 14:1-3); the rebuilding of this temple didn't work out as envisaged, but the essence of the prophecy still comes true in a spiritual sense.

Ezekiel 40:30 *There were arches all around, twenty-five cubits long, and five cubits broad-* The Hebrew for "arches" can also mean a colonnade or portico.

Ezekiel 40:31 *The arches of it were toward the outer court; and palm trees were on*

its posts: and the ascent to it had eight steps- This compares with the seven steps of :22, possibly implying that this was of greater holiness, requiring more effort in human ascent.

Ezekiel 40:32 *He brought me into the inner court toward the east: and he measured the gate according to these measures-* This now describes the inner part of the east gate.

Ezekiel 40:33 *And its lodges, and its posts, and its arches, according to these measures: and there were windows therein and in its arches all around; it was fifty cubits long, and twenty-five cubits broad-* Repeating the style of :29.

Ezekiel 40:34 *The arches of it were toward the outer court; and palm trees were on its posts, on this side, and on that side: and the ascent to it had eight steps-* The motif of palm trees is perhaps to create the idea of direct, upward growth, characteristic of the flourishing of the righteous (Ps. 92:12). Likewise the feet of the cherubim were "straight". The idea is that we respond directly and immediately to spiritual things and possibilities, without all the meandering and distraction so typical of the flesh.

Ezekiel 40:35 *He brought me to the north gate: and he measured it according to these measures-* "Measure" is literally 'to stretch oneself'. It could perhaps be that the measure was the height of the Angel; which would then make sense of Rev. 21:17 where the wall of the new Jerusalem is measured "according to the measure of a man, that is an Angel".

Ezekiel 40:36 *Its lodges, its posts, and its arches: and there were windows therein all around; the length was fifty cubits, and the breadth twenty-five cubits-* The prevalence of "windows... all around" recalls the cherubim being full of eyes all around (Ez. 10:18). There is clearly an impression given that the cherubim were to be involved in the rebuilding and functioning of this new temple system; every human effort to engage with it would be blessed and multiplied by the huge Angelic help available.

Ezekiel 40:37 *The posts of it were toward the outer court; and palm trees were on its posts, on this side, and on that side: and the ascent to it had eight steps-* "The outer court" is LXX "the porch", corresponding with :31,34.

Ezekiel 40:38 *A room with its door was by the posts at the gates; there they washed the burnt offering-* Ezekiel saw a functioning temple- he speaks of "where they washed the burnt offering", he saw animals being killed, things being laid on tables (:38-43). It was all- potentially- 'happening'. It just had to be realized on earth. See on :14.

Ezekiel 40:39 *In the porch of the gate were two tables on this side, and two tables on that side, to kill thereon the burnt offering and the sin offering and the trespass offering-* The order of the offerings usually features the burnt offering last; after recognizing sin and obtaining forgiveness, there was [and is] to be the dedication to God represented by the burnt offering. But God was so eager to accept the returning exiles that He had forgiven them although they had not generally repented. He wanted

them to respond in dedication, and then for His grace to elicit from them the recognition of their sins.

Ezekiel 40:40 *On the one side outside, 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-* There were twelve tables, eight were used for slaughtering and laying the carcasses, and the remaining four for the instruments employed in killing the animals. Of the eight, four stood within the porch of the gate, two on each side, and four outside—two on the side "as one goes up to the entry of the north gate". This seems to mean "at the shoulder to one going up to the gate opening towards the north", i.e. on the outside of the porch's north wall; and two on the other side or shoulder, i.e. on the outside of the porch's south wall. The gate in view is therefore not the north gate, as the AV conjectures, but the east gate, whose side walls looked towards the north and south. The third group of four tables appears to have been planted at the steps, presumably two on each side, "at the ascent", i.e. at the staircase (cp. :26).

Ezekiel 40:41 *Four tables were on this side, and four tables on that side, by the side of the gate; eight tables, whereupon they killed the sacrifices-* See on :40.

Ezekiel 40:42 *There were four tables for the burnt offering, of cut stone, a cubit and a half long, and a cubit and a half broad, and one cubit high; whereupon they laid the instruments with which they killed the burnt offering and the sacrifice-* This speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple [NEV "instruments"] with the same word used for the temple vessels which were brought up out of Babylon back to Judah, in fulfilment of several of Isaiah's 'Kingdom' passages (Ezra 1:6-11; 8:25-33 cp. Is. 52:11; 66:20). The tables on which the carcasses were placed were of stone, maybe implying the tables for the instruments were of wood.

Ezekiel 40:43 *The hooks, a handbreadth long, were fastened within all around: and on the tables was the flesh of the offering-* "Hooks" is LXX "ledges," or "border guards", to keep the instruments or flesh from falling off; or they could refer to "pegs" fastened in the wall for hanging the carcasses before they were flayed.

Ezekiel 40:44 *Outside of the inner gate were rooms for the singers in the inner court, which was at the side of the north gate; and their prospect was toward the south; one at the side of the east gate having the prospect toward the north-* The chambers for the singers appear to have been the priestly chambers (:45,46). In Solomon's temple, the Levites managed the singing (1 Chron. 6:33-47; 15:17; 2 Chron. 20:19). Now the priests were apparently to do so. LXX: "And he led me unto the inner court, and behold two chambers in the inner court, one at the back of the gate which looks towards the north, and bearing towards the south, and one at the back of the gate which looks towards the south, and bearing towards the north". The emphasis upon the singers is appropriate seeing that so many restoration prophecies envisaged the returned exiles singing praises.

Ezekiel 40:45 *He said to me, This room, whose prospect is toward the south, is for the priests, the keepers of the duty of the house-* The phrase 'to keep the duty / charge / ordinance' is used multiple times as a commandment. The priests were to keep the duty, whereas previously they had not. But the same phrase is used in Mal. 3:14 of

how the restored exiles complained that they had 'kept the duty' of the temple for no profit. The greatest tragedy is when potentials are thrown away, and this was and is the tragedy of God's people.

Ezekiel 40:46 *And the room 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 Yahweh to minister to Him-* It was in this kind of chamber in the restored temple that the enemies of the Jews were allowed a living place and the apostate Tobiah stored his "stuff" (Neh. 13:8). This explains Nehemiah's anger about the situation- they were precluding the fulfilment of the potential envisaged here in Ez. 40:46.

Ezekiel emphasized that the sons of Zadok were to organize priestly work in the temple (Ez. 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11); and it was surely not incidental that Ezra, the leader of the initial restoration, was one of the sons of Zadok (Ezra 7:2). He was in a position to fulfil those prophecies, although the bulk of his brethren seem to have precluded this. Ezra was enabled to "beautify" the temple (Ezra 7:27), the very same word used in Is. 60:7,9,13 about how God would "glorify" [s.w.] His temple with merchandise from throughout the Babylonian empire- all of which was willingly offered by Cyrus and Darius. But the people didn't respond to Ezra, and so this scenario didn't come about.

Ezekiel 40:47 *He measured the court, one hundred cubits long, and a hundred cubits broad, foursquare; and the altar was before the house-* Henry Sulley and other popular reconstructions place it, without justification, in the Most Holy Place. Ezekiel commanded that the priests were not to wear their holy garments in the outer courts; and yet if as the popular view suggests they wear them in a central area, at the altar, and then go into their chambers on the edge of the temple, they *would* have to wear them in the outer courts.

Ezekiel 40:48 *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-* Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:3). The "porch" appears to have been entered by a folding door of two leaves, each three cubits broad, which were attached to two side pillars five cubits broad, and met in the middle, so that the whole breadth of the porch front was six cubits, or, including the posts, sixteen cubits. The measurements in :49 of the length of the porch (from east to west) twenty cubits, and the breadth (from north to south) eleven cubits, assumes that the pillars, which were five cubits broad in front, were only half that breadth in the inside, the side wall dividing it in two, so that, although to one entering the opening was only six cubits, the moment one stood in the interior it was 6 cubits + 2 x 2.5 cubits = 11 cubits.

Ezekiel 40:49 *The length of the porch was twenty cubits, and the breadth eleven cubits; even by the steps by which they went up to it: and there were pillars by the posts, one on this side, and another on that side-* Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:21). See on :48.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 41

Ezekiel 41:1 *He brought me to the temple and measured the doorposts, six cubits broad on the one side, and six cubits broad on the other side, which was the breadth of the structure-* "The temple" here refers to the holy place, the nave. "Structure" is 'tabernacle', to ever remind the people that the temple was but a masonry expression of the simple tent in the wilderness where God met with His wandering people. All organized religious structures must ever remember this.

Ezekiel 41:2 *The breadth of the entrance was ten cubits-* The door into the porch was eleven cubits (Ez. 40:49). This would have the effect of rendering the door into the holy place more conspicuous.

And the sides of the entrance were five cubits on the one side, and five cubits on the other side: and he measured its length, forty cubits, and the breadth, twenty cubits- Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:16,17).

Ezekiel 41:3 *Then he went inside and measured each post of the entrance, two cubits; and the entrance, six cubits; and the breadth of the entrance, seven cubits-* The Angel entered the Most Holy, and presumably called out the measurements to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 41:4 *He measured its length, twenty cubits, and the breadth, twenty cubits, before the temple. He said to me, This is the most holy place-* Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:19,20). No details are given of what was within the most holy place, perhaps because it was simply to be indwelt by the glory of God. In Ezekiel's system there is a lack of many things required under the Mosaic system (see too Ez. 45:23), because at the restoration they could have been spiritually fulfilled. That didn't work out, and so the fulfilment has been reapplied and rescheduled to the work of the Lord Jesus. There was:

- No Laver (see Ezekiel 36:24-27, John 15:3) ;
- No Table of Shewbread (see Micah 5:4, John 6:35);
- No Lampstand or Menorah (see Isaiah 49:6, John 8:12);
- No Golden Altar of Incense (Zechariah 8:20-23, John 14:6)
- No Veil (Isaiah 25:6-8, Matthew 27:51) ;
- No Ark of the Covenant (Jeremiah 3:16, John 10:30-33).

Ezekiel 41:5 *Then he measured the wall of the house, six cubits; and the breadth of every side room, four cubits, all around the house on every side-* Solomon's system of "chambers" or "ribs" was replicated (1 Kings 6:5,8,16 cp. Ez. 41:5-11 s.w.). The measuring began with the outer wall, which, beginning at the pillars (Ez. 41:1), enclosed the temple on its south, west, and north sides.

Ezekiel 41:6 *The side rooms were in three floors, one over another, and thirty on each floor. The outer wall on each floor was thinner than on the floor below, so that the rooms could rest on the wall without being anchored into it-* Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:6,10). The chambers were ranged in three stories of thirty each; Josephus (*Antiquities* 8.3.2) claims this was exactly how it was in Solomon's temple. Perhaps there were twelve threes on each of the longer sides, the north and the south, and six threes on the shorter or western side.

Ezekiel 41:7 *The walls of the house, when seen from the outside, seemed to have the same thickness all the way to the top. Against the house's outer wall, on the outside of the rooms, two wide stairways were built, so that it was possible to go from the lower story to the middle and the upper stories-* Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:6,8). The AV speaks of an "enlarging", as if the floor area of each floor increased from the first to the third story. The AV "and a winding about still upward to the side chambers" could suggest that Ezekiel's temple had a spiral staircase like that in Solomon's temple (see 1 Kings 6:8).

Ezekiel 41:8 *I saw also that the house had a raised base all around: the foundations of the side rooms were a full reed of six great cubits-* RV "A raised basement". The six cubits are the height of the ceiling above the floor in each story, which would give a height of eighteen cubits for the three stories; but probably they mark only the height of the temple and side chamber measured from above ground level.

Ezekiel 41:9 *The thickness of the wall, which was for the side rooms, on the outside, was five cubits: and that which was left was the place of the side rooms that belonged to the house-* The five cubits were between the temple wall and the side chambers.

Ezekiel 41:10 *Between the rooms was a breadth of twenty cubits around the house on every side-* The LXX combines :9 and :10: "And that which was left between the side chambers of the house and the cells [along the inner court wall] was twenty cubits round about the house on every side".

Ezekiel 41:11 *The doors of the side rooms were toward the place that was left, one door toward the north, and another door toward the south: and the breadth of the free space that was left was five cubits all around-* The breadth of the court was comprised of: 1. Breadth of the house 20 cubits; 2. Breadth of wall, 6 x 2 cubits = 12 cubits; 3. Breadth of chambers, 4 x 2 cubits = 8 cubits; 4. Breadth of chamber wall, 5 x 2 cubits = 10 cubits; 5. Breadth of corridor, 5 x 2 cubits = 10 cubits; 6. Breadth of free space, 20 x 2 cubits = 40 cubits. Total = 100 cubits. The length of the court was comprised of: 1. The length of the house—60 cubits; 2. The temple wall—6 cubits; 3. The chambers—4 cubits; 4. The chamber wall—5 cubits; 5. The corridor ["free space"]—5 cubits; 6. The space towards the west—20 cubits. Total = 100 cubits. The "house" was thus one hundred cubits square.

Ezekiel 41:12 *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 all around, and its length ninety cubits-* "The separate ['cut off'] place" refers to a space behind the temple on the west, which was marked off from the rest of the ground on which the temple with its courts and chambers stood. There was a similar space behind Solomon's temple (2 Kings 23:11; 1 Chron. 26:18), apparently for rubbish.

Ezekiel 41:13 *So he measured the house, one hundred cubits long; and the separate place, and the building, with its walls, one hundred cubits long-* See on :14.

Ezekiel 41:14 *Also the breadth of the face of the house, and of the separate place toward the east, one hundred cubits-* We can summarize: The breadth of the area from west to east:

1. The separate place (including walls)—100 cubits
2. The "house" (with free space behind)—100 cubits
3. The inner court—100 cubits
4. The outer court (the two gates with space between them)—200 cubits

Total = 500 cubits

The length of the area from north to south—

1. The outer court (the two northern gates with spaces between them)—200 cubits
 2. The "house" (with free space on both sides)—100 cubits
 3. The outer court (the two southern gates with distance between them)—200 cubits
- Total = 500 cubits.

Ezekiel 41:15 *He measured the length of the building before the separate place which was at its back, and its galleries on the one side and on the other side, one hundred cubits; and the inner temple, and the porches of the court-* The "galleries" could be "ledges", or some kind of terrace buildings.

Ezekiel 41:16 *The thresholds, and the closed windows, and the galleries around on their three stories, over against the threshold, with wood ceilings all around, and from the ground up to the windows, (now the windows were covered)-* If parts of the structure were to be made of wood, we wonder whether this was really intended to last for 1000 years, as required by the view that this temple is that of a future Millennial reign of Christ. The 'covering' of the windows could refer to a lattice, or it could imply that from below, they were not seen.

