1:5 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). Despite God’s apparent silence, there is likewise a huge Angelic system whirring away over our lives too.

1:7 *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 in Ez. 1:7,23. 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.

1:20 The wheels 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).

1:25 *There was a voice*- The supreme exaltation of the voice / word of God.

1:26 *As the appearance of a man on it above*- Ezekiel saw only likenesses and appearances, rather than God Himself. But the implication is surely that we are made in God’s image and likeness, and therefore we are invited to understand that God exists in a corporeal form, in which image our bodies appear. Understanding God as a personal being rather than intangible ‘spirit’ greatly enhances our relationship and prayer life with God.

2:4-6 Ezekiel was shown “what the house of Israel are doing in the dark” (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 (. 2:4-6; 3:8,9,27; Jer. 1:18; 15:20). 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.

3:3 This eating of God’s word was to represent how Ezekiel wasn’t merely to relay God’s word as a disinterested messenger, but to assimilate it personally, receiving it into his heart before he spoke it to others (:10), just as we should in our witness.

3:7 Having specifically told Ezekiel that Israel would not hearken to His word, God later tells Ezekiel to act out his parables in front of them- for " it may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house" (12:3). Here we see the supreme hopefulness of God, which we too should have when it appears we are preaching to hopeless cases.

3:12 *Rushing*- The Angels are involved with the Cherubim. Yet in Ezekiel's context, the language of chariots inevitably suggests the approach of enemy armies. 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.

3:17-21 Our duty is to witness to the Truth even if there’s no response; realizing that we may have to answer at the last day if we do not do so.

3:18 Perhaps this said to Ezekiel because for 7 days he hadn’t told them the word of God as he had been asked to (:11,15,16).

3:20 God does not just disregard those who turn away from Him. He deceives them, and leads them into a downward spiral of moral and doctrinal declension. He laid a stumbling block before the righteous man who turned to sin.

4:1-5 Preaching through these acted parables would’ve led to people thinking Ezekiel was mad or at least, very ‘odd’; just as they may consider us when we share God’s word with them as He asks.

4:14 This is very similar to the situation when Christ asked Peter to kill and eat unclean animals (Acts 10:14). Peter saw the similarity, taking (as we should) guidance and encouragement from a Biblical example of a person who was in his situation. Peter therefore replied by quoting from Ez. 4:14, where Ezekiel refuses to eat similar food when asked to by the Angel. Perhaps Peter saw himself as Ezekiel's antitype in his witnessing against Israel's rejection of the word of God in Christ (note how 4:16 is a prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction in AD70). 'In the same way as God made a concession to Ezekiel about this command to eat unclean food', Peter reasoned, 'so perhaps my Lord will do for me'. But the Lord was to teach him even greater things than Ezekiel.

4:15 God is open to dialogue with His children, and is willing to make concessions to human weakness and foibles; just as we should be to others.

5:11 *Will I also diminish you*- The implication was that they had diminished God. It may be purposefully putting it in arresting terms, but all the same it’s ultimately true that if we don’t give God the glory we are intended to, then we are diminishing Him of what is potentially and rightfully His. This is the degree to which He has come down to our level in His interaction with men.

5:13 The very existence of “the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” is in order to “make known the riches of his glory upon the vessels of mercy” (Rom. 9:22,23 Gk.). After the experience of Divine judgment, "you shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem" (14:22); and yet these are exactly the words used here in 5:13 to describe how God will be 'comforted' after the judgments. We will come to share God's perspective through our experience of the judgment process. It will teach us to be like Him, to see things from His viewpoint. As a result of it, the struggles we have over "why…?" so many things happened will be resolved. The purpose of the judgment is not only to convict us of our sinfulness, but also to make us appreciate our own righteousness for what it was and is. The faithful almost argue back with the Lord when He points out to them their righteous acts; they were done within a spirit of service that simply didn't see them as He does.

6:7 *You shall know that I am Yahweh*- This is as a refrain throughout Ezekiel. Ultimately, the wicked will come to know Yahweh through their experience of His judgment, but then it will be too late. We are to “know” Him now, rather than too late in the process of condemnation.

6:9 *I have been broken*- The God who is Almighty and so more powerful than us has become so involved with humanity that His heart was broken by Israel; and if it was broken in Ezekiel’s time, we cannot imagine what His feelings were at the crucifixion of His Son. To truly love makes us weak and vulnerable, and the awesome extent of God’s love has in a sense done the same to Him. Not that we are righteous of ourselves, but it’s worth reflecting how our feeble efforts to love Him are therefore so thrilling to Him.

*Their lewd heart… their eyes, which play the prostitute*- This is the language of sexual addiction, and it applies to God’s woman, Israel. No wonder they so broke His loving heart.

6:13 The bodies of Israel lay strewn around their idols because in fact the idols they worshipped were the idols of their enemies, who would’ve sacrificed the corpses of the Israelites to *their* gods. It’s so bizarre that Israel should’ve worshipped the idols of their victorious enemies, but this is how bizarre sin is.

7:9 *According to your ways*- Here God says that He will punish Israel at the hand of the Babylonians according to their sins, proportionate to them. But when Israel were punished by the Babylonians, Ezra (9:13) realized that they had not been punished proportionate to their sins. Yet in Is. 40:2, again in the context of Judah's punishment by the Babylonians, God says that their judgment had been double what it ought to have been; and yet Ezra says it was less than the promised proportionate recompense for their sins. Here we have the utter, humanly inconsistent grace of God; almost taking guilt for punishing them too much, not punishing them enough, and yet saying He will punish them in exact proportion to their sin (see too 5:11; 8:18,19; 9:10). All we can say is that God is passionate and emotional. He hates punishing His children for their sins, just as any loving parent does, even if He speaks at times in the fire of His wrath. And when He did punish Judah, it seems He almost rushes to take it back and say it was far too much. This isn’t to say that God is in any sense fickle; the paradox can perhaps only dimly be understood by the analogy to human parenting dilemmas. All we can say is that His love and passion for His wayward children is real and felt, and He will not hold Himself to His word of judgment in a legalistic, literalistic sense- quite simply because love, not least *His* love, is beyond such limitation.

7:12 *The time has come*- And yet God says elsewhere that it is still to come (:10). God is outside of time as we know it. The future is as if it’s happened. Because of this, God can speak of the dead as if they are alive, although they are not; and can speak of people as if they were alive before birth. He can speak of a day coming as if it has come (Is. 3:8). We need to bear this in mind in interpreting His word.

7:20 *Therein*- Amazingly, there were idols made in Yahweh’s temple…

7:23 The Hebrew word *mishpat* means [and is translated] both “crime” (7:23) and “judgment” (5:7,16,20). Every sin is its own judgment, and brings us immediately as it were before the judgment throne of God. And yet *mishpat* is also translated “ordinance”, in speaking about the commands of God (11:20). Acts of obedience are also acts of judgment; they too bring us positively before the judgment of God. The Greek and Hebrew words translated 'judge' mean both the process of discerning / summing up, and also the execution of judgment.

8:3 *Which provokes to jealousy*- Any form of idolatry provokes God to jealousy. The vast extent of His love for us means that any unfaithfulness provokes His feelings of jealousy; love and jealousy are in this sense part of the same thing.

8:12- see on 2:4-6. It seems that righteousness goes unrewarded and sin goes unpunished. This is a very strong impression to the surface level view of things as they currently are. Those who thought in their hearts that “Yahweh doesn’t see” likely never said that in so many words. But their persistence in sin, like ours today, arose from a disbelief in practice that God does in fact see and know all things. They thought that “the Lord will not do good, nor will He do ill” (Zeph. 1:12); “my way is hidden from the Lord” (Is. 29:15; 40:27). This of course is the attitude with which we daily live. The question is, will we perceive it as the prophets did, and live with the belief that God is in fact intently watching us, 24/7?

8:13 Amongst God’s people, some sins are “greater abomination” than others . Even amongst the Gentiles, God sees some as sinning more than others (7:24). This doesn’t mean that the ‘smaller’ ones don’t count. But it reflects God’s great sensitivity to human behaviour. The varying scale of sacrifices for various sins reflects this too. The Lord Jesus spoke of the man with “greater sin” (Jn. 19:11), and of other men who owed varying amounts to the Father. God's eye did not spare or pity Israel, because they thought that sin was a light thing to Him (:17,18). They thus insulted His essential nature.

9:2 *One man… with a writer’s inkhorn by his side*- Ezekiel was seeing himself in the vision.

9:4 *Foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry over all the abominations*- In some ways we can do nothing about the state of things in the world or amongst the people of God, because we cannot change other people. But what marks us out as God’s people is that in our deepest minds [symbolized by the forehead], we weep for it all. This was the characteristic which saved Lot when Sodom was destroyed (2 Pet. 2:8).

9:5 This is reminiscent of the Passover Angel sealing the faithful Israelites against the destruction of the “Destroyer” Angel. But now, unfaithful Israel were no better than the Egyptians.

9:8 Ezekiel’s intercession was after the pattern of Abraham pleading for Sodom and Moses for Israel. Their examples inspired Ezekiel in prayer, as they should us. But it wasn’t heard at this time; for in the end, wilful sin just has to be punished, and no mediator or intercession can change things.

10:8 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” (: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, "God is in need of man".

10:14 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. 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" 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.

11:1 The wheels of the cherubim 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 (8:3; 11:1). He became part of the Cherubic system.

11:15 *I will judge you in the border of Israel*- Babylon and Assyria were located at the borders of the land promised to Abraham.

11:19 Sitting there in captivity, God offered His people a new covenant (: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 the whole offer was rescheduled and reapplied, so that it is now accepted by those who turn 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 our hearing of the 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 believe it- or just continue to be obsessed with just trying to make the best of a rather dumb life.

11:22-24 When the cherubim lifted up, so was Ezekiel lifted up. 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.

12:3- see on 3:7.

*Perhaps they will consider*- The Hebrew word ulay, 'perhaps', is significant in revealing how much God has given us freewill; for we are invited to understand that perhaps God limits His foreknowledge so that He didn’t ‘know’ whether they would “consider” or not. He speaks the same way in Is. 47:12; Jer. 26:2,3; 36:3,7). This ‘uncertainty’ of God as to how His people will respond to His word reflects the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to our kind of time. It has huge implications for us. With what eagerness must God Almighty look upon us as we sit down to read His word daily! 'Are they going to listen? How are they going to respond…?'.

12:22-25 The desolation of Israel by the invaders was repeatedly foretold by the prophets. The message was continually mocked by the false prophets, who claimed inspiration from God to claim that the day of judgment had been endlessly delayed. They also belittled the predictions made by true prophets like Ezekiel, spreading their ideas until it became a common joke that Yahweh's prophets kept speaking of a coming day of the Lord that never came. But God's reply here was clear. The similarities with the last days leading up to AD70 are clear- the prophetic word was likewise mocked with the taunt “Where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Pet. 3:4). The true word of God regarding the coming day of the Lord was mocked; a belief that "the days are prolonged" led to the conclusion that "every prophetic vision fails", as the thought that "my Lord delays his coming" (Mt. 24:48) resulted in a lack of faith in the word of promise. Christ’s statement that "all shall be fulfilled" at His coming (Lk.21:32) matches the assurance given here that "every vision" *would* be fulfilled when the day came. Those within the people of God at Ezekiel's time who were expressing such doubt were matched by some within the body of Christ in the first century. Clearly they must have their latter day counterparts.

12:25 ‘Yahweh’ can mean ‘I who will be’. Because He is, and He will be, therefore the words of the 'I will be', really will be. His very Name is the utter guarantee that His word for us will be fulfilled.

13:5 God is so sensitive to prayerfulness. He condemns the leaders of Israel for not stopping the gaps or building the wall, i.e. interceding, for Israel. If only there had been a prayerful minority, God would have changed the whole course of His dealings with Israel. But petty materialism and self small-mindedness was what stopped those leaders from doing their job.

13:9 *Neither shall they enter into the land of Israel*- Ezekiel seems to be writing this in the context of the first wave of captives taken to Babylon. The false prophets amongst them were saying that all would be well with Jerusalem (:16); whereas Ezekiel spoke on God’s behalf in revealing the sins going on there, and saying that because of them, the rest of Judah would be taken captive. Although it was God’s purpose to restore the captives to Judah, these false prophets would die in Babylon and not return there. This kind of thing has gone on from the time of the serpent in Eden- questioning God’s word, and saying what others would like to hear as if it is from God.

13:11 *You, great hailstones, shall fall*- Note the sudden change of pronoun. This is an example of how God personally addresses the natural creation. He may be speaking to the Angels who control it, and yet there is also the sense within the Bible that God is somehow in conscious, active dialogue with the natural creation, and hasn’t merely left it ticking on mindless clockwork.

13:18 Any attempt to manipulate or get power over other people within God’s family, be it done consciously or unconsciously, should be outlawed for us by the simple consideration that they are in fact *God’s* people and not ours.

14:7 People who were worshipping idols in their hearts still wanted to come and hear God’s word from the prophet. Like those people, we are tempted to worship the true God as well as idols, rather than making a clean break. People come to God’s word as it now is in the Bible, but they are confused by God in the message they hear from it because they come to His word with idols in their hearts. Mere Bible reading won’t make us righteous; the attitude of mind we bring to it is all important. If we come with idols in our hearts, then reading God’s word will lead us yet further from God.

14:9 Clearly God is capable of deceiving people, and at times He even uses His word as the medium through which He does so. We can never be passive in our relationship with God, nor stand still in our journey with Him. He is constantly active through His word to lead us either closer to Him or further away from Him.

14:14 *Noah, Daniel, and Job*- Each of these men delivered others by their intercession and personal righteousness. Noah delivered his family, Daniel his people, and Job his friends. God is willing to save people for the sake of a third party, but there clearly has to be some base level of spirituality in the person. By Ezekiel’s time, there wasn’t even that.

14:22- see on 5:13.

*The evil that I have brought*- God and not some cosmic ‘Satan’ being is the One who brings “evil” in the sense of calamity against people. See on Is. 45:5-7.

15:5 There in Babylon they 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. Even before they were burnt up, the vine tree of God’s people wasn’t good for any work (:3), and had no superiority over the other trees (:2). God’s people aren’t better, of themselves, than the peoples around them; we’re not good at works, even if we think we are; the way God uses us is a reflection of pure grace, and how He delights in using the humanly worthless and useless to do His work.

16:3 Israel are reminded that ethnically they’re not so different from the surrounding nations, seeing that Abraham their ancestor was originally from Ur. The basis of being ‘Jewish’ and part of God’s people was therefore God’s grace rather than anything ethnic.

16:5 This is very much the language of Isaac’s half brother Ishmael, ancestor of many of Israel’s enemies (Gen. 21:10-16). Israel were no better than the Gentile world, just as they are today not inherently better than their Arab cousins, and as we in essence are no better than the world around us. It’s God’s calling, which is by grace alone, which makes all the difference.

16:8 God found Israel in the wilderness, covered them with a cloud (cp. His ‘skirt’) at Sinai, and there entered a covenant with them.

16:10 This alludes to the materials used for the tabernacle and priestly clothing. The intention of all that legislation, as with all God’s Law, is to make us beautiful in His eyes.

16:13 *You ate fine flour, honey and oil*- A reference to the priests eating these offerings. The whole people of Israel are spoken of here as if they were priests; it was God’s intention that the whole nation should become priests (Ex. 19:6). We as the modern people of God are likewise all intended to be priests (1 Pet. 2:9), taking spiritual responsibility for others rather than leaving it to a dedicated minority of the community.

16:20 Our children are borne to God; we’re not therefore free to raise them as we wish, but as He wishes, because they are His children.