Ezekiel 41:17 *To the space above the door, even to the inner house, and outside, and by all the wall all around inside and outside, by measure-* The 'complete covering' (GNB) with cherubim (:18) reflected the complete and total presence of God and His activity for His people, which is what the cherubim represented.

Ezekiel 41:18 *It was made with cherubim and palm trees; and a palm tree was between cherub and cherub, and each cherub had two faces-* The temple was to have cherubim motifs throughout it- as if to show that the Cherubim of Ezekiel 1 had now 'landed' on the temple at the end of the prophecy. The vision of God's glory entering the temple "was according to the vision... that I saw by the river Chebar" back in Babylon (Ez. 43:2,3). This is the meaning of the fact that cherubim visions both begin and end the prophecy of Ezekiel. The cherubim would move from Judah to Babylon and then back to Judah, to enter into and dwell in the temple. Yet God's glory did not enter the temple which Nehemiah built. This was because the people had not followed Ezekiel's example, they had not identified themselves with the Angelic movements above them, but rather remained dominated by their petty self interests. They never really repented- for Ezekiel 43:11 records Ezekiel being told to only give Judah "the form of the house" and "write it in their sight" only "if they be ashamed of all that they have done". There is no record of Ezekiel giving them the promised further plans for the temple- so the wonderful prophecy could not be fulfilled, because they did not repent.

Ezekiel 41:19 *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 all around-* Each cherub had only two of its faces

revealed on the wall. Perhaps the allusion was to the man who was to be the lion of Judah, the Messiah figure who could have arisen at the restoration.

Ezekiel 41:20 *From the ground to above the door were cherubim and palm trees made: thus was the wall of the temple-* The entire wall was covered with this motif.

Ezekiel 41:21 *As for the temple, the door posts were squared; and as for the face of the sanctuary, the appearance of it was as the appearance of the temple-* The emphasis upon the "squared" pattern again connects with the four fold nature of the cherubim vision of Ez. 1. The cherubim of glory had as it were landed permanently in the temple. And all of God's people who identified with His work would likewise come there.

Ezekiel 41:22 *The altar was of wood, three cubits high, and its length two cubits; and its corners, and its length, and its walls, were of wood: and he said to me, This is the table that is before Yahweh-* Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:20,22). A wooden altar may seem unsuitable for the task. But the idea of the altar was that it was God's table, at which He as it were ate in fellowship with men. We too sit at such a humanly inadequate table in fellowship with the same God. However a wooden altar may imply this was the altar of incense (Ex. 30:1; 1 Kings 7:48). But again we note a difference with the old system; the dimensions of this altar in the tabernacle were two cubits high and one cubit long and broad.

Ezekiel 41:23 *The temple and the sanctuary had two doors-* Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:31-35; 6:32 AVmg.).

Ezekiel 41:24 *The doors had two leaves apiece, two turning leaves: two leaves for the one door, and two leaves for the other-* Considering all the detail given of even the doors, the absence of any mention of an ark of the covenant within them is significant. The glory of God was to dwell there. Or perhaps the details of the most holy place would have been given later, had Judah been responsive to this outline description (Ez. 43:11).

Ezekiel 41:25 *There were made on them, on the doors of the temple, cherubim and palm trees, like as were made on the walls-* Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:32).

And there was a threshold of wood on the face of the porch outside- "Wood" is "thick planks". There are many links between Solomon's temple and that described by Ezekiel. There were "thick planks" upon the porch of Solomon's temple; and the same word is only used elsewhere in describing how this would feature in Ezekiel's temple too (1 Kings 7:6 cp. Ez. 41:25,26).

Ezekiel 41:26 *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 rooms of the house, and the thresholds-* . Even the "windows of narrow lights" of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:4) were to be replicated (Ez. 40:16; 41:16,26). The idea is that the Davidic throne and kingdom was to be reestablished, and we know from Zechariah that this was envisaged as happening at the restoration from Babylon.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 42

Ezekiel 42:1 *Then he brought me forth into the outer court, the way toward the north: and he brought me into the room that was opposite the separate place, and which was opposite the building toward the north-* Earlier we heard of chambers for the officiating priests on the north and south gates of the inner court (Ez. 40:44-46). He now as it were returns to take a closer look at them.

Ezekiel 42:2 *The length of the building whose door faced north was a hundred cubits, and the breadth was fifty cubits-* It was the front length of the cell building to which Ezekiel sees himself brought. The hundred cubits length agree with Ez. 41:13.

Ezekiel 42:3 *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-* No staircase seems mentioned; the focus of the vision is upon the existence of so many rooms; see on :5.

Ezekiel 42:4 *Before the rooms was a walk of ten cubits' breadth inward, a way of one cubit-* The walkways are emphasized. Zech. 3:7-10 encouraged Joshua to be the king-priest of the restored kingdom: "If you will walk in my ways, and if you will keep my charge [as so frequently commanded in Ez. 40:46; 44:8,14-16 s.w.], then you shall also judge my house (as prophesied in Ez. 40-48), and shalt also keep my courts (so often mentioned in Ez. 40-48), and I will give you places to walk (s.w. Ez. 42:4 about the walkways in the prophesied temple)... hear now, O Joshua". But he didn't. He didn't keep the courts, but allowed Tobiah the Ammonite to set up his office for subversion in the temple chambers.

And their doors were toward the north- Time and again, the new system is described in terms which allude to the bad practices in the old system- e.g. the stress of Ez. 42:4 etc. that the doors of the new chambers were "toward the north" connects with how Ezekiel had earlier seen women weeping for Tammuz "towards the north" in the temple (Ez. 8:14; Ez. 9:2). See on :20.

Ezekiel 42:5 *Now the upper rooms were shorter; for the galleries took away from these, more than from the lower and the middle, in the building-* The huge attention given to the chambers is surely because they would come to represent the places in the Father's house prepared for His people (Jn. 14:1-3), who would all be as it were about the work of His house. And there was a huge number of them, far more perhaps than was required in the restored temple situation. The sheer number of them and attention given to them in the plans was to highlight a symbolic meaning to them, even at the time. For the literal "sons of Zadok" were likely not enough to have lived in or used them all.

Ezekiel 42:6 *For they were in three stories, and they had no pillars like the pillars of the courts. Thus the upper chambers were set back from the ground more than the lower and the middle ones-* The chambers rose in terrace form, each of the upper stories receding from that below it, as was customary in Babylonian architecture. Likewise the form of the cherubim and palm tree motif was similar to what they had seen in Babylon. God in His grace and sensitive understanding was giving the exiles a plan to follow which would have been acceptable to them in accordance with the

culture they had picked up in Babylon. And this thought confirms the impression that the temple was intended for the returned exiles to build, and not far any far later generation.

Ezekiel 42:7 *The wall that was outside by the side of the rooms, toward the outer court before the rooms, its length was fifty cubits-* This "wall" is the word used in Ez. 13:5. Judah had not previously built nor maintained such a wall or fence; and now on return from exile they were to do what they had earlier failed to. The fence was perhaps intended to screen the side windows of the lower chambers from public gaze, since these were to be occupied as robing and disrobing rooms for the priests (Ez. 44:19). This all sounds very much of a human situation, rather than that after the return of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 42:8 *For the length of the rooms that were in the outer court was fifty cubits: and see, before the temple were one hundred cubits-* The chambers whose windows looked into the outer court, projected fifty cubits into the outer court; i.e. this was their breadth or depth from north to south. Those before the temple were an hundred cubits; i.e. the chambers whose windows fronted the temple, were a hundred cubits from east to west.

Ezekiel 42:9 *From under these rooms was the entry on the east side, as one goes into them from the outer court-* This entry ran along the east side of the building, and led from the outer to the temple court. Because the outer court was higher than the temple and could only be reached by steps, "the entry" is represented as lying under the rooms.

Ezekiel 42:10 *In the thickness of the wall of the court toward the east, before the separate place, and before the building, there were rooms-* As noted on :5, there is a huge emphasis upon the rooms, seeing they would come to represent places of personal salvation in Christ. But we reflect that these rooms are places of work and connected to work. Salvation will be about active work for the Lord and not an eternal rest.

Ezekiel 42:11 *The way before them was like the appearance of the way of the rooms which were toward the north; according to their length so was their breadth: and all their exits were both according to their fashions, and according to their doors-* The existence of walkways is stressed in these plans. As explained on Zech. 3:7, these are the "places to walk" which would have become real and actual had the returned exiles responded to this great plan.

Ezekiel 42:12 *According to the doors of the rooms 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-* See on :11.

Ezekiel 42:13 *Then he said to me, The north rooms and the south rooms, which are before the separate place, they are the holy rooms, where the priests who are near to Yahweh shall eat the most holy things: there shall they lay the most holy things, and the meal offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; for the place is holy-* The same words are found in Ezra 2:63 and Neh. 7:65- it wasn't possible for the priests to eat of the holy things [signifying God's acceptance of His people], because

there was no record of their genealogy. Their names were not written in the “register” in fulfilment of Ez. 13:9: “neither shall they be written in the writing [s.w. ‘register’, Ezra 2:62] of the house of Israel”. Only if a priest stood up with urim and thummim could they eat of the holy things. These were two engraved stones carried in a pouch in the breastplate which flashed out Divine decisions (see H.A. Whittaker, *Samuel, Saul And David* for an excellent study of this). Zechariah 3:9 prophesies that Joshua the High Priest would have the engraved stone with seven eyes- the urim and thummim. It would thereby have been possible for a priesthood who had lost their genealogy record during the sacking of the first temple to eat the holy things, and thus fulfil Ezekiel 42:13. In a restoration context, Isaiah 66:21 had prophesied that Yahweh would regather Judah, “And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD”. This implies, surely, that He would accept some as Levites who could not otherwise prove they were. Zechariah 6:11,13 speaks of Joshua being crowned with the High Priestly mitre and ‘bearing the glory’, i.e. carrying the urim and thummim in the breastplate. But all this was *conditional* on Joshua’s obedience: “This shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey” (Zech. 6:15). Because Joshua failed, he didn’t have urim and thummim, therefore no decision could be given about who was an acceptable priest, and therefore the ‘Kingdom’ prophecy of Ezekiel 42:13 was left unfulfilled. So much depended upon that man. And likewise, the eternal destiny of many others depends on us. Isaiah’s prophecies of the restoration feature “the servant”- who was a symbol of both the people and a Messianic individual. His success was bound up with theirs. Thus Is. 65:9: “And I will bring forth a seed [singular] out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor [singular] of my mountains: and mine elect [plural] shall inherit it, and my servants [plural] shall dwell there”. His obedience would enable the peoples’ establishment as the Kingdom.

Ezekiel 42:14 *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 in which they minister; for they are holy: and they shall put on other garments, and shall approach to those things which are for the people-* The LXX gives the sense: "None shall go in thither except the priests, and they shall not go forth of the holy place into the outer court, that they that draw nigh to me may be continually holy, and may not touch their garments in which they minister, with defilement, for they are holy; and they shall put on other garments whenever they come in contact with the people". The language of defilement reads contrasts with the New Testament teaching that defilement has now been ended in Christ; and the veil to the Most Holy was torn at the Lord's death to demonstrate that now, access to the Holiest was possible for "the people". And Hebrews builds on this, showing that all in Christ are now able to enter. It is not therefore good enough to argue that this temple will be built after the Lord's return, and these things will point back to Him as the Mosaic sacrifices pointed forward to Him. The reality is that "the people" can get direct access to the Holiest, and that is now a reality for all time that will not be changed.

Ezekiel 42:15 *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 all around-* He now measures the wall which was around the house and its courts. And Ezekiel was apparently led out by the east gate to observe this.

Ezekiel 42:16 *He measured on the east side with the measuring reed five hundred reeds, with the measuring reed all around-* For discussion of the size of the temple,

see on Ez. 45:1. The LXX sees this wall as that of the outer court, and changes the "reeds" into "cubits".

Ezekiel 42:17 *He measured on the north side five hundred reeds with the measuring reed all around-* The temple of Ezekiel was of broadly similar dimensions to that of Solomon, 500 cubits square (see RSV). The Hebrew translated "reeds" is hard to interpret; but many expositors have concluded that "cubits" is meant, amongst them Mark Allfree, *Worship In The Age To Come* and Philip Hinde & Ivan Sturman, *Ezekiel's Last Vision*.

Ezekiel 42:18 *He measured on the south side five hundred reeds with the measuring reed-* The LXX reads "cubits" instead of "reeds".

Ezekiel 42:19 *He turned about to the west side, and measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed-* Reading with LXX "cubits" makes more sense. Otherwise there is a huge area of space enclosed for no apparent reason.

Ezekiel 42:20 *He measured it on the four sides: it had a wall around it, the length five hundred, and the breadth five hundred, to make a separation between that which was holy and that which was common-* This is alluding back to Ezekiel's earlier lament that Judah had not made that very separation (Ez. 22:26). See on Ez. 44:6. This reflected the difference between God's people, His "sanctuary" (Psalms 114:2), and the surrounding world. But Judah did not 'separate' themselves from the surrounding tribes but instead married them and worshipped their idols (s.w. Ezra 9:1 "The people of Israel... have not separated themselves from the people of the land, doing according to their *abominations*... for they have taken of their daughters for themselves"). The same word for "abominations" occurs in the same context in Mal. 2:11: "Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god". Yet it had been emphasized that the temple system Ezekiel described was to be free of all the "abominations" [s.w.] previously committed by Israel (Ezekiel 43:8; 44:6,7,13).

In fact, the account of Judah's separation from the surrounding peoples reads similar to that of the purges from idolatry during the reign of the kings. They separated / purged, and then, within a few years, we read of them doing so again. Initially, the exiles separated from the peoples of the land (Ezra 6:21); by Ezra 9:1 they are in need of separating again; and by Ezra 10:11 likewise; then they separate (Ezra 10:16), only to need another call to separation by the time of Neh. 9:2; 13:3. They obviously found it extremely difficult to be separated from the surrounding world unto God's law (Neh. 10:28). There was a powerful logic- either separate from the world around, or be separated from the people of God (Ezra 10:8). It's a separation- one way or the other. Judah chose not to make that separation, and so the spirit of the new temple was precluded from coming about in that form at that time.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 43

Ezekiel 43:1 *Afterward he brought me to the gate that looks toward the east-* The same words are translated "prepare the way" in Mal. 3:1 and Is. 40:3 (see too Ez.