16:37 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 (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 (:7,9,10); the gang rape by her enemies which God would bring about, leaving her mutilated and humiliated (:37; 23:22-49); about the size of her lovers’ sexual organs and coital emissions, and how she let them fondle her breasts (23:8,20). This is shocking language, which perhaps we skip over in our Bible reading from sheer embarrassment- and we are 21st century 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. The shocking sexual language and imagery of the prophets was in order to help Israel see that this was how far they had outraged God. It was and is a rhetoric that cannot be forgotten, shrugged off, re-interpreted. The rhetoric pushes relentlessly for a response in our consciences.

16:49 Note how pride, ignoring the poor and self-indulgence are highlighted as Sodom’s essential sins; the sin of homosexuality is no worse nor better than these sins.

*This was the iniquity… fullness of bread*- The “fullness of bread” was itself a sin. Hoarding wealth when others are poor and needy is “iniquity”.

16:50 The abomination of their sexual perversion is placed last in the list of their sins, as if to emphasize that all the other sins were just as much sin. Likewise Paul writes to the Corinthians about their failures, but he doesn’t start where I would have started- with their drunkenness at the memorial meeting. Instead he starts off with their disunity. Those things which we may consider as lesser sins, the Bible continually lists together with those things we have been conditioned into thinking are the greater sins. Clearest of all is the way Paul lists schism and hatred in his lists of sins that will exclude from the Kingdom. The worldviews of many societies have taught that sexual sin is so infinitely far worse than a bit of argument within a church, or ignoring others’ poverty. But is this really right…?

16:51 This statement that Judah (the two tribe Kingdom) sinned more than Israel (the ten tribes) needs some meditation upon; God really did lavish grace upon the weakest of the weak.

17:3 *Great eagle*- Nebuchadnezzar; *Full of feathers –*Many subject peoples; *Various colours*- Various nations within the Babylonian army and confederacy.

17:4 *The topmost of the young twigs*- The princes of Judah taken to Babylon.

17:5 *The seed of the land*- Zedekiah. *Planted it in a fruitful soil*- Set up as King of Judah, supported by Babylon.

17:6 *A vine of low stature*- Judah under Babylonian control could never become a high nation; her roots tended towards Nebuchadnezzar for all support.

17:7 *Another great eagle*- Pharaoh-hophra, king of Egypt. *This vine bent its roots toward him*- Judah broke their agreement with Nebuchadnezzar and sent to Egypt for help to rebel against Babylon.

17:8 *That it might be a goodly vine*- If Judah had accepted their domination by Babylon as a just punishment for their rebellion against Yahweh, God potentially had set up a situation whereby this could have been fruitful for His people. Wriggling out of our sins never brings the blessing God has prepared for those who accept their sins and the consequences of them.

17:9 *Cut off its fruit*- Zedekiah’s children killed. *The leaves*- Judah’s leadership.

17:15 *Shall he break the covenant, and yet escape?-* God’s people are held to be honest to the agreements they make with unbelievers, as well as their covenant with God.

17:22 *A tender one*- Messiah, the Lord Jesus (Is. 53:2), one of the twigs of the Jewish nation as Zedekiah had been, a Jew of our human nature.

17:23 The great tree speaks of Christ’s Kingdom, under which people from all nations would find refuge (Mk. 4:32).

17:24 The low tree which is exalted speaks of Christ; the dry tree which will flourish was understood by Jesus as a reference to Himself on the cross (Lk. 23:31). There, as also explained in Is. 53, He appeared to be a “dry tree”, a man dying without any children; but through that death, He flourished into many children, in us who have believed in Him and been born anew as God’s children.

18:4 The Jews of Ezekiel’s time felt they weren’t bad people, but were unjustly suffering the effects of their fathers’ sins. The Hebrew word translated “soul” here has a wide range of meaning, but generally it refers to the human person. The person who sins will die. The soul therefore isn’t something inherently immortal. This is a pagan idea which has sadly been accepted by some Christian traditions.

18:14 Note the double usage of the word “sees”. He sees the sins, and then he really sees them, and doesn't do them. This is how we must be in our registering of the fact that sin really brings death. We can know that sin brings death as theory; and we can really know it.

18:20 This simple truth demonstrates that the idea of suffering because of the sins of another person in another life is simply not true; we are judged for our own sins and not those of others. This can also psychologically free a person from the tendency to apply to ourselves ‘guilt by association’ for others’ sins. However, it’s also true that we can suffer the effects of others’ sins, and the Bible contains examples of this, not least our suffering the effect of Adam’s sin. But we are personally judged only for our own sins. We need to draw this line very clearly in our self-examination; between the suffering we experience as a result of others’ dysfunctions and sins, and that which is in response to our personal sins.

18:22 *Remembered against him*- An implication that in some sense, at the day of judgment, there will be a ‘going through’ with the wicked of all their sins; whereas for the righteous, these will not be remembered and instead their good works will be recounted to them (:24). The parable of Mt. 25:36-44 says as much.

18:29 Working through the logic here, the answer to the ‘God’s not fair!’ syndrome is to reflect deeper upon our own sinfulness, and the simple fact that sin nets death.

18:32 God has no pleasure in punishing the wicked; rather do they punish themselves. He’s not some capricious deity who takes pleasure in using His omnipotence to make His opponents suffer. His dislike of punishing the wicked is proof enough that ‘hell’ doesn’t refer to any concept of eternal, conscious torment of the wicked; Biblically, *sheol* (the word translated “hell” in some Bibles) is the same word translated “the grave”. Death is the punishment for sin, not eternal torment.

19:2 The lioness represents Judah or Jerusalem.

19:3 *She brought up one of her cubs*- Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, whose father was conquered killed by Pharaoh-necho, king of Egypt.

19:5 *Took another of her cubs*- Jehoiakim, after Jehoahaz had been taken to Egypt (:4).

19:6 *He went up and down among the lions*- Jehoiakim acted like the leaders [“lions”] around him in the Gentile world.

19:11 A reference to Zedekiah and his sons; but Zedekiah became proud, was broken down by the Babylonians and Jerusalem was burnt (:12). Zedekiah comes over in Jeremiah as a weak man when it came to doing the right thing; it seems he wanted to obey God’s word through Jeremiah, but feared the opinion of the princes and that the Babylonians might abuse him (Jer. 38:19-24). However, this verse fills out the picture- his fear of the opinion of others was due to his pride. We may appear humble, but if we are only so because we are image conscious- then in fact we are proud.

20:3 *Is it to inquire of Me?*- We can come to God’s word in the Bible or bow in prayer before Him, but have our minds already made up, and not actually be seeking Him and His perspective at all. To truly “seek” God as we are often exhorted is not at all easy.

20:8 The degree to which righteousness is imputed to us is hard to feel. Dt. 32:12 states that there was no strange God with Israel- but here we read that they took the idols of Egypt with them, as confirmed in Acts 7:43. God counted wayward Israel as righteous after their Red Sea baptism (1 Cor. 10;1,2); at that time, as Balaam said, God did not see iniquity in Israel, nor behold the perversity that was in Jacob (Num. 23:21).

20:9 *I made Myself known to them in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt*- Our exodus from the world at baptism, which is our Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1,2), is a witness to the world around us. Our conversion to Christ therefore cannot be unnoticed by the world, there must be a visible element to it.

20:12 *A sign between Me and them*- The Sabbath was a sign between God and Israel, not between God and Gentile believers today.

20:22 God swore that He would destroy Israel in the wilderness (:21); but God 'withdrew His hand', He took back this promise. Likewise God said He would destroy Israel in Egypt (:8). But He didn't (:9). Clearly enough God is willing to change His intended judgments of His people, so sensitive is He to their repentance and spirituality.

20:25 An example of how God confirms people in the downward spiral they choose. Likewise :26 implies that God led His people into idolatry in order to make them desolate.

20:34 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. The wonderful possibility of a new covenant (:37) went unrealized- to be deferred until the true Israel of God are gathered home in our last days.

20:37 *The bond of the covenant*- The Hebrew translated "bond" is literally a fetter, a tie that binds, that restricts. To be in covenant relationship therefore means that we are not free to do as we like; there is an element of regulation in our lives, but of course it has a purpose- to bring us to God's Kingdom and keep us within the sphere of relationship with Him. But a covenant is a two way thing. This tie that binds applies to God too; hence the wonderful, oft-repeated idea of His chesed, His covenant faithfulness to us His people. He likewise carries a kind of responsibility to us.

20:38 *They shall not enter into the land of Israel* - 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 (also in 13:9). 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" (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

20:40 *There will I accept them*- As in :41. This ‘acceptance’ was to be when Judah returned from captivity, and the same word is found in 43:27 where a temple was to be built and sacrifices offered, “and I will accept you”. The intention clearly was that the temple was to be built upon Judah’s return from captivity; but they failed to live up to the wonderful potential enabled.

20:49 The fact that his audience disregarded and mocked his message was so hard for Ezekiel to endure. No true preacher of the Gospel hasn’t had the same feeling at times.

21:26 *The mitre… the crown*- The implication is that the King to be deposed was a King-Priest, as if the priestly and kingly lines had crossed in his genealogy. This points forward to the Lord Jesus.

 Mary understood that through her conception, God had put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted them of low station in this life (Lk. 1:52). This clearly alludes to Ez. 21:26, where the princes are to be put down and him that is low is to be exalted, i.e. Messiah. But Mary felt that she had been exalted; thus she shared Messiah’s exaltation because He was in her and she in Him. We too are in Him, and we should feel something of the pride and joy, along with the suffering, that comes from that identification. She parallels her lowly estate with them of low station in this life (Lk. 1:48,52)- perhaps referring to her and Jesus? Yet despite all her undoubted spiritual perception in her song of praise, she didn’t have totally pure understanding. It seems from her allusion in Lk. 1:52 to Ez. 21:26 [the mighty being put down from their thrones and the humble one exalted] that she thought that Ezekiel’s prophesy about Messiah’s restoration of the Kingdom had already been fulfilled in her conception of Jesus. It could be that she was so sure that her child would one day do this that she saw the time of the coming of “Him whose right it is” as being right there and then; and yet we know that it is in fact still future.

21:27 The throne of the kings of Judah was to be no more until Christ, the rightful King of Israel, returns. He is the One who was low who has been exalted on high (:26). The triple ‘overturning’ could refer to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, the Roman destruction in AD70, and a final overturning of the city in our times, just prior to Christ’s return as King of Israel. Alternatively, the triple 'overturning' refers to the three invasions of Judah made by Babylon. The future Kingdom of Christ is to be a re-establishment of the Kingdom of God as it once was, based around Jerusalem. The return of Christ is spoken of as the restoration of that Kingdom in Acts 1:6, where the disciples are basically asking when this prophecy of Ez. 21:27 will be fulfilled.

22:2 *Judge the bloody city... cause her to know all her abominations*- The purpose of judgment is to reveal sin to those being judged. We must face up to our sins, know them for what they are- either now, or in the process of rejection at the final day of judgment.

22:3 *So that her time of judgment may come, and that makes idols against herself to defile her*- Notice how the judgment and defiling were brought about by her own behaviour. Those who are condemned have condemned themselves (see :31).

22:9 Because gossip is such an epitome of the flesh, it is ranked here along with sins like fornication, idolatry and murder. Other scripture teaches that to hate your brother in your heart was and is as bad as murdering him (Mt. 5:22; 1 Jn. 3:15). Here, the connection is made between gossip and murder. To gossip against our brother is to hate him.

22:15 *I will consume your filthiness out of you*- This suggests that as the day of the second coming approaches, Israel will be progressively purged and move closer and closer towards repentance. It is our duty to show them the Gospel so that they can make sense of their sufferings and see what they are intended by God to lead them towards.

22:22 This wrath of God was still ultimately constructive- because through the heat of the fire of His wrath, God intended to purge out the dross from His people, so that they might be saved. A very common tragedy in human experience is when people suffer terribly, and yet still don’t make the changes God intends. So much suffering, especially of Israel, has in this sense been in vain.

22:26- see on 42:20.

22:30 Even at this dire time of Judah’s weakness, God would have changed His entire program of judgment for the sake of just one man. But there was none, it seems Ezekiel himself wasn’t passionate enough even. Thus God says He has consumed them in His wrath (:31), whereas Moses ‘turned’ God from executing His wrath as He planned (Ps. 78:38; 106:23).

23:8 *Neither has she left her prostitution since the days of Egypt*- A reference to how Israel took the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea (16:8,9), just as we can take this world’s idols with us through the waters of baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2).

23:11 Judah (the two tribe Kingdom) are portrayed here as more sinful than Israel (the ten tribe Kingdom), although the historical records in Kings and Chronicles suggest that Judah had more spiritual Kings than did Israel. We must conclude that occasional good leadership doesn’t therefore affect the entire community. Seeing relationship with God is so intensely personal, good leadership can only be of limited value, and it therefore shouldn’t be over-emphasized as the reason why a community are righteous or not.

23:14 *Men portrayed on the wall*- The context suggests this was some kind of visual pornography. There’s a lot of language in these verses which speak of her attraction to them visually. The impression is given of a totally superficial woman who became sexually obsessed- when married to God Himself. This is how we can become, unless we understand our covenant relationship with God to utterly preclude any other relationship.

23:19 *Remembering the days of her youth* – Israel’s memories and perception of their time in Egypt were very warped. It was a furnace of suffering for them, and yet they remembered fondly the food which the Egyptians ate (Num. 11:5), and the gods they worshipped. We need to understand our life before baptism for what it was, and not keep hankering after it.

23:22 *Your lovers… from whom your soul is alienated*- No illicit relationship can ever last, and the supposed love always turns to hate or alienation. Israel are the classic case- it was the nations whose gods she worshipped who came and destroyed her without mercy.

23:27 *Your prostitution brought from the land of Egypt*- It is repeatedly emphasized that Israel took Egypt’s idols with them (16:8,9 and elsewhere in this chapter). Yet Ezekiel is writing centuries afterwards. The faithless attitude Israel had when they left Egypt influenced their spiritual walk afterwards. How we start our walk with God is so important; and we should be very aware of this in raising children and in our attitude to new converts within the church.

23:34 Ezekiel speaks of how every act of idolatry was seen by God as the fickle wife of a faithful husband deceitfully liaising with another, worthless, man. And there is a similar shocking terror associated with our infidelities to the Lord who bought us for His own. The self-hatred of repentant Israel before they accept the new covenant is described with a purposefully terrible idiom: a woman plucking off her own breasts. These words must be seen in the context of Israel offering these parts of her body to the hands of the Gentiles (:3,8). And now, with her own hands, Israel would fain pluck off her breasts in realization of her degradation. This self-loathing must be part of every true repentance; for we too, in advance of Israel, ought to have repented a like repentance, and entered the very same covenant. Just reflect upon the self-loathing in repentance of 6:9; 20:43; Job 40:4; 42:6. This is how sin is serious. Alternatively, we can read this self-hatred as an Old Testament form of what Jesus repeatedly warned about- the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” which will be experienced by those rejected at the judgment seat (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

24:7 *She set it on the bare rock*- But :8 says that *God* made her do this with her blood, so that she would incite His wrath. Here we have an example of how God confirms people in the sin they choose to commit. There’s both a downward spiral and an upward one, we can never take a break from our spiritual journey, constantly we are being confirmed in the direction we choose.

24:12 *Wearied herself with lies*- The wearying with lies suggests that it was due to their listening to false prophets rather than the true word of God that the fire did not cleanse them.

24:16 *The desire of your eyes*- The implication is that Ezekiel dearly loved his wife and found her very attractive. Yet just as he so loved her, so Judah loved Yahweh’s temple (:21). We must realize that Judah weren’t atheists, they hadn’t rejected Yahweh. On one hand they loved Him, but they loved their other gods too.