43:1; 44:1; 47:2). The way is 'prepared' or 'looks' eastward. This was the way or road over which the glory was to re-enter the restored temple. But Judah didn't rebuild that temple as specified and as Malachi often demonstrates, the priests failed to act as commanded in Ez. 40-48. And so the messenger of the covenant who was to prepare that way likewise failed; but finally the essence of the prophecies will come true through the work of the Elijah prophet and John the Baptist [also a priest] preparing the way of the Lord Jesus, so that His glory and Spirit could enter a spiritual temple of restored people.

Ezekiel 43:2 *Behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the east: and His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shined with His glory-* This refers to the cherubim, who made the same sound according to Ezekiel's earlier visions of them.

Ezekiel 43:3 *It was according to the appearance of the vision which 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 on my face-* The vision of God's glory entering the temple "was according to the vision... that I saw by the river Chebar" back in Babylon. This is the meaning of the fact that cherubim visions both begin and end the prophecy of Ezekiel. The cherubim would move from Judah to Babylon and then back to Judah, to enter into and dwell in the temple. Yet God's glory did not enter the temple which Nehemiah built. This was because the people had not followed Ezekiel's example, they had not identified themselves with the Angelic movements above them, but rather remained dominated by their petty self interests. They never really repented- for Ez. 43:11 records Ezekiel being told to only give Judah "the form of the house" and "write it in their sight" only "if they be ashamed of all that they have done". There is no record of Ezekiel giving them the promised further plans for the temple- so the wonderful prophecy could not be fulfilled, because they did not repent.

Ezekiel 43:4 *The glory of Yahweh came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east-* Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (Ez. 43:4,5). But God's prophesy of this in Is. 60:7, that He would glorify His house, meant that He was prepared to work through men to glorify it. The fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of the cloud of glory entering the temple again could have been fulfilled if the exiles had done what Artaxerxes empowered them to do- to glorify the house of glory. And so the fulfilment was delayed. The glory of the temple the exiles built was tragically less than the glory of the first temple; and so it would only be in the last day of Messiah's second coming that the house shall truly be filled with glory (Hag. 2:3,7,9). And the lesson ought to be clear for us, in the various projects and callings of our lives: it becomes crucial for us to discern God's specific purposes for us, and insofar as we follow His leading, we will feel a blessing and power which is clearly Divine.

Ezekiel 43:5 *The Spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of Yahweh filled the house-* The glory of Yahweh was to fill Ezekiel's temple as it had done Solomon's (Ez. 43:5 cp. 1 Kings 8:10).

Ezekiel 43:6 *I heard one speaking to me out of the house; and a man stood by me-* The references to Yahweh's 'return' to Zion were to be fulfilled in the Angel of His

presence again dwelling there. And this is the Angelic person who is now located within the house and speaks to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 43:7 *He said to 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-* God's throne was that of David; the restored throne of David is in view.

The house of Israel shall no more defile My holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their prostitution, and by the dead bodies of their kings in their high places- . Judah in the new temple would not “defile” Yahweh’s Name any more (:8); but they were lazy to keep the uncleanness laws, they *did* defile Yahweh by touching dead bodied and then offering the sacrifices (Hag. 2:13,14 s.w.), just as Israel previously had been defiled by touching the dead bodies of their kings and then offering sacrifices; but after the restoration, Judah thought they were above God’s law, and therefore did exactly the same things which had caused the temple to be destroyed in the first place.

Ezekiel 43:8 *In their setting of their threshold by My threshold, and their doorpost beside My doorpost, and there was but the wall between Me and them; and they have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed: therefore I have consumed them in My anger-* We gasp at the closeness of God to men, even before the even greater proximity achieved in the work of Jesus.

Ezekiel 43:9 *Now let them put away their prostitution-* Whilst Ezekiel was prophesying before the return from exile, he speaks as if the temple has been built but Judah are still unfaithful to the covenant. He was inspired to see that the restoration would happen, but the returned exiles would need exhortation to return spiritually to God and not just physically to Zion.

And the dead bodies of their kings, far from Me; and I will dwell in their midst forever- Instead of focusing upon the dead bodies of apostate kings, they should instead look to the restoration of the Davidic line in a Messianic prince. The promise that Yahweh would dwell in the new temple was conditional on them not touching dead bodies; but Hag. 2:13 makes it apparent that they did this very thing at the time of the restoration. The kingdom prophecy of Joel 3:21 could then had had some fulfilment: “I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed; for the LORD dwells [s.w.] in Zion”. See on Ez. 47:1.

Ezekiel 43:10 *You, son of man, show the house to the people of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern-* Ezekiel was showing the captives that they would return but would likely fall back into the very "prostitution" to the covenant (:9) which led to their exile; and Ezekiel is as it were asking them to repent ahead of time. Ezekiel shewed Judah the general picture of the temple; if they were obedient, then God promised to give them more details so they could build it in reality (perhaps these would have included details of the contents of the most holy place, of which nothing is said). In the same way as the Angel-cherubim were to be followed back on earth by Judah from Babylon to Jerusalem, so in the same way as the Angel is described as measuring the new temple, so Judah were to "measure the pattern" and build accordingly. But they didn't.

Israel would only be able to build the temple properly if they were “ashamed of their iniquities”. This was the tragedy felt by Ezra, when he realized the exiles were not living as they should be: “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to

thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased” (Ezra 9:6). And Ezra knew they weren’t “ashamed of their iniquities”. And thus he sought to take upon himself that shame, believing that God would accept *his* shame on behalf of the people. Note in passing how he speaks of blushing before God. You only blush in someone’s presence. And this was how close and real Ezra felt his God to be.

Ezekiel 43:11 *If they be ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the form of the house, and its fashion, and its exits, and its entrances, and all its forms, and all its ordinances, and all its forms, and all its laws; and write it in their sight; that they may keep the whole form of it, and all its ordinances, and do them-* The fact Ezekiel does make known the form of the house would suggest that a minority amongst the exiles did repent. Or perhaps they didn’t, and by grace God all the same revealed to them the wonderful “form” of all the possibilities for them, in the hope that would elicit their repentance. Perhaps this repentance of a remnant explains why in fact the record of Ezekiel’s temple was written down at all- for it would be written down *if* Judah were ashamed of their sins. Ezekiel’s opening chapters record him being forewarned by God that they would not generally be responsive to his ministry; and yet some like Ezra were (see on :10), and maybe this was eagerly seized upon by God as the basis for allowing the writing down and preservation of the specifications we have in Ez. 40-48.

The temple vision should have made them ashamed of their sins (Ez. 43:10,11). It should have motivated them to live the Kingdom life in their lives: “describe the Temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them match their lives to its pattern”. But they didn’t. It may have been partly due to lack of familiarity with the text of the prophecy- Ezekiel would have preached it to them, but many of them were too busy with the Babylon life to reflect upon it. Those who returned to the land may well have done so not so much in order to get on with conformity to Ezekiel’s vision of the Kingdom, but for other reasons- their family and friends were going back, they felt some vague conscience that they ought to, perhaps their own experience of Babylon life hadn’t been positive and they vaguely hoped for something better... and so when they got there, they simply weren’t interested in serious conformity to the prophecies about restoration. And in principle, our own lives and apparent commitment before God can be just the same. It is evident that they didn’t reflect upon the real implications of the prophecies which they must all have vaguely known. And these weaknesses must serve as the basis for our own self-examination: are we familiar with the text of Scripture, and more so, are we really meditating upon the personal implications for us?

Ezekiel 43:12 *This is the law of the house: on the top of the mountain the whole limit around it shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house-* This is one of the clearest statements that what we have in Ez. 40-48 is command rather than prediction. They were a law, a commandment to be fulfilled. This explains the commandment style of the instructions, e.g. Ez. 44:2: “This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened”. The “law of the house” should not be confused with the law of Moses; there are significant differences.

Ezekiel 43:13 *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 its border around its edge a span; and this shall be the base of the altar-*

Ezekiel 43:14 *From the bottom on 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-* The impression given by the language is that the altar rises up out of the earth. This is a purposeful juxtaposition with the unusual word used for it in :15, *harel*, "the mount of God". The impression is that arising from the dust on man's side, God meets with man there at His table and fellowships with us in eating together.

Ezekiel 43:15 *The upper altar shall be four cubits; and from the altar hearth and upward there shall be four horns-* "Upper altar" is *harel*, literally "the mount of God". The altar is therefore presented as the pinnacle of mount Zion. The teaching is not so much that sacrifice is the pinnacle of devotion to God, but rather His desire to share a table with man, to eat with man, is the pinnacle. The four horns perhaps connect with the four cherubim, who have as it were landed permanently in the new temple.

Ezekiel 43:16 *The altar hearth shall be twelve cubits long by twelve broad, square in the four sides of it-* This was large, but the twelve square arrangement looked forward to the united twelve tribes of Israel having one altar. The restoration prophecies indicate that there was envisaged a unity between the restored tribes of Israel, centred around a joint experience of forgiveness and desire to worship at the same altar (cp. 2 Chron. 32:12). Ezekiel had earlier seen the altar as the place of Divine judgment for the abuses committed there (Ez. 9:2). Now, the restored exiles were to do better.

Ezekiel 43:17 *The ledge shall be fourteen cubits long by fourteen broad in the four sides of it; and the border about it shall be half a cubit; and its bottom shall be a cubit around; and its steps shall look toward the east-* The altar would have steps leading up to it, whereas this was forbidden in Ex. 20:26. The intended new system would not need to be so concerned about human uncleanness because this had been dealt with under the new covenant offered them.

Ezekiel 43:18 *He said to me, Son of man, thus says the Lord Yahweh: 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-* "In the day..." implies they were not to use it until they had immediately offered a sin offering upon it (:19). That the altar needed cleansing again indicates an abiding imperfection in the whole system which would not be appropriate if this temple is to be built and operated by the Lord Jesus and the redeemed in the future.

Ezekiel 43:19 *You shall give to the priests the Levites who are of the seed of Zadok, who are near to Me, to minister to Me, says the Lord Yahweh, a young bull for a sin offering-* Before we can offer anything to God on His altar (:18), there must be the recognition that we are sinners; what we are offering, therefore, is not in order to obtain forgiveness, but in gratitude for that forgiveness already received. The "you" was addressed to Ezekiel and suggests it could have been built within Ezekiel's lifetime, for he was to give the animals to the sons of Zadok to offer in the temple; Ezekiel was to prepare the daily sacrifice (Ez. 46:13). The Zadok of Ez. 43:19 may well be the Zadok of Neh. 13:13; meaning that although the potential for fulfilment in Ezekiel's lifetime had been missed, the next generation were still capable of fulfilling it.

Ezekiel 43:20 *You shall take of its blood, and put it on the four horns of it, and on the four corners of the ledge, and on the border all around: thus you shall cleanse it and make atonement for it-* Ezekiel himself, as a priest, was to inaugurate the altar by sprinkling blood upon it and making an offering (Ez. 43:20-25). Ezekiel personally was to give the priests a bullock to offer on the new altar and to cleanse it (Ez. 43:19,20)- as if the temple was intended to be built during Ezekiel's lifetime. See on :19.

Ezekiel 43:21 *You shall also take the bull of the sin offering, and it shall be burnt in the appointed place of the house, outside of the sanctuary-* Nehemiah did his very best to bring the potential Kingdom of God about by urging the people to repentance and conformity to God's will, such was his perception of what was going on; that the coming of God's Kingdom was being limited by the apathy of his own people. See on Ez. 40:10. He arranged for 12 gates to be built in the wall, as Ez. 48:31-34 had commanded there to be. He built 'miphkad', "the Muster Gate" (Neh. 3:31 RSV), the "appointed place" [s.w.] of Ez. 43:21.

Ezekiel 43:22 *On the second day you shall offer a male goat without blemish for a sin offering; and they shall cleanse the altar, as they cleansed it with the bull-* Malachi and Haggai so bitterly complain at the way the priests didn't serve God properly in the restored temple. They offered blemished sacrifices, when it had been prophesied / commanded in Ezekiel that Israel were not to do this (Mal. 1:8).

Ezekiel 43:23 *When you have finished cleansing it, you shall offer a young bull without blemish, and a ram out of the flock without blemish-* But they offered blemished animals (Mal. 1:8), because they wanted the nicer meat and more money for themselves- petty materialism stopped the Kingdom experience being realized.

Ezekiel 43:24 *You shall bring them near to Yahweh, and the priests shall cast salt on them, and they shall offer them up for a burnt offering to Yahweh-* The salt was a sign of covenant relationship (Lev. 2:13). The inauguration of the altar would be a sign of acceptance of the new covenant with the returned exiles which is envisaged in Ez. 20 and Jer. 31. The reality is that they didn't really accept it.

Ezekiel 43:25 *Seven days you shall prepare every day a goat for a sin offering: they shall also prepare a young bull, and a ram out of the flock, without blemish-* The contrast between "you" and "they" suggest that Ezekiel himself is envisaged as acting as a priest. The prophecy could have come true in his life time; the 70 year period of captivity could have been reduced. Instead, it was extended.

Ezekiel 43:26 *Seven days shall they make atonement for the altar and purify it; so shall they consecrate it-* There was to be a seven day dedication of the altar (Ez. 43:26) just as had happened in Solomon's time (2 Chron. 7:9).

Ezekiel 43:27 *When they have accomplished the days, it shall be that on the eighth day, and onwards, the priests shall make your burnt offerings on the altar and your peace offerings-* Both Solomon and Ezekiel's temples were to be ready for operation on "the eighth day" after their consecration (cp. 1 Kings 8:66). I suggest that contrary to how it is often presented, Ezekiel's temple was to be of a similar size to that of

Solomon's. Even the statement that finally, the Lord would be there in the temple, is alluding back to how Yahweh came and dwelt in Solomon's temple.

And I will accept you, says the Lord Yahweh- Ezekiel 20 gives the clearest outline of the envisaged sequence of events at the restoration. Verses 3-33 describe Israel's sins up to the captivity; then there is the pleading with Israel in captivity (:35 = Ez. 17:20), with the intention that there in Babylon Israel would repent (:43). Then they would return to their land, build a temple and offer acceptable sacrifices, and be "accepted" (Ez. 20:41). The idea of God 'accepting' Israel is found here in Ez. 43:27; when the temple was built and the sacrifices offered, "I will accept you". If Judah resumed building the temple according to Ezekiel's plan, "I will take pleasure" in it, God offered (Hag. 1:8). The same word is used in Ez. 43:27- *then*, when the temple of Ezekiel was built, Yahweh would "accept / take pleasure in" His people and temple. But because they built and served Him with such a mean spirit, He did not "accept" them at that time (Mal. 1:10,13 s.w.). Note how Hag. 1:8 describes the need to go up onto the mountain and build the temple- as if to recall attention to Ezekiel's opening vision of the temple as built on a mountain. But Judah would not, and therefore the Kingdom blessings of corn, new wine and oil, as well as fruitfulness on the mountains, were all withheld (Hag. 1:11).