24:23 The emphasis is very much on the psychological suffering of the condemned Israel. Ezekiel wasn’t allowed to weep, which is the natural expression of grief. It therefore bottled up within him, causing deep psychological pain; in order to present Israel with an illustration of how they would feel under God’s judgment. The punishment of the rejected at the final judgment will be “gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 24:51), which is again a picture of anger with oneself and internal torment at what might have been, the eternal future which they chose to miss. The wicked will not be punished with literal fire or torture; the internal psychological pain will be in fact far worse. These pictures of condemnation are frequent in the Bible; not to scare us into submission, but to bring before us the eternal consequence of the decisions we take in this life, for the flesh or for the Spirit.

24:27- see on 29:21.

25:11 *They shall know that I am Yahweh*- God judged nations in order that men might know Him as Yahweh (see too 28:22; 30:19). But did they? Often God states His intentions and wishes for people’s faith as if they have been realized. In this we can see the hopefulness of God, like the shepherd who searches for the lost sheep with the attitude that he will search until he finds it (Lk. 15:4). We should have this hopefulness in all our witnessing to others.

25:14 *By the hand of My people Israel*- The Law of Moses had commanded Israel not to hate Edomites (Dt. 23:7); so they were intended to carry out this judgment with no personal hatred, just as at times we have to. Despite Josephus claiming that the Maccabees fulfilled this prophecy, Obadiah 21 speaks of how this judgment will be fulfilled in the last days around the second coming of Christ (cp. Is. 63:1).

25:15 *For the old enmity*- A reference to the Jacob:Esau hatred, which will finally be resolved in Jacob’s favour- by God’s grace alone.

25:16 *The rest of the sea coast*- The Hebrew word for ‘Philistine’ is the same as that now used for ‘Palestinian’; the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip are in exactly the geographical location spoken of here.

26:7 This speaks of how Babylon will surround and destroy Tyre. But this never happened in recorded history- it was done by Alexander and the Greeks much later. 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. 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. Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant, but God changed the terms and conditions of his labour. He would not conquer Tyre, but he was given Egypt instead. 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 did Tyre like Nineveh get to hear of this prophecy, and repent, so it didn’t happen? Or is Tyre yet to fall in some last days scenario? Or is it that God tells us something, only a piece of the future at a time, and then we get a fuller picture later on? We do not need to question God's prophesies. We can believe Him each time, and believe the changes He makes as well. Ezekiel has a lot of conditional prophecies- not least the last nine chapters with their description of the temple situation which could have come about if Judah had returned from exile and rebuilt the temple as God intended.

Another approach would be to reconsider our philosophy of history. In this age where science is assumed to have all the answers, the assumption is likewise made that the science of history is somehow complete. But primary sources for ancient history are limited; there are large gaps in ancient history, and primary sources may exist for some incidents which aren’t very significant on the larger canvass; and likewise major incidents are at times unnoticed in the sources currently available. So it’s possible that Nebuchadnezzar did do to Tyre as required by this prophecy, it’s just not recorded; and Alexander also destroyed the city later (this would require special attention to our note on 26:21 about the meaning of the phrase “no more be rebuilt”).

26:8,9 The references to making mounts against Tyre’s walls show that the “Tyre” referred to here isn’t any island fortification as claimed by some.

26:12 *Lay your stones and your timber and your dust in the midst of the waters*- Alexander the Great broke down Tyre and carefully laid the rubble in the water in order to build a causeway with which to reach the island castle of Tyre which still held out against him.

26:21 *No more be rebuilt*- This also may have been part of a conditional prophecy- see on :7. It could be that the Biblical Tyre wasn’t on the same spot as the city now known as “Tyre”. The Hebrew can bear the translation ‘Not be built any more’, meaning that the building which was then ongoing would end. The same grammatical construction is found in passages like Ex. 9:29, where Moses says that ‘As soon as I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the Lord ... there will be hail no longer...’. This doesn’t mean that there would never be any hail ever again; it means that the current hailstorm would stop. Another example in Neh. 2:17.

27:3 *Perfect in beauty*- Arrogant self-confidence, opulence, human beauty, human wisdom, praise and respect from others, power… all the things which people so strive after in our society were all obtained to their fullness by Tyre, and yet these are the very things which they were condemned for. Note how the prophets pointed out to Gentile nations their sins and failures before the God of Israel; sin is still felt by God as sin, even if it is committed by those not responsible to His final judgment. It must be so hard for God, feeling all this offence against Him. However, it was Jerusalem which was the city seen by God as “perfect in beauty” (Ps. 50:2); Tyre wasn’t simply boastful, but consciously wanted to take over from Jerusalem as God’s chosen city. They thought that their wealth and human advantage could buy for them status with God- as people do today. It was Tyre’s aspiration to replace Israel as God’s people which He found so upsetting- see notes on chapter 28.

27:17 Judah and the land of Israel- Ezekiel would’ve reflected that this list of good things from his own land was produced at a time of blessing on the land (Dt. 8:8; 32:14); for at his time, the land was desolate and not trading with Tyre. As a young Jew in Babylon, Ezekiel likely knew nothing of Tyre personally, and so the detailed list in this chapter is an example of Divine inspiration giving the Bible writers information which was beyond them personally to amass.

27:36 *Never again*- See on 26:7,21.

28:13-15 It is wrongly assumed that this refers to Satan once having been in Eden. But the words “devil” and “satan” 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 27:3 and 28:12; 27:16,17 with 28:13; 27:33 with 28:16). The passage plainly speaks of the King of Tyre, not anything that happened at the beginning of the world. It is commonly believed that Satan was thrown out of heaven into Eden, but this passage says that this person was in Eden before he sinned and was cast out when he sinned. The garden of Eden was on the earth, not in heaven (its boundaries are given in Gen. 2:8-14), therefore the casting out was not out of heaven. The person was to “die the death of the uncircumcised” (:10), but angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35-36). That a man is referred to is confirmed by v. 9: “you are man”. Verse 2 defines him as the “prince of Tyre”. The Hebrew word for “perfect” is applied to Noah, Abraham, Job and David (Gen. 6: 9; 17:1; Job 1:1; Ps. 18:23 & 25); it doesn’t imply a supernatural being. “You were in Eden” refers to where the king of Tyre was in place, not in time. Pharaoh and Assyria are similarly described as being like trees in Eden, and having these trees in awe (31:2,3,8,9,16,18). 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. Eden was a geographical area on earth known to Ezekiel's readers- this is how it is used elsewhere in Ezekiel (Ez. 27:23; 31:8,9; Is. 51:3; Gen. 13:10). 'Eden' was not understood as a historical reference to the garden of Eden in early Genesis, but rather to a known nation / region of Ezekiel's time. The sin of the King of Tyre is defined in :16-18 as dishonest accumulation of wealth. The sin in view wasn't some Angelic rebellion against God. The language of precious stones in :13,14 is an allusion to the stones set in the breastplate of the high priest of Israel (Ex. 39:10-14). Tyre was “on the holy mountain of God” (:14)- but this holy mountain is Mount Zion, Jerusalem here on earth (20:40). The prophecy of the fall of Tyre is being consciously framed to mirror the fall of man, e.g. v. 2 “you are 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. Verses 14,16 sound like a reference to the King of Tyre as Adam: "I put a terrifying angel there to guard you… the angel who guarded you drove you away " (:14,16- this is also the reading of the G.N.B. and T.E.V.)

Another approach is suggested by archaeological discoveries in Tyre. A large cherub-sphinx with a king’s head and animal’s body set on a base of sculptured mountains was discovered, evidently a deification of a king of Tyre. With Hiram’s knowledge of the true God, it seems that subsequent Kings of Tyre came to put themselves in the position of God, 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 v. 13 were all found embedded in this sphinx-cherubim. The three jewels of the breastplate missing from the list in v. 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. "The king of Tyre" (:12) may be a reference to the Tyrian god Melkart ("King of the city"). Perhaps 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. “You seal up the imitation” (:12) show how God was aware that this replica of His system of worship had been pushed by the king of Tyre as far as it could go. 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. This would explain why the King of Tyre is criticized for saying " I am a god, I sit in the seat of God " (: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 :13 is used in Ex. 31:3,5; 35:31 of the workmanship of the tabernacle and associated garments. The King of Tyre claimed to be "perfect in beauty" (:12)- just as Zion was described earlier in Ezekiel in the same terms (16:14).