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 44

Ezekiel 44:1 *Then he brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary, which looks toward the east; and it was shut-* The intention was that when the temple was built and functioning as required, operated and used by a repentant Judah, Yahweh's glory would return through the east gate. But in the vision, it was still "shut". The same words are translated "prepare the way" in Mal. 3:1 and Is. 40:3 (see too Ez. 43:1; 47:2). The way is 'prepared' or 'looks' eastward. This was the way or road over which the glory was to re-enter the restored temple. But Judah didn't rebuild that temple as specified and as Malachi often demonstrates, the priests failed to act as commanded in Ez. 40-48. And so the messenger of the covenant who was to prepare that way likewise failed; but finally the essence of the prophecies will come true through the work of the Elijah prophet and John the Baptist [also a priest] preparing the way of the Lord Jesus, so that His glory and Spirit could enter a spiritual temple of restored people.

Ezekiel 44:2 *Yahweh said to me, This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, neither shall any man enter in by it; for Yahweh, the God of Israel, has entered in by it; therefore it shall be shut-* Zechariah labours the paradox of grace- that if Judah returned to Yahweh both physically and spiritually, then He would return to them. But He by grace had already returned, so eager was He for this possible scenario to come about. And He has the same Spirit in dealing with us today. See on Ez. 46:12.

Ezekiel 44:3 *As for the prince, he shall sit therein as prince to eat bread before Yahweh; he shall enter by the way of the porch of the gate, and shall go out by the way of the same-* Had Judah repented at the time of the restoration, a Davidic ruler would have been raised up, Zerubbabel is the most obvious candidate (see on Zech. 6). He would have reigned "for ever", for an age. But he dropped the baton, or at least Judah were unwilling for this scenario. And so the prophecies were reinterpreted and rescheduled for total and eternal fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. "The prince" of the

envisaged restored temple in Ez. 40-48 refers to this same individual. See on Ez. 37:25; 46:3.

Ezekiel 44:4 Then he brought me by the way of the north gate before the house; and I looked, and behold, the glory of Yahweh filled the house of Yahweh: and I fell on my face-

Ezekiel 44:5 Yahweh said to me, Son of man, mark well, and see with your eyes, and hear with your ears all that I tell you concerning all the ordinances of the house of Yahweh, and all its laws; and mark well the entrance of the house, with every exit of the sanctuary- The details of the temple were so detailed- Ezekiel was to “mark well...every going forth”- in order to inspire in Judah repentance for how they had abused the previous temple. Ezekiel’s prophecies should have been an inspiration to Israel, that they might be obedient and live out these things as a reality before them, and thereby see other prophecies come true in their own experience. They could have entered upon an upward spiral of spirituality. The form of the house, the very description of it by Ezekiel, should have inspired them to feel that they had had enough of sin.

Ezekiel 44:6 You shall tell the rebellious house of Israel- This the same rubric used earlier (Ez. 2:5; 3:26; 12:2,25; 17:12; 24:3). There is a congruence between the style of address found in Ez. 40-48 and the earlier part of the prophecy. See on Ez. 42:20. This is because Ezekiel is addressing the same audience- those who had heard his criticisms and appeals for repentance were the same group who were now being commanded to build a temple according to the dimensions given.

Thus says the Lord Yahweh: you house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations- These plans for the temple were given in order to elicit Judah’s repentance. These words are picked up from the LXX by Peter, and applied to all of us in 1 Pet. 4:3: “For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles”. The same word for “abominations” occurs in the same context in Mal. 2:11: “Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and has married the daughter of a strange god”. Yet it had been emphasized that the temple system Ezekiel described was to be free of all the “abominations” [s.w.] previously committed by Israel (Ez. 43:8; 44:6,7,13).

Ezekiel 44:7 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- This could be read as referring to what Judah had done before the exile; they were under the impression, according to Ez. 18, that they were suffering unfairly. But in the attempt at rebuilding the temple, Judah profaned the Sabbath (Neh. 13:17,18), and profaned the temple by their marriage with Gentiles and their “weariness” with the temple ordinances (Mal. 1:12; 2:10,11). They got bored with the things of the Kingdom, and so they had no part in it.

And they have broken My covenant, to add to all your abominations- Judah broke covenant [s.w.] with Yahweh at the time of the restoration by marrying Gentiles and worshipping their gods (Ezra 9:1,14).

Ezekiel 44:8 You have not performed the duty of My holy things; but you have set performers of My duty in My sanctuary for yourselves- They had the mentality of

many religious people. They thought their religious structures and leaders could do the work of spirituality for them. We recall how Israel didn't want to hear Yahweh speaking directly to them, but preferred Moses to engage with God for them; and how the spiritually weak asked others to pray to God for them instead of them doing so (Jer. 14:11; Acts 8:24). This is the problem with all organized religion; it tends to take away from personal spirituality and engagement with God.

Zech. 3:7-10 encouraged Joshua to be the king-priest of the restored kingdom: "*If you will walk in my ways, and if you will keep my charge* [as so frequently commanded in Ez. 40:46; 44:8,14-16 s.w.], then you shall also judge my house (as prophesied in Ez. 40-48), and shalt also keep my courts (so often mentioned in Ez. 40-48), and I will give you places to walk (s.w. Ez. 42:4 about the walkways in the prophesied temple)... hear now, O Joshua". But he didn't. He didn't keep the courts, but allowed Tobiah the Ammonite to set up his office for subversion in the temple chambers.

Ezekiel 44:9 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh, No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into My sanctuary, of any foreigners who are among the people of Israel-* Joel 3 describes how then there would be a great invasion, to be met by Yahweh's intervention and the establishment of the Kingdom. *Then* "So shall you know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no stranger pass through her any more" (Joel 3:17). This is language undoubtedly to be linked with that of Ezekiel 40-48. There we have Yahweh dwelling in Zion, the city named Yahweh Shammah, 'Yahweh is there' (Ez. 48:35). No stranger would pass through Zion, according to Ezekiel 44:7-9.

Ezekiel 44:10 *But the Levites who went far from Me, when Israel went astray, who went astray from Me after their idols, they shall bear their iniquity-* We notice how the religious leaders and the masses are equally blamed. A population get in the end the leadership they really want and deserve, whether or not they practice a democratic system. The priesthood knew what the people wanted and encouraged them in it, for their own ends.

Ezekiel 44:11 *Yet now-* Having carried the guilt of their iniquity in the exile (:10), they were now to be rehabilitated as ministers again.

They are to be ministers in My sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house, and ministering in the house: they shall kill the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them- The Levites were to "stand before" the people as their inferiors, to serve them, and not as previously, as their controllers and masters.

Ezekiel 44:12 *Because they ministered to them before their idols, and became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel; therefore have I lifted up My hand against them, says the Lord Yahweh, and they shall bear their iniquity-* As noted on :11, they were in Ezekiel's time 'bearing their iniquity' in exile, unable to minister to Yahweh in His temple.

Ezekiel 44:13 *They shall not come near to Me, to execute the office of priest to Me, nor to come near to any of My holy things, to the things that are most holy; but they*

shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed- They would be able to "minister" for the people, but not to come near before Yahweh (:15). That would be done by the sons of Zadok.

The people were warned that the temple had been destroyed because of their previous "abominations", and that the rebuilt temple was not to feature any such abominations (Ez. 43:8; 44:6,7,13). "let it suffice you of your abominations" they were told- and then told not to allow the uncircumcised into the temple, as they had been doing Ez. 44:6,9). This sounds as if the prophecy of Ezekiel was more command than prediction- to those of his own day. But they returned, and committed the abominations [s.w.] of the Gentiles (Ezra 9:1,11,14) and married their daughters; to the extent that Malachi commented upon this: "Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination [s.w.] is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god" (Mal. 2:11).

Ezekiel 44:14 *Yet will I make them performers of the duty of the house, for all its service, and for all that shall be done therein-* Judah were to keep the charges of God relating to His house (Ez. 40:46; 44:8,14-16). Nehemiah, seeking for Israel's obedience to Ezekiel's vision, tried to get them to "keep the charges" (s.w. Nehemiah 7:3; 12:9,45; 13:20). But soon, Judah complained that there was no benefit to them from having kept the charges (Mal. 3:14 s.w.). Partial obedience discouraged them from any further effort, because the fullness of blessing can only come from a way of life conformed to God's Kingdom vision and life. This is why people get disillusioned with religion and lose even the true faith- because they seek for immediate benefit as a result of keeping a few highly specific aspects of God's law, rather than willingly devoting their way of life to the realization of His vision

Ezekiel 44:15 *But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, who performed the duty of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer to Me the fat and the blood, says the Lord Yahweh-* We wonder if there was a literal "Zadok" at the time of the restoration whose sons could have literally done this.

Ezekiel 44:16 *They shall enter into My sanctuary, and they shall come near to My table, to minister to Me, and they shall keep My instructions-* Malachi later laments how this table or altar of Yahweh was despised by the returned exiles, offering small quantities of sick animals upon it, and thereby entertaining Yahweh in a paltry manner. They despised it (Mal. 1:7,12), they found it such a weariness. And we too have an attitude to the Lord's table. Paul speaks of us each one partaking of "the table of the Lord" (1 Cor. 10:21), a phrase used in the LXX for the altar (Ez. 44:16; Mal. 1:7,12)- the sacrifices whereof only the priests could eat. This would have been radical thinking to a community used to priests and men delegated to take charge of others' religious affairs. Hebrew 3:13 gets at this idea when we read that *we* are to exhort one another not to turn away, situated as we are on the brink of the promised land, just as Moses exhorted Israel.

Ezekiel 44:17 *It shall be that when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and no wool shall come on them, while they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within-* The temptation to wear woolen clothes may have been simply in order to keep warm.

Ezekiel 44:18 *They shall have linen headware on their heads, and shall have linen breeches on their waists; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat-* These people are clearly mortal, as sweat is part of the curse.

Ezekiel 44:19 *When they go forth into the outer court, even into the outer court to the people, they shall put off their garments in which they minister, and lay them in the holy rooms; and they shall put on other garments, that they not sanctify the people with unclean garments-* We recall how Joshua the high priest was clothed in filthy garments in Zech. 3. The statements in :18-23) may all be hinting that these things *were* done by Israel before the captivity; but they were not to be done in the new temple. There was to be repentance.

Ezekiel 44:20 *Neither shall they shave their heads, nor allow their locks to grow long; they shall only cut off the hair of their head-* They were to be under something like the Nazirite vow.

Ezekiel 44:21 *Neither shall any of the priests drink wine when they enter into the inner court-* These priests are clearly mortal because they are liable to the influence of alcohol.

Ezekiel 44:22 *Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her who is divorced; but they shall take virgins of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow who is the widow of a priest-* These priests are clearly mortal as the immortalized will not marry (Lk. 20:35,36), and we have here a surrounding situation envisaged where there is the possibility of divorce and remarriage. If indeed this speaks of a situation in the supposed Millennium, then we have to accept there will be divorce and remarriage then. But after the Lord's return, surely all that will be part of the tears that are wiped away from our eyes and experience.

Malachi and Haggai so bitterly complain at the way the priests didn't serve God properly in the restored temple. The priests married divorced women (Mal. 2:14-16), even though Ez. 44 commanded they should not do this.

Ezekiel 44:23 *They shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the common, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean-* It would no longer be the duty of the Levites to teach the people as under the Mosaic law; it is envisaged here as specifically the duty of the sons of Zadok. This again confirms the conclusion that we are not reading here of the Law of Moses being reinstituted; but rather a new deal, a new covenant, offered to the returning exiles which had some similarities with the Mosaic law, but which differed from it.

The Levites were to teach Judah and to make others *discern* between good and evil. They should have done this, but instead "ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi" (Mal. 2:7,8). The sons of Zadok were descendants of Eleazer and Phinehas (1 Chron. 6:3-8), and Mal. 2:5 alludes to this: "My covenant was with him of life and peace: and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name" (cp. Ex. 32:28). But Mal. 2:6-8 go on to show that the sons of Zadok, as the descendants of Phinehas, had not lived up to their pedigree; they were making men "stumble at the law". This shows the connection between the Ezekiel prophecies and Malachi's commentary on their failed fulfilment in the hands of men like the sons of Zadok.

Ezekiel 44:24 *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 make My Sabbaths holy-* The existence of controversies is surely inappropriate to any Millennial reign of Christ; and the Sabbath was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. The situation here speaks of a scenario after the restoration from Babylon. The Levites were to judge justly. But Zechariah 7:9; 8:16 [s.w.] had to exhort them to stop judging unjustly.

Ezekiel 44:25 *They shall not go near a dead person to defile themselves; but for father, or for mother, or for son, or for daughter, for brother, or for sister who has had no husband, they may defile themselves-* The priests of this new system would have relatives who died, and the possibility of defilement. Clearly they are mortal and not immortal.

Ezekiel 44:26 *After he is cleansed, they shall reckon to him seven days-* As noted on :25, the possibility of defilement and the need for cleansing speaks of a very human situation at the time of the restoration, and not of the reign of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 44:27 *In the day that he goes into the sanctuary, into the inner court, to minister in the sanctuary, he shall offer his sin offering, says the Lord Yahweh-* The priests will still be capable of sin and require sin offerings. They are mortal, and not immortal. And the Lord's sin offering on the cross was and is effective for all time, and thereby ended the need for animal sacrifices to atone for sin and defilement.

Ezekiel 44:28 *They shall have an inheritance: I am their inheritance; and you shall give them no possession in Israel; I am their possession-* The GNB grasps the sense: "The priests have the priesthood as their share of what I have given Israel to be handed down from one generation to another". The honour of serving God today should likewise make our material possessions of little moment to us.

Ezekiel 44:29 *They shall eat the meal offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; and every devoted thing in Israel shall be theirs-* The existence of such offerings clearly speaks of a time prior to the Lord's death, which was the ultimate offering for sin and all trespass and thereby ended the need for any further such offerings.