29:12 This prophecy of forty years could have been a provisional prophecy- see on 26:7,21. See too the note on 26:7 about the fact that ancient history has blank areas- perhaps this prophecy was fulfilled but there is no record of it.

29:17-20- see on 26:7.

29:21 *I will give you the opening of the mouth in their midst*- In the midst of the surrounding nations. 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 never open their mouth any more because of their shame (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 Jesus 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 Yahweh” (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.

30:2 The wailing and lamentation for the fate of Gentile nations, even those who had been enemies of God’s people, really shows how neither God nor Ezekiel had the slightest pleasure in the punishment of the wicked. God’s desire is to positively manifest and develop His Name; this is His focus, rather than hitting back against those who rebel against Him.

30:13 *I will put a fear in the land of Egypt*- God often punishes people by sending attitudes of mind upon them.

30:18 *The day shall withdraw itself*- A reference to the collapse of the meaning of time as we know it around the period of Christ’s return? This verse speaks of the time when Egypt comes to know the Lord through His judgments (:19)- and this must have some reference to the last days.

30:21 *I have broken the arm of Pharaoh-* One arm of Pharaoh had already been broken when Babylon defeated Pharaoh-Necho at Carchemish (Jer. 46:2) and took away from Egypt all her territory from the Nile to the Euphrates (2 Kings 24:7). This breaking of Pharaoh’s arms one by one is likely because God wished them to repent after the first arm was broken. God doesn’t afflict just to be cruel, but because He has a purpose, to His glory.

30:23,24 The language of scattering amongst the nations after being attacked by a Babylon empowered by God is exactly the sort of thing the prophets said would happen to Israel. There is a Biblical theme that God’s people suffer the same judgments as the world, Egypt, if they act like the world. Hence we are warned to beware lest we be condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:32). In our hearts and actions, there must be a chasmic difference between us and this world.

31:1 This was a month before Jerusalem was taken by the Babylonians. Judah were desperately hoping that Egypt would come to their rescue, and in this prophecy there is the clear message that Egypt like Assyria before them, like all human strength, is doomed to not ultimately save us. Judah were intended to learn from history- the apparently invincible Assyrian had fallen, so would Egypt. But our human tendency to live in an eternal present means that we tend not to learn the lessons of history; yet God’s word is full of history for us to learn from. Note how Is. 52:4 likewise parallels Egypt and Assyria.

31:3 God’s people Israel are likened to such a cedar (17:3), spreading out roots to the waters (Ps. 80:11). The implication is that Assyria wished to usurp Israel as God’s people and appropriated such language and imagery to themselves. It is *God’s* Kingdom which gives “a forest-like shade” (Mk. 4:32); but the kingdoms of men appear as fake imitations of God’s Kingdom; and it is our wisdom to perceive the difference.

31:6 *Under its shadow*- The smaller nations lived under the shadow of the superpowers like Egypt and Assyria, but they had eventually fled from under the shadow of Assyria (:12). Judah like us today are asked not to dwell under the shadow of such superpowers- in our day, perhaps insurance policies, savings, home ownership- but to dwell under the shadow of God’s invisible Angel-cherubim wings (Ps. 17:8; 91:4). For a small nation like Judah wedged at the time between the superpowers of Babylon and Egypt, this was a radical demand- to dwell at peace under the shadow of God’s care.

32:2 *Take up a lamentation*- Ezekiel and the faithful are being invited to as it were attend Egypt’s funeral and participate in the laments- rather than trust in her. We too, living as we do at the end of human history, can do the same- laying to eternal rest, in our own minds and faith, the pomp and the power and the pride of this world.

32:10 The prophesied judgment upon Egypt [a symbol of the world] included that the sun was to be made dark, and people would be “amazed” at her. This is just what happened when Christ was crucified (Is. 52:14). The judgment of Egypt / the world had some elements of fulfilment in the ‘judgment of this world’ which occurred through the cross (Jn. 12:31). The crucifixion of Christ declared all worldly strength to now be nothing compared to the power of God’s love toward us.

32:18 *Cast them down*- This was the power of the word of prophecy. What Ezekiel said on God’s behalf was as good as done.

32:26 *Meshech, Tubal*- At the time of this prophecy, these nations had already passed off the scene. They were Scythian tribes who were much feared in the area. Yet we read of them in 38:2 as coming to invade Israel and being destroyed by dramatic Divine intervention. This seems to be a prophecy of the last days, suggesting that the political and military situation around Israel at the time of the Babylonian invasion will be seen again in the last days. The current trends in the Middle East show this coming about. Another possibility is that the sequence of events intended in chapters 37-40 simply didn’t happen because of Israel’s failure [restoration of Israel, invasion by the Scythian tribes, the destruction of that invasion by Divine intervention and the establishment of God’s Kingdom based around a renewed temple in Jerusalem]. The Scythian tribes like Meshech and Tubal passed off the scene, but not in the dramatic way envisaged in chapter 38; instead the prophecy will be fulfilled in the last days.

32:26-30 gives a picture of the mighty warriors of the nations around, lying in their graves. This refers to the custom of burying warriors with their weapons, and resting the head of the corpse upon its sword. Yet this is a description of Sheol, the word translated in some Bibles “hell” - the grave. These mighty men lying still in hell (i.e. their graves), hardly supports the idea that hell is a place of fire. Physical things (e.g. swords) go to the same “hell” as people, showing that hell is not an arena of spiritual torment. Note how Sheol is often paralleled in this chapter with “the pit”, clearly referring here to the mass graves of the once mighty soldiers.

33:4 *If the sword come*- Yet the context speaks as if the sword will surely come. But if the watchman warns the people, there arises an element of possibility- “*if* the sword come”. The implication is that God is willing to change the intended judgment if people repent (:11), as happened with Nineveh.

33:8 If we do not warn the wicked of their way, "his blood will I require at your hand". Some will have to give an account on judgment day of their specific lack of witness. Yet we can live day after day, saying nothing to our fellows, as if it doesn't really matter, because nobody notices… Not only our salvation but that of others can be limited by our exercise of freewill. If others' salvation is not to some extent dependent upon our preaching, then there is no meaning to the very concept of preaching.

33:10,11 Like so many a prisoner, so many a Christian, like Judas and Achan, like you and me, they had the sense of desire to come back to God, the detailed realization of wherein they had failed; but not enough real strength of purpose to seriously repent.

33:13 *If he trust to his righteousness and commit iniquity*- This is a warning to the righteous, that they will fall into sin if they trust their own righteousness. Good living believers fall into sin once they start trusting their righteousness. As Paul explains throughout Romans 1-8, we are saved by our faith in righteousness being imputed to us. God has arranged our salvation this way so that our faith in the fact that *we* aren’t righteous (for all our good living appearances compared to the surrounding world) will keep us humbly trusting in *His* righteousness being counted to us- and this is the mentality which leads us to not sin in practice.

33:31 Ezekiel's audiences loved to come and hear God's words at his mouth- and in response to them, " with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goes after their gain". Materialism stopped them from really accepting those words, even though they theoretically assented to their inspiration. Only in their condemnation would they know "that a prophet has been among them" (:33). And so there is a chilling choice: to really accept the power of inspiration now; or have to learn it through the process of condemnation when judgment comes.

33:32 *They hear your words*- God prophesied that those to whom Ezekiel witnessed would not hear His words (3:11). And yet they came and sat before him, desiring to hear God’s word. They wanted to hear, they heard, and yet they didn’t really hear. The prophets 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…

34:4 *Cause to return*- 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 (see :4,16 and frequently in Ezekiel). 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.). This is matched in Ez. 36 by the idea of God giving Israel a new heart. And the 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.

34:5 *Scattered because there was no shepherd*- Good leadership produces unity; disunity amongst the sheep is therefore a reflection of poor shepherding. They scatter because they aren’t fed by the shepherds and go elsewhere for food (:9).

34:11 *I Myself, even I, will search for My sheep*- The passage in John 10 which Jesus speaks of Himself as the good shepherd who seeks out God’s sheep is full of allusion to this chapter. When He says “I and My Father are one” (Jn. 10:30), He is speaking in this context of His being the shepherd on God’s behalf. This principle of agency, of operating on behalf of God in His Name, doesn’t mean that Jesus was God Himself in person, but rather that He manifested the Father, so that God’s shepherding was achieved through the person and work of Jesus.

34:20 *Between the fat sheep and the lean sheep*- The shepherds are here likened to fat sheep. Shepherds or pastors are themselves sheep and in that sense no different from those they are shepherding. This should result in an appropriate humility in all pastoral work.

35:5 “Esau is Edom” (Gen. 25:30; 36:1). The reference here is to the hatred between Jacob and Esau which played itself out between their descendants. Bitter argument between family members of one generation can continue over many generations; one aspect of the sin of division and enmity is that it tends to continue after our time, or after the protagonists have resolved with each other, as Jacob and Esau did. And each generation, according to this prophecy, is held responsible for their part in any hatred against their brother.

35:10 The two nations refer to Israel [the ten tribes] and Judah [the two tribe kingdom]. As God “*was* there” in the land of Israel in their past, so when the Kingdom is re-established it will again be known that “Yahweh is there” (48:35). The future Kingdom on God on earth will be a re-establishment of God’s Kingdom as it earlier was in the form of Israel and Judah.

35:12 *I, Yahweh, have heard*- The extent of God’s knowledge is amazing. He consciously is aware of every thought, intention, implication and actual spoke word of every single person in the world, including Gentiles like Edom.

36:13 *You are a devourer of men*- This prophecy is given to the physical land of Israel. It seems the captives in Babylon didn’t want to return after the 70 years because they felt the land itself was somehow evil and would devour them. This is a similar mistake made by Israel in the wilderness, who slandered God’s land rather than accepting it was a land of blessing. Being influenced by worldly superstitions and fears leads many of God’s people to reject the hope of His Kingdom, and prefer to remain in the world rather than taking possession of the good Kingdom prepared for them. But God worked with Judah in their misunderstanding- He promises that from now on, the land will not be like that (:14). This is rather like in New Testament times, Jesus worked with the wrong ideas people had about demons, and demonstrated that even if this was what they feared, they were actually of no power compared to the inbreaking of God’s Kingdom power which was possible for those who believed.

36:15 *Neither shall you cause your nation to stumble any more*- The Jews blamed the high places of the land of Israel for having bereaved them of their children (:13) and having made them stumble; but it was in fact they who had chosen to go up to the high places, build altars there for false gods, and sacrifice their children to them. God doesn’t specifically correct them, although He privately explains the real situation to Ezekiel (:17,18); rather He works through that wrong idea, supposing for a moment it were true, but assuring the people that this will no longer be the case- just as Jesus did by using the language of demons when He did healing miracles, without specifically stating the basic truth that demons in fact don’t exist.

36:27 *Cause you to walk in My statutes* - Entering the new covenant which God here proposed to His people involved Him promising to make them be obedient to His ways. We who have entered this same new covenant (Heb. 8:8-13) are likewise party to this same operation of God on human hearts- if we want it.

36:27-29 A new spirit was potentially given to the exiles who returned from Babylon, God put in the heart of men like Nehemiah to revive the work (Neh. 2:12 same Hebrew word). 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.

36:33 This says that although Judah had profaned God’s Name in Babylon, yet He would sprinkle their hearts by grace and make the new covenant with them; and *then*, “In the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited”. But in recorded history, there was no apparent connection between Judah’s forgiveness and the rebuilding of the land. God enabled the exiles to return and rebuild the cities even though they didn’t repent; such was His grace and urgent desire to give His spiritually weak people the Kingdom He had potentially prepared for them. We can take strong encouragement from this.

37:5 *I will cause spirit to enter into you*- This is an amplification of 36:27, where God explained His plan to make a new covenant with the returning exiles from Babylon. His Spirit would enter them and He would “cause” them to be obedient to His covenant, and they would return to the land and rebuild it. The dry bones represent Israel and Judah in their captivity, spiritually dead and thinking they were too far gone for God to revive them. God’s plan was to revive them and return them to His land and for them to rebuild God’s Kingdom there. But only a few returned from exile, and they were more interested in building up their own kingdom and houses than God’s Kingdom and house. The return from exile therefore featured some small fulfilment of the potential which is outlined as possible in chapters 36 and 37. The return of Israel to their land, arising as it were out of the death camps of Europe to rebuild and make fertile the neglected land of Israel, was likewise a small fulfilment of these prophecies- perhaps in the 1940s and 50s, as at the return from exile, there could also have been the fuller fulfilment of this chapter. But again, there wasn’t the all important turning to God in spirit and truth. It seems we must await yet further persecution to lead Israel to return to their land in repentance and faith in Christ, and then the promised Kingdom conditions will come about.

37:7 The sound of the cherubim Angels which Ezekiel heard was like the noise of an earthquake (3:12). Those two Hebrew words, for "noise" and "earthquake", occur here in 37:7, when he hears the "noise" of "shaking" or earthquake as the bones of Israel in exile come together by the spirit / Angelic operation of Yahweh. The Spirit came from four places (:9)- just as there were four cherubim. As the sound of the cherubim was as of a great army (1:24), so revived Israel stood up as a great army (: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 Hebrew word for “noise” here is the same word used in Ezra 1:1 about the “proclamation” of Cyrus for Judah to return to the land. Most of God’s people didn’t return; the majority preferred to stay in Babylon. Therefore the prophecy was deferred in fulfilment until our times; the tragedy is that so much was potentially enabled at the time of Cyrus’ decree, and Judah made such little use of it.

37:11 These were the very sentiments of Jeremiah in Lamentations, and those who wept by the waters of Babylon when they remembered Zion.

38:2 Gog is an individual, not a nation; he is portrayed as the singular leader of a confederacy of Scythian tribes, several of whom have been mentioned previously in Ezekiel and were known at the time.

38:5 *Persia, Ethiopia and Libya*- These areas don’t exactly correspond to the areas bearing those names today. But clearly they refer to a group of people from what is now Iran and north Africa.

38:8 The invasion is to come against Israel after the Jews have returned to the land from many nations and are dwelling there confidently and in material prosperity (:11,12). In the prophetic schema which God had made potentially possible, the exiles were intended to return in faith and repentance, rebuild the land and temple and receive great material blessing from God. If that had happened, there would then have been this invasion outlined in chapter 38, dramatic Divine intervention (chapter 39) and then the re-establishment of God’s Kingdom based around a rebuilt temple and the returned glory of God in Zion as detailed in chapters 40-48. But Israel failed in all this, and so the prophecies will have a re-scheduled and re-applied fulfilment in the last days before Christ returns. The nations and tribes mentioned are from the areas today occupied by the Islamic enemies of Israel. The fact there is a nation of Jews in Israel is also an encouragement that the Middle East situation is moving towards the time of fulfilment of this prophecy.

38:11 This dwelling securely sounds like the time of Messiah’s Kingdom described in 37:24-27. Psalm 2 predicts a scenario where Christ is King in Jerusalem, surrounded by His enemies, whom He then goes out and destroys. There is no suggestion in Ezekiel 38 that the invasion is successful

38:13 “Young lions” is a term elsewhere used in Ezekiel to refer to leaders or princes (19:2,6; 32:2). The Hebrew of this verse could imply that these three nations notice that the seven others are going to take spoil from Israel, and decide to join in with them. This would bring the number of Israel’s invaders in this prophecy to ten- which is the number of horns of the beast which desecrates the land of Israel in the last days, and the number of surrounding nations who attack Israel according to Psalm 83.

39:1 The emphasis of the prophecies is upon the individual leader of the confederacy. It seems there will be one specific, charismatic anti-Christ figure who leads the world’s opposition to Christ in the last days.

39:3 This speaks of the failure of military technology- a scenario we can well imagine in our times.