Ezekiel 44:30 *The first of all the first fruits of every thing, and every offering of everything, of all your offerings, shall be for the priest: you shall also give to the priests the first of your dough, to cause a blessing to rest on your house-* Malachi 3:8 and Nehemiah's record show how these tithes were not given, and what was given was substandard and abused by the priests. This potential scenario didn't come about because we are reading here commands rather than prediction.

Ezekiel 44:31 *The priests shall not eat of anything that dies of itself, or is torn, whether it be bird or animal-* The priests 'ate' the offerings to symbolize God eating with the offerer at His table, the altar. But the returned exiles did offer such animals, according to Malachi; see on :30. The existence of animals who will have been "torn" by other animals seems hard to square with the Kingdom prophecies of Isaiah 9 and

11 about the animals living at peace with each other. It is the restoration from exile which is in view, not the Kingdom to be established by the Lord Jesus at His return.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 45

Ezekiel 45:1 *Moreover, when you shall divide by lot the land for inheritance, you shall offer an offering to Yahweh, 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 its border all around-* The confusion has been in deciding whether to take some of the measurements in reeds or cubits (which are much smaller), seeing that the Hebrew text strangely omits the measurement unit. The “oblation” would be about 60 miles square if we measure it in reeds. This area would encroach either upon the Mediterranean or the Dead Sea, and it seems contextually more likely that a smaller area measured in cubits is intended. If measured in reeds, this large area somewhat disrupts the distribution of land amongst the tribes as detailed later in Ezekiel. If the missing measurement unit here is cubits and not reeds, it is likely that it is in the dimensions of the temple itself. The holy oblation described in Ez. 45:1 is to be “the length of five and twenty thousand”. “Reeds” in the AV is in italics. The following verse speaks of *cubits* as the measurement unit. Only the context can decide whether cubits or reeds is meant in many of the Ezekiel passages- although the LXX, RSV etc. give cubits rather than reeds in 42:16 and other passages. If it is going to be thousands of reeds, then it would be over 1 mile square. However, Jer. 30:18 RSV prophesies: “the city shall be builded *upon her own heap*, and the palace shall be *where it used to be*”. And passages as varied as Zech. 1, Ps. 68 and Micah 4 all insist that the temple of the restored Kingdom was to built *within* the city of Jerusalem. If the temple is 500 reeds square, there will be no room for a city, assuming the city will be of the same size as the previous old city of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 45:2 *Of this there shall be for the holy place five hundred in length by five hundred in breadth, square all around; and fifty cubits for its suburbs all around-* As noted on :1, the "five hundred" isn't defined.

Ezekiel 45:3 *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-* The sanctuary was in the midst of the tribal allotments (Ez. 48:8). The entire area is described as "the most holy", literally "the holy of holies". The conception of sacred space is challenged in the Ezekiel temple. The most holy in Solomon's temple was 20 x 20 cubits, about 9 x 9 meters. Now, the entire temple area is the most holy.

Ezekiel 45:4 *It is a holy portion of the land; it shall be for the priests, the ministers of the sanctuary, who come near to minister to Yahweh; and it shall be a place for their houses, and a holy place for the sanctuary-* The priests were to live in one specific area near the temple, whereas under the Mosaic Law, the priests were given land to live on in each of the various tribes of Israel. And yet the record of the restoration stresses that the priests lived not around the temple, but in various cities throughout Judah (Ezra 2:70; Neh. 7:73; 11:3,20; 12:44). They disobeyed about everything in the regulations of Ez. 40-48.

Ezekiel 45:5 *Twenty-five thousand in length, and ten thousand in breadth, shall be to*

the Levites, the ministers of the house, for a possession to themselves, as places to live in- AV "for a possession for twenty chambers". This suggests the number of ministers is relatively small, contradicting the theory of a huge temple for the entire planet. The small size and relatively small number of ministers is far more appropriate to a temple intended to be rebuilt by the returned exiles.

Ezekiel 45:6 *You shall appoint the possession of the city five thousand broad, and twenty-five thousand long, side by side with the offering of the holy portion: it shall be for the whole house of Israel-* Adding the 10,000 reeds of breadth for the Levites' domain, the 10,000 for the priests' land, and the 5000 for the city quarter, makes a total breadth of 25,000 reeds; so that the tract in which all these were included was a square.

Ezekiel 45:7 *Whatever is for the prince shall be on the one side and on the other side of the holy offering and of the possession of the city, in front of the holy offering and in front of the possession of the city, on the west side westward, and on the east side eastward; and in length answerable to one of the portions, from the west border to the east border-* Had Judah repented at the time of the restoration, a Davidic ruler would have been raised up, Zerubbabel is the most obvious candidate (see on Zech. 6). He would have reigned "for ever", for an age. But he dropped the baton, or at least Judah were unwilling for this scenario. And so the prophecies were reinterpreted and rescheduled for total and eternal fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. "The prince" of the envisaged restored temple in Ez. 40-48 refers to this same individual. See on Ez. 37:25.

Ezekiel 45:8 *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-* The idea that some prophecies are more command than prediction helps make sense of the prophecy of Ez. 40-48. When we read "my princes shall no more oppress my people... the shekel shall be twenty gerahs... you shall offer an oblation" (Ez. 45:8,12,13), the emphasis needs to be placed upon the word "shall". This was a command to the elders of the people- made explicit in passages like Ez. 45:9: "Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil... you shall have just balances". By failing to be obedient, God's people effectively disallowed the fulfilment of the 'prophecy' that could have come true if they had been obedient to it. "My princes [in this new temple system] shall no more oppress my people" as they did in the recent past (cp. Jer. 22:3; Ez. 18:7,12,16; 22:7,29; Zeph. 3:1, where the same Hebrew word for "oppress" is found). Thus there was to be repentance for the 'oppression' which Ezekiel had earlier had to criticize Israel for. They went into captivity because the princes and priests oppressed the people (Jer. 21:12; 22:3,17); in the new temple, this was not to be so. The princes were to give the rest of the land to the people of Israel. And yet, in Nehemiah's time the princes of the people did again oppress them, e.g. through making them mortgage their lands to them so that effectively they took it for themselves (Neh. 5:3). This is the tragedy of Israel's refusal to learn... The intention was that those hearing Ezekiel's words in captivity would "bear the punishment of their iniquity... that the house of Israel go no more astray" (Ez. 14:11).

Ezekiel 45:9 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Let it suffice you, princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute justice and righteousness instead of dispossessing My*

people, says the Lord Yahweh- Nehemiah 5 records that Judah did the very opposite on returning from exile, and Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi all record social injustice as being the order of the day at the time of the restoration.

Ezekiel 45:10 *You shall have just balances, a just ephah and a just bath-* They were to have “just” balances, as opposed to the “unjust” [s.w.] balances which they had in the lead up to the captivity (Jer. 22:13, AV “unrighteous”).

Ezekiel 45:11 *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: its measure shall be after the homer-* Malachi and Haggai so bitterly complain at the way the priests didn’t serve God properly in the restored temple. They were to use just measures (:9-14), unlike what they had previously done. But they robbed God in their sacrifices in the restored temple (Mal. 3:8).

Ezekiel 45:12 *The shekel shall be twenty gerahs. Twenty shekels plus twenty-five shekels plus fifteen shekels shall be your mina-* The standard, defining weights were destroyed during the Babylonian attack, according to Josephus.

Ezekiel 45:13 *This is the offering 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-* There are intentional differences with the Mosaic requirements. There is probably no great symbolic meaning in the differences, rather is the point being made that acceptance of the new covenant meant effectively that the Mosaic law had been ended. This is evidence enough that the law of Moses was not literally “eternal” but was for that age or *olahm*.

Ezekiel 45:14 *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)-* This is significantly more than the Mosaic law required, although there was to be only one daily offering in the morning, and not also in the evenings.

Ezekiel 45:15 *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, says the Lord Yahweh-* The Ezekiel temple prophecies may be a purely conditional prophecy, which will not now come true in that Israel were disobedient. This would then allow us to be more comfortable with the passages in Hebrews which speak as if the system of sacrifices has finished for all time. It would also enable us to sit more comfortably with the Ezekiel passages which speak of the sacrifices offered in that temple as actually achieving atonement, i.e. forgiveness of sins (Ez. 45:15,22,25,17). They are not just ‘pointing back’ as teaching aids to the Lord’s work; they are framed as actually enabling, by their blood, forgiveness. It may be, however, that the Ezekiel prophecies had an intended and possible fulfilment at the time of the restoration under Ezra, but this was nullified by Israel’s lack of response; and therefore, at least in principle, the prophecies had their fulfilment delayed until the second coming. The lesson that comes out of all this is the extent to which God is willing to work with us, to tailor His purpose according to how far we are prepared to work with Him, and in that sense to allow Himself to be limited by us. There could be no greater inspiration to a maximal commitment to His purpose and His work.

Ezekiel 45:16 *All the people of the land shall give to this offering for the prince in Israel-* “The people of the land” were to have a part in the new system of things (Ez. 45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God’s intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel’s temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. And yet Judah intermarried with them, learnt their language, and were dragged away from true Yahweh worship by them at the time. The later separation from the 'Samaritans' was only after a few generations from the restoration. But Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress the stranger / Gentile. Israel would not. Is. 56:6 defines what is meant by “a house of prayer for all nations”- it is for those of all nations who “join themselves to the Lord, to serve him and to love the name of the Lord... every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and *taketh hold of my covenant*”.

Ezekiel 45:17 *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-* It was this which in principle inspired Nehemiah to generously provide food to God's people and the local people of the land (Neh. 5:17). "The prince" here is presented as also a priest; and Zech. 6 presents the possibility of a king-priest arising as leader of the returned exiles. But it never came about, and so these things have their spirit fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, although not the exact letter of them.

Ezekiel 45:18 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In the first month, in the first day of the month, you shall take a young bull without blemish; and you shall cleanse the sanctuary-* We wonder why the Lord Jesus and His assistant priests would need regular cleansing in the age to come. The entire situation presented here clearly applies to mortal, sinful people and priesthood, which could have arisen at the time of the restoration.

Ezekiel 45:19 *The priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering, and put it on the door posts of the house and on the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and on the posts of the gate of the inner court-* This alludes to the Passover, which under Moses' law was to begin on the tenth day of the first month. But this was to be done on the first day of the first month (:18). The differences seem intended to underline the fact that the Mosaic law was over. But Judah refused to accept this revision of the Passover law, and to this day keep the Mosaic law rather than that laid down here.

Ezekiel 45:20 *So you shall do on the seventh day of the month for everyone who errs, and for him who is ignorant: so you shall make atonement for the house-* This appears to be a revised form of the day of atonement. We note that sins of ignorance still require atonement. This ought to humble us, realizing that ignorance is no excuse. We are saved by grace rather than specific repentance and obtaining of forgiveness for every sin.

Ezekiel 45:21 *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-* There is no Day of Atonement mentioned in Ezekiel's new system, because the exiles were to have repented and been forgiven on a more permanent basis than under the Mosaic system.

Ezekiel 45:22 *On that day shall the prince prepare for himself-* That the "prince" needed to prepare for himself a sin offering is surely evidence that the Lord Jesus is not in view; not only does He need no sin offering, but He was Himself the sin offering. "The prince" must refer to a prince of the restored line of David at the time of the restoration, although as I have explained on Zechariah, the various possible candidates all dropped the baton.

And for all the people of the land a bull for a sin offering- See on :16; "the people of the land" refer to Gentiles who were envisaged as accepting Yahweh in this new system. This is a revised form of the Passover legislation; but Judah didn't accept it and continued to attempt to keep the Mosaic legislation. And so the envisaged system didn't come about.

Ezekiel 45:23 *The seven days of the feast he shall prepare a burnt offering to Yahweh, seven bulls and seven rams without blemish daily the seven days; and a male goat daily for a sin offering-* This differs from Mosaic legislation; see on Ez. 46:4. Moses' law required 1 lamb, (daily for 7 days, 2 bulls burnt, 1 ram burnt). There were to be more bulls and rams offered in this new system; perhaps to suggest a greater level of dedication.

Much thinking about the temple seems to have gotten confused because of an assumption that Ezekiel's temple will be in order to observe parts of the Mosaic law. But consider the following studied differences between the two. Clearly the system described by Ezekiel implied a change of the Law at the re-institution of the temple; the temple he speaks of was not in order to obey the *Mosaic Law*:

Sin offering:

- Ez. : blood daubed, parts burned outside, day 1-1bull, days 2-7-1 kid, 2 bulls, 1 ram
- Law: blood poured, parts burned inside, day 1-1bull + 2 rams, days 2-7-1bull

Sabbath offering:

- Ez. : 6 lambs, 1 ram (gate open)
- Law: 2 lambs

New Moon offering:

- Ez.: 1 bull, 1 ram, 6 lambs
- Law: 2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs

Daily sacrifice:

- Ez.: 1 lamb (in a.m.)
- Law: 2 lambs (1 a.m., 1 p.m.)

Passover:

- Ez.: 1bull, (daily thru 7 days: 7 bulls burnt, 7 rams burnt), 1 kid? (sin offering)
- Law: 1 lamb, (daily thru 7 days: 2 bulls burnt, 1 ram burnt), 1 kid? (sin offering)

Feast of Booths:

- Ez.: 7 bulls + 7 rams (burnt daily, 7 days), 1 kid
- Law: day 1: 13 bulls, 2 rams, 14 lambs, 1 kid; day 2: 12 bulls, 2 rams, 14 lambs, 1 kid; The number of bulls is reduced by 1 each day...day 7: 7 bulls, 2 rams, 14 lambs, 1 kid

Ezekiel 45:24 *He shall prepare a meal offering, an ephah for a bull, and an ephah for a ram, and a hin of oil to an ephah-* This clearly differs from the Mosaic law (Num. 28:19-22).

Ezekiel 45:25 *In the seventh month, in the fifteenth day of the month, in the feast, shall he do the like the seven days; according to the sin offering, according to the burnt offering, and according to the meal offering, and according to the oil-* Zechariah 7:5 criticized the Jews for keeping this feast only externally, but not “unto me”. Hag. 2:1 records how on the 21st day of the 7th month- i.e. once the seven day feast that began on the 15th had finished- Haggai was sent to rebuke “the prince”, Zerubbabel, for being so slack in fulfilling Ezekiel’s vision. Even by the time of Nehemiah 8:14-17, it was so that the feast of the 7th month had not been kept by Judah since the time of Joshua. They subconsciously switched off to Ezekiel’s words; just as we can all do. They reasoned that “the time” of which he spoke hadn’t come- even though the temple had miraculously been enabled to be rebuilt, for no human benefit at all to Cyrus (Isaiah 45:13 “not for price nor reward”). They felt that all the prophecies were “marvellous” in the sense of something incapable of concrete fulfilment in their experience (Zechariah 8:6). This is why Hag. 1:2 rebuked them for saying “the time is not come...that the Lord’s house should be built”. They didn’t want the prophecy to be fulfilled, because it would mean ‘going up’ from their ceiled houses- both in Babylon and in the farmsteads they had built in Judah- to build the temple.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 46

Ezekiel 46:1 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: 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-* Whatever the Messianic implications of this, Malachi lamented that the returned exiles wouldn’t even open the gates unless they were paid; or some translations suggest that nobody at all would open or shut the gates (Mal. 1:10). By not opening or closing the gates, the entrance of the Messianic prince was precluded.

Ezekiel 46:2 *The prince shall enter by the way of the porch of the gate outside, and shall stand by the post of the gate; and the priests shall prepare his burnt offering and 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-* Had Judah repented at the time of the restoration, a Davidic ruler would have been raised up, Zerubbabel is the most obvious candidate (see on Zech. 6). He would have reigned "for ever", for an age. But he dropped the baton, or at least Judah were unwilling for this scenario. And so the prophecies were reinterpreted and rescheduled for total and eternal fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. "The prince" of the envisaged restored temple in Ez. 40-48 refers to this same individual. See on Ez. 37:25. His standing by the post of the gate records David's royal descendants doing so (2 Kings 11:14; 23:3). The impression is given

that the prince is a restored Davidic ruler at the time of the restoration of the temple. But we note that he must remain at the gate whilst the priest prepares the offerings. This again reads strangely if we are to interpret the prince as the Lord Jesus, for He is both a prince and priest, after the order of Melchizedek.

Ezekiel 46:3 *The people of the land shall worship at the door of that gate before Yahweh on the Sabbaths and on the new moons-* Instead, “the people of the land” hung around the gates of the city on the Sabbath in order to do some trading of goods (Neh. 13:19,20). Judah intermarried with them rather than leading them to worship Yahweh at the temple on the Sabbaths. Those who insist that these prophecies speak of the future Kingdom of God on earth would have to therefore admit that the Sabbath will be reinstituted. But the New Testament is clear that the Sabbath has been fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 46:4 *The burnt offering that the prince shall offer to Yahweh-* According to Zech. 3 and Zech. 6, we can understand “the prince” as primarily referring to Zerubbabel or Joshua the High Priest (see on Ez. 37:25; 44:3). Under Joshua, the iniquity of the land could have been removed, and “ye shall call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree” (Zech. 3:8-10). The Messianic Kingdom could have been brought in, the new covenant accepted by Israel. It could have been Eliashib- but despite his apparent enthusiasm, he didn’t even build the wall outside his own house (Neh. 3:20-22), and arranged for his grandson to marry Sanballat’s daughter (Neh. 12:10,11). It is evident from Ez. 46:3 and Ez. 44:3 that the promised Messiah figure was to be both a king and a priest- which would fit Joshua. He is described as a crowned High Priest, called “the branch”, who would build the temple and reign as “a priest upon his throne”. But this didn’t happen. Because Zechariah concluded this prophecy with the comment: “And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the Lord” (Zech. 6:10-15). Joshua-Jesus didn’t live up to it. And Zerubbabel never ruled in Jerusalem- he returned to the soft life in Babylon after the temple was rebuilt. But the prophecies suffered a deferral. They will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the branch.

Shall be on the Sabbath day six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish- Two lambs were required under Mosaic law. This temple whilst based upon Solomon's was not an exact replica, just as the regulations for sacrifice are similar but differ from those of the Mosaic law. See on Ez. 41:4; 45:23. Perhaps the greater number of lambs was to teach the exiles the weight of their sins. Seven lambs weren't required, but six- perhaps hinting that the complete and perfect lamb [seven] was yet to come. But see on :6.

Ezekiel 46:5 *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-* The Mosaic law required less; whereas it required more than Ezekiel's system for the new moons in :6.

Ezekiel 46:6 *On the day of the new moon it shall be a young bull without blemish, and six lambs, and a ram; they shall be without blemish-* This contrasts with the Mosaic law which required 2 bulls, 1 ram and 7 lambs. See on :4. It almost seems that the regulations are purposefully intended to signal a difference with the Mosaic law.

Ezekiel 46:7 *And he shall prepare a meal offering, an ephah for the bull, and an ephah for the ram, and for the lambs according as he is able, and a hin of oil to an ephah-* "As he is able" suggests serving God within the limitations of what is available to us. This cuts across all legalism, reflecting God's earnest desire for fellowship with man in all his limitations. It is also a rather strange thing to read if indeed these words speak of fulfilment of in God's future Kingdom on earth.

Ezekiel 46:8 *When the prince shall enter, he shall go in by the way of the porch of the gate, and he shall go out by its way-* It seems the east gate is in view (:1,2). This is in contrast to how the people were to enter by one gate and leave by another (:9). See on :10.

Ezekiel 46:9 *But when the people of the land shall come before Yahweh in the appointed feasts-* "The people of the land" were to have a part in the new system of things (Ez. 45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God's intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel's temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. The scenario of Zech. 14, with Gentiles coming to Zion to keep Tabernacles, was also potentially possible at the restoration.

He who enters by the way of the north gate to worship shall go out by the way of the south gate; and he who enters by the way of the south gate shall go out by the way of the north gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate by which he came in, but shall go out straight before him- We noted earlier the design of the gatehouses and barriers to facilitate crowd control (Ez. 40:12), and this one way system appears to be reflective of a perceived need to control the crowds. This all seems rather human if we think that this scenario is intended for fulfilment in the Kingdom of God. The language of going "straight before him" is another example of how there are continual allusions back to the cherubim visions. The straight feet and path of the cherubim was to be replicated in the path of God's people on earth (see on Ez. 1:7).

Ezekiel 46:10 *The prince, when they go in, shall go in with them; and when they go out, he shall go out-* He enters and leaves by the east gate (:1,2,8). The idea may be that when the people enter by the north or south gates (:9), he enters; and he leaves as they leave. The idea is that the worship of the prince is not separate from that of the ordinary people. There was to be a unity between prince and people, despite his evident superiority to them; and this looks forward to the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 46:11 *In the feasts and in the solemnities the meal offering shall be an ephah for a bull and an ephah for a ram, and for the lambs as he is able to give, and a hin of oil to an ephah-* The lack of specific definition of the amount of meal offering required with the lambs is typical of God's open ended relationship with us. We are to respond as we can. And perhaps it is the lack of legalistic legislation which inspires us to greater generosity and devotion than within a more circumscribed system.

Ezekiel 46:12 *When the prince shall prepare a freewill offering, a burnt offering or peace offerings as a freewill offering to Yahweh, 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 out; and after his going forth one*

shall shut the gate- Malachi and Haggai so bitterly complain at the way the priests didn't serve God properly in the restored temple. The priests were to shut the gates (Ez. 44:2; 46:2,12); but they refused to do this unless they were paid for it (Mal. 1:10). Again we note here how the prince was also able to act as a priest in some feasts. Zechariah 6 taught that just such a figure could have arisen at the restoration.

Ezekiel 46:13 *You shall prepare a lamb a year old without blemish for a burnt offering to Yahweh daily: morning by morning you shall prepare it-* The "you" was addressed to Ezekiel and suggests this system could have been built within Ezekiel's lifetime, for he was to give the animals to the sons of Zadok to offer in the temple (Ez. 43:19); Ezekiel was to prepare the daily sacrifice.

Ezekiel 46:14 *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 to Yahweh continually by a perpetual ordinance-* The continual burnt offering under Moses' law was to be made morning and evening (Num. 28:3); now the evening sacrifice is abolished. We note the change of pronouns. "The prince" has been in view in :13; now "you", perhaps Ezekiel personally; and then "they" in :15. It is as if Ezekiel is being addressed as representative of the priests; another indication that the prophecy was intended for fulfilment in Ezekiel's time by people then known to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 46:15 *Thus shall they prepare the lamb, and the meal offering, and the oil, morning by morning, for a continual burnt offering-* "Morning by morning" appears to stress that the evening offering was now no more.

Ezekiel 46:16 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: If the prince give a gift to any of his sons, it is his inheritance, it shall belong to his sons; it is their possession by inheritance-* The idea is that it could never again revert to the prince. This seems to safeguard against the prince making gifts to his sons and then demanding them returned to him; any attempt to interpret the prince as the returned Lord Jesus runs into major difficulty here, as the legislation is designed to keep the prince from being fickle and manipulative with his wealth.

Ezekiel 46:17 *But if he gives of his inheritance as 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-* He is subject to death (Ez. 46:17,18); and has a wife and sons (Ez. 46:16) who will succeed him (Ez. 45:8). Clearly the prince is mortal, and not the immortal Lord Jesus. "The year of liberty" could refer to the year of Jubilee, or possibly the seventh year release of slaves from their bondage to a particular master. Although here it is the return of property which is in view, so the reference is more likely to the year of Jubilee.

Ezekiel 46:18 *Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by thrusting them out of their possession; he shall give an inheritance to his sons out of his own possession, that My people not be scattered every man from his possession-* This and the surrounding verses are admittedly hard to understand if they really are to be literally fulfilled in relation to Jesus at His second coming. For this legislation seems to guard against the prince abusing the people, as if he is prone to such sin. But it is so understandable within the framework of interpretation here advocated. They

had gone into captivity for these kind of abuses, they had indeed been scattered from their possessions; now they were to return and rebuild the temple after the pattern of Solomon's, repent of their sins, and live righteously, and they would have the possibility of bringing in the Messianic Kingdom. But they chose to be satisfied with a semi-revival, a quasi repentance- just as we can be so easily. And Nehemiah records how the princes *did* oppress the people, taking their land / possessions away from them. They had 'thrust out' their brethren before the captivity (Jer. 22:3; Ez. 18:7,12; 22:7,29 s.w.), and so had been themselves 'thrust out' (Jer. 25:38 s.w.).

Ezekiel 46:19 *Then he brought me through the entry, which was at the side of the gate, into the holy rooms for the priests, which looked toward the north: and behold, there was a place on the hinder part westward-* There were to be "holy chambers" in the temple for the Levites (here and very often in Ezekiel 40-48). The uncircumcised Gentiles were not to be brought into the sanctuary (Ez. 44:7). It was God's intention that when Judah returned from Babylon, the uncircumcised would not come into Zion (the temple), and the Kingdom would be established (Isaiah 52:1,11). There was to be no Canaanite in the house of Yahweh (Zech. 14:21). But Tobiah the Ammonite was given a chamber in the temple for him to use as an office for undermining God's people (Neh. 13:7-9).

Ezekiel 46:20 *He said to 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; so that they do not bring them into the outer court, to sanctify the people-* The clear distinction between the inner and outer court (Ez. 44:19) seems inappropriate now, when the veil of the holiest has been torn down and as Hebrews emphasizes, all can freely enter the presence of God Himself.

Ezekiel 46:21 *Then he brought me 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 another court-* The "Behold" suggests surprise on Ezekiel's part; because this temple whilst based upon Solomon's was not an exact replica, just as the regulations for sacrifice are similar but differ from those of the Mosaic law.

Ezekiel 46:22 *In the four corners of the court there were enclosed courts, forty cubits long and thirty broad: these four in the corners were of one measure-* Great detail is given about these kitchens, whereas there is nothing at all about what was within the most holy place. The difference in detail is striking and highlights the emphasis of the vision upon the work which God's restored people were intended to do.

Ezekiel 46:23 *There was a wall around in them, around the four, and boiling places were made under the walls all around-* This "wall" could be no more than a low wall with shelves on appropriate for the kitchen utensils or storage.

Ezekiel 46:24 *Then he said to me, These are the boiling houses, where the ministers of the house shall boil the sacrifices of the people-* The portions of the people's offerings which were to be eaten by the priests were to be boiled in these kitchens.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 47

Ezekiel 47:1 *He brought me back to the door of the house; and see, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward (for the front of the house was toward the east); and the waters came down from under the right side of the house, on the south of the altar-* The holy waters start from the altar- not from the threshold of the house, as Henry Sulley's view requires. His claim that the city will be built 30 miles away from the temple is another example of pure imagination which just doesn't fit the text. This is the situation of Joel 3:18 "a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD". Joel's kingdom prophecies likewise could have had some fulfilment in the restoration from Babylon. See on Ez. 43:7,9. So far in the temple prophecies, we have been given the impression of a very human situation. Much detail has just been given about the kitchens, regulations limiting the prince from abusing the people and about his children, of priests who sweat and must therefore wear appropriate clothing, of guardhouses with crash barriers to enable the smooth flow of people through the temple etc. Now in Ez. 47 and 48 we have prophecies which are clearly more miraculous in nature. They are alluded to in Revelation and John's Gospel and given a clearly figurative application, and yet the material is clearly based upon a literal depiction of a situation replete with fishermen fishing, a healed Dead Sea etc. I suggest that had Judah been obedient to the vision and repented as required, then these more miraculous things such as a river of living water would also have come about. The description of the course of the new river requires that the temple structure be built to accommodate it, but there is no evidence that Judah even attempted this at the rebuilding under Ezra and Nehemiah. And so again, the great possibilities in the Divine program for the restored exiles didn't come about. But the prophecies were not thereby falsified; in spiritual essence, they will come true at the Lord's return and even in this life, although maybe not in every literal, physical detail.

The enigmatic Jn. 7:38 alludes here: "He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly ("innermost being", NIV) shall flow rivers of living (Gk. spring) water". What "scripture" did the Lord have in mind? Surely Ez. 47:1,9, the prophecy of how in the restored Kingdom, rivers of spring water would come out from Zion and bring life to the world; and perhaps too the references to spring water being used to cleanse men from leprosy and death (Lev. 14:5; 15:13; Num. 19:16). The water originated from the sanctuary; and that most holy place is now the "innermost being" of the believer. The literal possibilities in Ez. 40-48 didn't come about, but the essence of it all, although not the physical detail, will be fulfilled in spiritual terms. Out of the innermost being of the true believer, the spring(ing) water of the Gospel will *naturally* spring up and go out to heal men, both now and more fully in the Kingdom, aided then by the Spirit gifts. The believer, *every* believer, *whoever* believes, will preach the word to others *from his innermost being*, both now and in the Kingdom - without the need for preaching committees or special efforts (not that in themselves I'm decrying them). The tendency is to delegate our responsibilities to these committees. There is no essential difference between faith and works. If we believe, we will do the works of witness, quite spontaneously. And note how the water that sprung out of the Lord's smitten side is to be compared with the bride that came out of the smitten side of Adam. We, the bride, are the water; thanks to the inspiration of the cross, we go forth in witness, the water of life to this hard land in which we walk.

Ezekiel 47:2 *Then he brought me out by the way of the north gate, and led me round*

by the way outside to the outer gate, to the gate that looks toward the east; and, there ran out waters on the right side- The same words are translated "prepare the way" in Mal. 3:1 and Is. 40:3 (see too Ez. 43:1; 44:1). The way is 'prepared' or 'looks' eastward. This was the way or road over which the glory was to re-enter the restored temple. But Judah didn't rebuild that temple as specified and as Malachi often demonstrates, the priests failed to act as commanded in Ez. 40-48. And so the messenger of the covenant who was to prepare that way likewise failed; but finally the essence of the prophecies will come true through the work of the Elijah prophet and John the Baptist [also a priest] preparing the way of the Lord Jesus, so that His glory and Spirit could enter a spiritual temple of restored people.

Ezekiel 47:3 When the man went forth eastward with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were to the ankles- This man with the measuring line is the same Angel of Zech. 2:1, who was enabling the restoration of Zion at the time of the returned exiles; but they refused to make use of the potential.

Ezekiel 47:4 Again he measured one thousand, and caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were to the knees. Again he measured one thousand, and caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were to the waist- As explained on :1, there is a miraculous element in this. A water course does not increase in depth so consistently unless other rivers or sources of water enter into it. But these waters increase in depth in a miraculous way. For this was to be no ordinary water, which always naturally finds a consistent level. The idea is that the water is not water as we know it, but has unique properties.

Ezekiel 47:5 Afterward he measured one 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- "Passed through" is the term used in Is. 33:21 of how no ship or boat would pass through or along the new "broad rivers and streams" in the restored Kingdom. But the returning exiles could miraculously pass through this river with God's miraculous help (s.w. Is. 43:2).

Ezekiel 47:6 He said to me, Son of man, have you seen this? Then he brought me and caused me to return to the bank of the river- The question seems to imply that Ezekiel had failed to notice something, and so he had to return to the riverbank.

Ezekiel 47:7 Now when I had returned, see, on the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other- Rev. 22:2 quotes this but in a very symbolic context. This will come true at the Lord's return, but in a figurative sense; for Rev. 22 is not at all literal but symbolic. These things could have literally come about at the restoration from Babylon, as God's miraculous response to their obedience. But they didn't, because Judah were not switched on to the huge Divine potential which there was.

Ezekiel 47:8 Then he said to me, These waters issue forth toward the eastern region, and shall go down into the Salt Sea Arabah; and the waters of the sea shall be healed- The healing of saltiness, a symbol of bareness, will not be complete in the area (:11). This seems somehow inappropriate to the Kingdom to be established by the Lord Jesus in the future; but it rings true for a scenario at the restoration whereby Judah's

repentant obedience to the plans of Ez. 40-46 would have been rewarded by God making miraculous things happen. The same words are used in 2 Kings 2:21,22 of the healing of salty waters by Elisha. Such things had been done by God's power earlier in human history, and could have been repeated at the restoration.

Ezekiel 47:9 It shall happen, 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 have come there, and the waters of the sea shall be healed, and everything shall live wherever the river comes- The plural "rivers" may just be an intensive plural referring to 'the great river'. Malachi had likewise foreseen a situation at the restoration where "in every place" Gentiles would have been spiritually healed and turned to Yahweh (Mal. 1:11). "Every living creature which swarms" is the language of creation, as if a new creation was going to come about in that local area. The river of living water, as explained on :1, refers now to the Spirit which is given to us and flows from us. Wherever we go, there should be healing- not just dissension, theological controversy and factionism, but real healing for those who hitherto had not had spiritual life. The great multitude of fish is again alluded to in John's Gospel, where the miracles of catching fish are used as symbolic of how the Lord's people would "catch men" in the Gospel's net. The physical realities didn't come about at the restoration, but the essence of them now comes true in the lives of Spirit filled believers.

Ezekiel 47:10 It shall happen, that fishermen shall stand by it: from En Gedi even to En Eglaim shall be a place for the spreading of nets; their fish shall be after their species, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many- The two locations mentioned are at the north and south of the Dead Sea. The "fish... after their species" could mean 'every kind of species of fish'. And again we have a connection to the miraculous haul of 153 fishes. As explained on Jn. 21:11, this was the number of species of fish which were then thought to exist. Every species of fish was caught in the net, with the incident clearly speaking of the universal appeal of the Gospel, saving some from all nations. The stress upon "exceeding many", also in :9, connects with the huge number of the seed of Abraham, the converts to the Gospel.

Ezekiel 47:11 But its muddy places and its marshes shall not be healed; they shall be given over to salt- This rings somewhat strangely if we insist this prophecy must have a fulfilment in the Kingdom of God on earth. See on :8. The idea is that not all would respond, even if the water of life came to them. For the marshes and muddy places were clearly reached by the water flowing from the temple.

Ezekiel 47:12 By the river on its banks, on this side and on that side, shall grow every tree for food whose leaf shall not wither, neither shall its fruit fail: it shall bear new fruit every month, because its waters issue out of the sanctuary; and its fruit shall be for food, and its leaf for healing- Rev. 22:2 interprets this in a clearly symbolic way with reference to the situation which will come about at the return of the Lord Jesus to Zion. Perhaps the trees with leaves that don't wither are to be seen as representative of the righteous (Prov. 11:30; Ps. 1:3). Those who respond to the water of life will grow thereby to provide the fruit of the tree of life to others. And that is true in this life too, as Prov. 11:30; Ps. 1:3 make clear.

The reference may be to the amazing fertility around Jerusalem that could have come if the exiles had focused upon rebuilding the temple, rather than upon their own farmlands. See on Hag. 1:9.

Ezekiel 47:13 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: This shall be the border, by which you shall divide the land for inheritance according to the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph shall have two portions-* The latter chapters of Ezekiel stress how Israel were to “inherit” the land; yet the same word is used in other restoration prophecies, about Messiah causing Israel to “inherit” the land again after their return from “the north country” (Zech. 2:12; 8:12; Is. 49:8; Jer. 3:18). When Judah returned from the “north country”, then Jerusalem would be the universally recognized “throne of the Lord” (Jer. 3:17,18). The Kingdom could have come when Judah returned from Babylon. It was therefore potentially possible for the returning exiles to inherit all the land outlined in Ez. 47:13-21 and share it out between the 12 tribes. But they grabbed every man for himself, his own farmstead, his own mini-Kingdom. They had no interest in the wider vision, nor in subduing extra land; and the majority of the Jews didn’t even want to inherit it; they preferred the soft life of Babylon, the Kingdom of men rather than the Kingdom of God. And thus the Kingdom made possible was never actually fulfilled at that time.

Ezekiel 47:14 *You shall inherit it, one as well as another; for I swore to give it to your fathers: and this land shall fall to you for inheritance-* This is the language of the tribal lots distributed under Joshua when the people first entered the land from the wilderness journey. It all has deep appropriacy to the giving of the land to the exiles now returning from Babylon, also involving a desert journey. All Judah were to inherit the land, “one as well as another”; whereas in reality at the restoration, Neh. 5 records how some grabbed the land of others. If the land was for an inheritance there could be the implication that those who were given it would die and then pass it on as an inheritance- again, appropriate to a restored kingdom at the time of the restoration, but not to the day of the eternal Kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 47:15 *This shall be the border of the land: On the north side, from the great sea, by the road to Hethlon, to the entrance of Zedad-* Num. 34 and Josh. 15 had defined the land in the order south, west, north, and east. But there the order is north, east, south, west. Perhaps this was because in Joshua's time Israel came from the south into the land; whereas now they were to return from the land of the north. We marvel at God's sensitivity to our contexts and situations on earth. See on :17.

Ezekiel 47:16 *Hamath, Berothah, Sibram, which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazer Hatticon, which is by the border of Hauran-* The whole style of Ez. 40-48 would appear to be relevant to Ezekiel’s own time- note how the borders of the land are described as “Sibram, which is between the border of Damascus... on the north northward is the border of Hamath” (:17). These geographical notes only made sense in Ezekiel's time.

Ezekiel 47:17 *The border from the sea, shall be from the sea to Hazar Enon at the border of Damascus; and on the north northward is the border of Hamath. This is the north side-* There appears to be a double reference to the northern border; as explained on :15, perhaps this was because in Joshua's time Israel came from the south into the

land; whereas now they were to return from the land of the north. We marvel at God's sensitivity to our contexts and situations on earth.

Ezekiel 47:18 *The east side, between Hauran and Damascus and Gilead, and the land of Israel, shall be the Jordan; from the north border to the east sea you shall measure. This is the east side-* The Jordan river was to be the eastern border. Yet the territory promised to Abraham extended to the Euphrates. God was making concessions to their weakness by giving them at this stage a more limited area. But the territory in Gilead east of the Jordan river was also envisaged as being possible for their possession (Mic. 7:14; Zech. 10:10). These varying definitions of the promised land are of themselves evidence that God's purpose with His people is elastic. We can be sure that at the return of the Lord Jesus, the full territory promised to Abraham will be given to Israel, right up to the Euphrates; for God's promise to Abraham shall surely be fulfilled. So this scenario here in Ez. 47 is not that of the future Kingdom after Christ's return.

Ezekiel 47:19 *The south side southward shall be from Tamar as far as the waters of Meriboth Kadesh, to the brook of Egypt, to the great sea. This is the south side southward-* Tamar was apparently at the southern end of the Dead Sea. There would therefore be a diagonal line drawn from there to the "brook of Egypt". As noted on :18, this was a new definition of the promised land. It was intended for the time of the restoration, as in the full Messianic Kingdom, the entire territory promised to Abraham will be inherited.

Ezekiel 47:20 *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-* This is the Hamath of :17. This coastal area included the territory possessed by the Philistines which had always been problematic for Israel. It would've all seemed too incredible for the exiles to believe; that powerful local peoples and the empire of Babylon and Persia would not get in the way of these promises being fulfilled. We too can look at present realities and baulk at the possibility of them all being swept away in order to fulfil the promises within the Gospel of the Kingdom. The Israel who returned instead focused on establishing their own farmsteads, getting a reasonable harvest, getting along with the local tribes, and a religion of external obedience, rather than seeing the huge possibilities open to them. We too face this same temptation.

Ezekiel 47:21 *So you shall divide this land to you according to the tribes of Israel-* Which were twelve tribes according to Ez. 48. The prophecies of the restoration envisaged both the ten tribes and Judah returning together. But most of them preferred to remain in the lands of their captivity.

Ezekiel 47:22 *It shall happen, that you shall divide it by lot for an inheritance to you and to the aliens who live among you, who shall father children among you; and they shall be to you as the native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel-* This would have been very hard for the exiles to accept. Ezra and Nehemiah document all the conflicts with the local people who "live among you". To give them a place in the new system would run counter to the core of Judah's self perception. The idea of course was that these "aliens" would convert to the God of Israel and become joined to natural Israel as His covenant people. But instead the Jews despised them, later terming them 'Samaritans',

refusing to accept them; and initially intermarrying with them and accepting their gods.

Ezekiel 47:23 *It shall happen, that in what tribe the foreigner lives, there you shall give him his inheritance, says the Lord Yahweh-* The commandments about giving the Gentiles inheritance amongst the tribal cantons are understandable in the light of the fact that the Samaritans were living in the land at the time of the restoration. Even within Ezekiel, as well as in Malachi, Israel are criticized for oppressing the stranger / Gentile who lived with them (Ez. 22:7,29); and now they are told that in the new temple system, the stranger must be generously given an inheritance in the land, he must be counted as actually belonging to one of the tribes. But the subsequent history of the returned exiles reveals their development of a xenophobic attitude to Gentiles.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 48

Ezekiel 48:1 *Now these are the names of the tribes: From the north end, beside the way of Hethlon to the entrance of Hamath, Hazar Enan at the border of Damascus, northward beside Hamath, (and they shall have their sides east and west)-* The initial audience would have balked at the mention of Damascus. It would've seemed impossible to establish a new kingdom bordering on such a powerful city. These descriptions of the borders of the land and the inheritances were therefore a huge challenge to faith, just as the message of a future Kingdom is to us today, surrounded by the seemingly permanent and powerful structures of this world.

Ezekiel 48:2 *By the border of Dan, from the east side to the west side, Asher, one portion-* By the time of Revelation, the tribe of Dan isn't mentioned in Rev. 7:5-8. But this was not the case at the time of the restoration. This is another reason to understand the entire potential scenario here as relevant to the restoration but not to the return of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 48:3 *By the border of Asher, from the east side even to the west side, Naphtali, one portion-* The tribal allotments are all equal in size, and the borders as it were imagined as straight lines. But this would have been unworkable in practice due to issues of topography; greater definition was needed to enable this to be practically done. The implication is that had Israel repentantly returned and responded to the plans of Ez. 40-46, then more detail would have been given. This is exactly as stated in Ez. 43:11.

Ezekiel 48:4 *By the border of Naphtali, from the east side to the west side, Manasseh, one portion-* The inheritance of Manasseh east of the Jordan is now ignored, and in order to be given parallel swathes of territory, this would meant Naphtali giving some of its former territory to Manasseh.

Ezekiel 48:5 *By the border of Manasseh, from the east side to the west side, Ephraim, one portion-* Ephraim as the largest tribe of the ten tribes is still given the same inheritance size. It could be that with the loss of the genealogical records at the destruction of the temple, the captives were not strongly aware of what tribe they came from. And so effectively a new Israel was being declared.

Ezekiel 48:6 *By the border of Ephraim, from the east side even to the west side,*

Reuben, one portion- The inheritance of Reuben east of the Jordan is now ignored; perhaps because effectively their separation there from the rest of Israel had not been to their spiritual good.

Ezekiel 48:7 By the border of Reuben, from the east side to the west side, Judah, one portion- The exiles of Judah returning from Babylon would have expected a larger portion, but this was not to be. A new Israel was envisaged here. This division of the land between the tribes was designed to take away any sense of parochialism and superiority based upon previous history.

Ezekiel 48:8 By the border of Judah, from the east side to the west side, shall be the district which you shall set apart, twenty-five thousand cubits in breadth, and in length as one of the portions, from the east side to the west side: and the sanctuary shall be in its midst- If the sanctuary was to be strictly in the midst of a swathe of land running from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River, then this position would not coincide with mount Zion. Perhaps this was intentional- to as it were relocate Zion, perhaps due to topographical changes God would have brought about. But "in its midst" need not be so literally interpreted. The Hebrew can as well be translated "within it".

Ezekiel 48:9 The district that you shall offer to Yahweh shall be twenty-five thousand in length, and ten thousand in breadth- The holy district had to be consciously 'offered' to God by the tribes. This suggests that the scenario in this chapter is more command than prescription of what God would force to come about. Ez. 45:1 seems to envisage a ceremony at which the returned exiles formally divided up the land according to these borders and also offered the district to the Lord. But they never did this.

Ezekiel 48:10 This holy district shall be for the priests: 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- This area was to be consciously given to the priests; see on :9. Hence LXX "Out of this shall be the first-fruits of the holy things to the priests".

And the sanctuary of Yahweh shall be in its midst- See on :8.

Ezekiel 48:11 It shall be for the priests who are sanctified of the sons of Zadok, who have kept My instruction, who didn't go astray when the children of Israel went astray, as the Levites went astray- But there is no record of the sons of Zadok keeping separate from the apostasy of the Levites in the time before the exile. We can conclude that they did have some faith, and this was counted to them for righteousness; hence "Zadok" means 'righteousness'. The sons of Zadok would sanctify others to work as priests, presumably because at the time of the restoration they were so few. Ezra struggled hard to get any Levites to return with him. And there is no evidence that the sons of Zadok ever did this at the restoration.

Ezekiel 48:12 It shall be to them an offering from the offering of the land, a thing most holy, by the border of the Levites- GNB "So they are to have a special area next to the area belonging to the Levites, and it will be the holiest of all". Again we see the intentional usage of the language of "the holiest of all" used about areas other than the most holy place. The impression given is that holiness will abound, and not be

confined to a tiny area of 9 square meters; Zech. 14:20 likewise speaks of holiness abounding in the restored temple system. As noted on :9, this area was to be consciously given to the sons of Zadok; hence LXX "And the first-fruits shall be given to them out of the first-fruits of the land, even a most holy portion from the borders of the Levites". But this simply wasn't done at the restoration.

Ezekiel 48:13 *Opposite the border of the priests, the Levites shall have an area twenty-five thousand cubits in length, and ten thousand in breadth: the entire length shall be twenty-five thousand, and the breadth ten thousand-* The division between sons of Zadok, priests sanctified by the sons of Zadok and Levites all seems to contradict the idea that the faithful are and will eternally be 'king-priests' (see on Rev. 5:10). We conclude therefore that this situation describes what could have happened at the restoration, and not in the future Kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 48:14 *They shall sell none of it, nor exchange it, nor shall the first fruits of the land be separated; for it is holy to Yahweh-* The situation envisaged is where sale and exchange of land is possible, although the Levites must not do so; which hardly sounds appropriate to the Lord's future Kingdom on earth. The original text is unclear regarding the "first fruits". The GNB offers: "none of it may be sold or exchanged or transferred to anyone else". The Levites were to be provided for, but did not own anything of themselves. And we in this age are to live in the spirit of priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5).

Ezekiel 48:15 *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 dwellings and for suburbs-* Ezekiel had earlier explained that Judah went into captivity because the priests made no difference between the holy and the "common" (Ez. 22:26 s.w.). The restored system was to correct that and maintain the separation. But Malachi makes clear that they did not do so.

And the city shall be in its midst- See on :8. There could be here the implication that the exiles had a choice as to where to build the city. Perhaps a new Zion was in view.

Ezekiel 48:16 *These shall be its measures: the north side four thousand five hundred, and the south side four thousand five hundred, and on the east side four thousand five hundred, and the west side four thousand five hundred-* The style here is alluded to in the description of the four square city of God in which there is no temple in Rev. 21:13. The idea seems to be that the essence of these prophecies will come true in a spiritual and eternal sense, but without the literal temple system (Rev. 21:22).

Ezekiel 48:17 *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-* Whilst the Levites and sons of Zadok lived in the area around the sanctuary, it seems there were to be no other tribes living there. Judah, in whose territory Jerusalem previously stood, had a separate swathe of territory as an inheritance. To as it were lose Jerusalem would have been unattractive to the people of Judah who were in captivity hearing these words for the first time. See on :18.

Ezekiel 48:18 *The remainder in the length, alongside the holy district, shall be ten*

thousand eastward, and ten thousand westward; and it shall be adjacent to the holy district; and its increase shall be for food to those who labour in the city- Revelation alludes to these prophecies, and effectively speaks of "the city" as being "the temple" (Rev. 3:12; 21 cp. Is. 66:6). "Them that serve the city" could refer to the Levites, who were "to serve the tabernacle" (Num. 4:24, 26; 18:6), which was now the temple / city. But the restored exiles considered that it was vain to serve God (Mal. 3:14,18), and so this just didn't come about at the restoration.

Ezekiel 48:19 *Those who labour in the city, out of all the tribes of Israel, shall cultivate it-* I suggested on :17,18 that nobody actually lives in the city; all the tribes have their inheritances elsewhere. The servants of the city may be the Levites. In this case we are to imagine them as under the Mosaic system, scattered throughout the tribes of Israel teaching there, and coming up by groups to work at the temple. One of their jobs will be to grow food for those working in the temple.

Ezekiel 48:20 *The entire district shall be twenty-five thousand by twenty-five thousand: you shall offer the holy district foursquare, with the possession of the city-* Again we note that the returned exiles were to consciously offer this area to God (Ez. 45:1); see on :9.

Ezekiel 48:21 *The residue shall be for the prince, on the one side and on the other of the holy offering and of the possession of the city; in front of the twenty-five thousand of the offering toward the east border, and westward in front of the twenty-five thousand toward the west border, answerable to the portions, it shall be for the prince: and the holy offering and the sanctuary of the house shall be in its midst-* Had Judah repented at the time of the restoration, a Davidic ruler would have been raised up, Zerubbabel is the most obvious candidate (see on Zech. 6). He would have reigned "for ever", for an age. But he dropped the baton, or at least Judah were unwilling for this scenario. And so the prophecies were reinterpreted and rescheduled for total and eternal fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. "The prince" of the envisaged restored temple in Ez. 40-48 refers to this same individual. See on Ez. 37:25.

Ezekiel 48:22 *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-* This is the territory which Ez. 46:18 says could be passed on by the prince to his sons for a lasting inheritance. But there is no legislation about how his sons could pass it on; over time, the area would have become endlessly subdivided between the prince's descendants. This is one of the many practical issues which arise in studying these records, just as the division of the land into horizontal swathes along straight lines requires more definition in order to be practically done. As noted on Ez. 43:11, had the returned exiles been obedient, then more details would have been given.

Ezekiel 48:23 *As for the rest of the tribes: from the east side to the west side, Benjamin, one portion-* Dt. 33:12 had stated that Benjamin would dwell close to Yahweh, and his portion is directly next to the sanctuary area. Jerusalem was originally situated on the border between Benjamin and Judah, although Judah took over Benjamin's territory at that point and effectively Jerusalem was considered as within Judah. But now, the tribal allotments were such that Jerusalem clearly

belonged to neither of them. Such petty squabbles were to be forgotten in the restored kingdom.

Ezekiel 48:24 *By the border of Benjamin, from the east side to the west side, Simeon, one portion-* Simeon's original territory was surrounded by Judah; now they were to be as it were given territory which was once Judah's, and Judah was given an inheritance to the north of where they had previously inherited. This would have been hard to accept for the men of Judah to whom Ezekiel was preaching. But all sense of pride and clinging on to the once significant things of this life is to be subsumed in the realities of the restored Kingdom. And we can learn a lesson from that.

Ezekiel 48:25 *By the border of Simeon, from the east side to the west side, Issachar, one portion-* Issachar had previously inherited to the far north of the land. Now they were in the far south. All we once held so dear is to be completely inverted in the inheritance prepared for us in God's Kingdom.

Ezekiel 48:26 *By the border of Issachar, from the east side to the west side, Zebulun, one portion-* Likewise Zebulun had previously inherited to the far north of the land. Now they were in the far south. Those who simply wanted to return to what they had once known were to be disappointed. See on :27.

Ezekiel 48:27 *By the border of Zebulun, from the east side to the west side, Gad, one portion-* This area would have been desert, as was the area promised to Issachar. To achieve an equality and fairness in the distribution of territory, there must be the implication that the climate and even topography would be changed. The restoration prophesies are full of promises of abundant harvests and blessing upon the physical land. But unless they were believed, Zebulun would have considered that this was not a good deal, and that the good news of this new kingdom held nothing much for them. And so it is with us. The promise of the Kingdom is only meaningful and good news for us if we have the faith to believe that things shall radically change on this earth, and the promised Kingdom will not simply be a return to how we have known secular life in this world; the old and familiar, like the previous inheritance and homesteads of Gad before the exile, will not be returned to us. Something far better is in store.

Ezekiel 48:28 *By the border of Gad, at the south side southward, the border shall be even from Tamar to the waters of Meribath Kadesh, to the brook of Egypt, to the great sea-* Tamar was apparently at the southern end of the Dead Sea. There would therefore be a diagonal line drawn from there to the "brook of Egypt". As noted on Ez. 47:18, this was a new definition of the promised land. It was intended for the time of the restoration, as in the full Messianic Kingdom, the entire territory promised to Abraham will be inherited.

Ezekiel 48:29 *This is the land which you shall divide by lot to the tribes of Israel for inheritance, and these are their individual portions, says the Lord Yahweh-* It was Ezekiel, as he sat with the exiles in Babylon, who was to divide the land by lot unto the various tribes. The tragedy of all the details recorded in Ezekiel 40-48, and the very reason for their being preserved to this day, is to show us to what great extent God has prepared potential things for His people, and yet they can be totally wasted if we don't respond. In fact according to Mic. 4:10, it was God's purpose to exile His people to Babylon, "and there shalt thou be delivered; there the Lord shall redeem

thee from the hand of thine enemies”. And yet they preferred to side with their enemies and to prefer non-deliverance from Babylon. The tragedy of it all is almost unthinkable, and yet this is what we do if day by day we chose the things of this world against the deliverance from this world which there is in Christ.

Ezekiel 48:30 *These are the exits of the city: On the north side four thousand five hundred reeds by measure-* "Exits" is literally 'goings out', the word used of Israel's going out from captivity in Egypt and Babylon. The association is in the fact that if they had truly gone out from Babylon, spiritually as well as literally, then this wonderful city would have been built.

Ezekiel 48:31 *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-* Nehemiah did his very best to bring the potential Kingdom of God about by urging the people to repentance and conformity to God's will, such was his perception of what was going on; that the coming of God's Kingdom was being limited by the apathy of his own people. See on Ez. 40:10. He arranged for 12 gates to be built in the wall, as Ez. 48:31-34 had commanded there to be. The twelve gates with the names of the tribes of Israel are spoken of in Rev. 21:12; but the language there is completely figurative. Seeing Judah had not built the city commanded in Ezekiel, it would as it were descend ready made from Heaven. But this is all figurative language. Seeing the literal fulfilment had been precluded by Judah's disobedience, God would fulfil the essence of it in spiritual terms.

Ezekiel 48:32 *At the east side four thousand five hundred reeds, and three gates: even the gate of Joseph, one; the gate of Benjamin, one; the gate of Dan, one-* Ez. 48:31-34 envisaged the 12 gates of Jerusalem being named after the 12 tribes of Israel. But it seems no accident that twelve separate gates of the city are mentioned in the restoration record- but they weren't renamed after the tribes of Israel. But the names of the city gates in Nehemiah were: valley (Neh. 3:13); horse (Neh. 3:28); east (Neh. 3:29); Miphkad (Neh. 3:31); water (Neh. 8:16); dung (Neh. 12:31); fountain (Neh. 12:37); Ephraim, old, fish, sheep and prison gates (Neh. 12:39). No wonder some wept when the rebuilt temple was finally dedicated- the pattern of Ezekiel's vision hadn't been followed, even on such basic matters as the names of the twelve gates of Jerusalem. The prophetic intention was that both the ten tribes and the two tribes would be restored. Hence the intended naming of the gates after all twelve tribes. But the ten tribes didn't return, and those of Judah and Benjamin who did still felt superior to the ten tribes, and didn't want the gates of their city named after them. And so petty factionism yet again precluded God's people from achieving their potential.

Ezekiel 48:33 *At the south side four thousand five hundred reeds by measure, and three gates: the gate of Simeon, one; the gate of Issachar, one; the gate of Zebulun, one-* The division of the tribes into four groups of three in a square formation recalls the cherubim visions of Ez. 1. The cherubim speak of the action of God on behalf of His people, and those who wished to could identify themselves with that work. The cherubim could have returned to Jerusalem and been manifested in the twelve tribes of a restored Israel. But this was precluded at the time by their disobedience and simple disinterest.

Ezekiel 48:34 *At the west side four thousand five hundred reeds, with their three*

gates: the gate of Gad, one; the gate of Asher, one; the gate of Naphtali, one- There is no reason to think [*contra* Henry Sulley in *The Temple of Ezekiel's Prophecy*] that there will be eleven gates on the West side. This is merely the fantasy of an architect.

Ezekiel 48:35 *It shall be eighteen thousand reeds around: and the name of the city from that day shall be, Yahweh is there-* Jerusalem was to be renamed "Yahweh is our righteousness" (Jer. 33:16 RV)- Ez. 48:35 likewise is a command rather than a prediction, that the city should be called "Yahweh is there". The cherubim of glory would have returned; but as Zechariah makes clear, Judah had to return to God, not just physically returning to Judah and making the motions of worship, but in repentance. The idea that Jerusalem will become the city where "the Lord is there" must be connected with Ezekiel's early use of the phrase to describe how the Lord "was there" in the land of Israel before the Babylonian invasion (Ez. 35:10); all these details could have come true in Ezekiel's time; but they did not. When they do so in the last days, the glory will visibly enter by the east gate in the person of the Lord Jesus. Using the prophetic perfect, God had prophesied that at the time of the restoration, He would come and dwell in rebuilt Zion (Zech. 8:3)- just as Ezekiel's prophecy had concluded: "The name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there" (Ez. 48:35). Clearly, Ezekiel's prophecies could have been fulfilled at the restoration; God was willing that they should be. But human apathy and self-interest stopped it from happening as it could have done.

They should have been more committed to building the temple "that I may appear in my glory" (Hag. 1:8 RSV). The glory of Yahweh as described at the end of Ezekiel could have appeared in Haggai's time- but this wonderful possibility was held back by Israel's petty minded, self-satisficing laziness.