39:4 *On the mountains of Israel*- Here we see God’s grace; because the mountains of Israel were the high places where Israel had built altars to other gods and sacrificed their children to them. But in these very places, God would show Himself strong for His people.

39:6 *Those who dwell confidently along the seacoasts*- Maybe referring to the Palestinian enemies of Israel dwelling in the Gaza strip, confident because of some international body guaranteeing their safety?

39:9 The burning of wooden weapons and the cleansing of the land from dead bodies (:12- :16) was likely part of the scenario which was intended by God at the time of the return from exile, but Judah’s lack of commitment made this possible scenario not come true; the essence but maybe not the details of the prophecy will be fulfilled in the last days, when God finally intervenes to save His repentant people from their invaders and establish His Kingdom on earth.

39:17-20 This gathering of the birds of prey at Gog’s destruction is alluded to in Rev. 19:17, which draws a parallel between Gog and the confederacy he controls and the latter day false prophet and “the beast” (Rev. 19:19). The confederacy of tribes which bordered Israel spoken of in Ez. 39 therefore become “the beast” of the latter day prophecies. We can therefore expect this “beast” to refer to Israel’s neighbouring Islamic enemies in the last days.

39:29 *For I have poured out My Spirit*- Clearly the meaning is “I *will* pour out My Spirit”. Here we have one of many examples of where God speaks of future events as if they’ve already occurred, so certain is His word toward us (Rom. 4:17). Verse 8 outlined the same principle: “Behold, it has come, and it is done”.

40:1 The return of the exiles from Babylon could have led to the re-establishment of God’s 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 fulfilment will inexorably arrive some day, regardless of our effort. The details of the temple are to the micro detail. They were commands rather than predictions, for Judah to fulfil. Ezekiel 40-48 was intended as an architectural record of the 'old' temple upon which a new one was to be reconstructed.

40:29 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. 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). See on 48:31.

40:46 It could have been possible for the Messianic Kingdom to have been established at the time of the restoration, and these temple prophecies would fit perfectly into this context. Thus Ezekiel emphasised that the sons of Zadok were to organize priestly work in the temple (see too 43:19; 44:15; 48:11); 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 Hebrew word used in Is. 60:7,9,13 about how God would “glorify” His temple with merchandise from throughout the Babylonian empire- all of which was willingly offered by Cyrus and Darius. 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”, as if he saw his work as fulfilling Ezekiel’s words. :42 speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple with the same Hebrew word used for the temple vessels which were brought 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 keepers of the charge*- Judah were to keep the charges of God relating to His house. Nehemiah, seeking for Israel’s obedience to Ezekiel’s vision, tried to get them to “keep the charges” (s.w. Neh. 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 realisation of His vision.

41:5 These rooms around the temple were in Christ’s mind when He spoke of how in God’s house or temple, there are many rooms; and He has prepared one for each of us by His death on the cross (Jn. 14:2). It could be that He understood the temple as a spiritual house, and that the vision of 40-48 was going to be fulfilled in a more abstract, spiritual manner.

41:8 *A full reed of six great cubits*- see on 45:1.

41:26 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). 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). Even the “windows of narrow lights” (1 Kings 6:4) were to be replicated (Ez. 40:16; 41:16,26). Solomon’s system of “chambers” was likewise copied (1 Kings 6:5,8,16 cp. Ez. 41:5-11 same Hebrew word). The glory of Yahweh was to fill Ezekiel’s temple as it had done Solomon’s (Ez. 43:5 cp. 1 Kings 8:10). Both temples were to be ready for operation on “the eighth day” after their consecration (Ez. 43:27 cp. 1 Kings 8:66). Ezekiel’s temple was to be of a similar size to that of Solomon’s; see on 45:1.

42:16 *Reeds*- The problem is that the length of the reed isn’t specified. See on 45:1.

42:20 The new temple was "to make a separation between that which was holy and that which was common" (Ez. 42:20 RV)- alluding back to Ezekiel's earlier lament that Judah had not made that very separation (Ez. 22:26). 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).

43:5 The glory would have entered the house of God’s glory as it did at the inauguration of the first temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (: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 Cyrus 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.

43:8 How close God was ought to have made them quit their idolatry. But their cognizance of the closeness of God was merely theoretical. They didn't feel nor respond to the wonder of it. And truly, He is not far from every one of us.

43:10 Ezekiel showed 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. There is a congruence between the style of address found in Ez. 40-48 and the earlier part of the prophecy. 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 "You shall tell the rebellious house of Israel..." (44:6) is the same rubric used earlier (2:5; 3:26; 12:2,25; 17:12; 24:3). The new temple was "to make a separation between that which was holy and that which was common" (42:20)- alluding back to Ezekiel's earlier lament that Judah had not made that very separation (22:26). 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 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 (8:14; 9:2). Ezekiel himself was to provide the sons of Zadok with a bullock for a sin offering (43:19), as if he himself could have been present in the work of the building and dedication of this temple. Ezekiel himself, as a priest, was to inaugurate the altar by sprinkling blood upon it and making an offering (43:20-25). Ezekiel’s temple prophecies are described as “the law of the house” (43:12). They were a law, a commandment to be fulfilled. This explains the commandment style of the instructions, e.g. 44:2: “This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened”. The description of Ezekiel's Temple was to be given to the captives in Babylon by Ezekiel, to lead them to repentance and to assure them of what could be if they repented. Then when the invitation to leave Babylon and return came in the time of Ezra, they ought to have been motivated to return to the land and build the temple which Ezekiel had explained to them. But sadly most of them weren’t very deeply motivated at all; they wanted to build a temple, but not to the extent Ezekiel had outlined. The intention was that then, when the temple was built (:11), they were to be obedient in all the ways in which they hadn’t been obedient in the past, with the result that they were now sitting in captivity (44:24).

43:19 This suggests the temple 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 (46:13). But due to the Jews’ selfishness and lack of spirituality, it didn’t happen. This accounts for the many links between the Ezekiel prophesies and prophets like Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. What was theoretically possible, what potentially could have been, simply wasn’t- because of their self-centredness and lack of effort. The prophecy of Ezekiel 40-48 was therefore primarily command rather than prediction. This was how it should have been, but the Jews failed to obey it all. They were minimalists, satisficers, rather than rising up to their full potential.

43:21 Nehemiah built ‘Miphkad’, “the Muster Gate” (Neh. 3:31 RSV), the “appointed place” [same Hebrew word]; he really tried to fulfil this command of 43:21. See on 40:29; 48:31. But one man’s obedience couldn’t in this case count for the whole people.

43:27- see on 20:40. If Judah resumed building the temple according to Ezekiel’s plan, “I will take pleasure” in it, God offered (Hag. 1:8). They should be more committed to building the temple “that I may appear in my glory” (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. The same word is used here in 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.).

*I will accept you*- This is to be connected with the prophecy of 20:41, that God would accept His people when they had been regathered from Babylon.

44:2 The priests were to shut the gates (44:2; 46:2,12); but the returned exiles in practice refused to do this unless they were paid for it (Mal. 1:10). The potential set up simply wasn’t realized because of petty selfishness.

44:6 *Let it suffice you*- 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” (Gk.). The temple vision should have made them ashamed of their sins (43:10,11). It should have motivated them to live the Kingdom life in their lives. Ezekiel’s prophecies should have been an inspiration to Israel to 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.

44:7 The house was not to be profaned, the covenant wasn’t to be broken. Judah returned from exile, built a temple, but 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. Judah broke covenant [s.w.] with Yahweh at the time of the restoration by marrying Gentiles and worshipping their gods (Ezra 9:1,14). We can externally appear obedient, as Judah did by building a temple, but our hearts can be far from the things of God’s covenant. By doing this, Judah precluded the possibility of all that is spoken in Ez. 40-48 from being fulfilled at that time.

44:9 The temple was primarily for the worship of Israel, “the people of the land” (45:22; 46:3,9), not for the whole world- no uncircumcised will be allowed to worship in it.

44:31 There are many details in Ez. 40-48 which seem very hard to apply to a future Kingdom under the rulership of Jesus. The offering of animal sacrifices in order to gain forgiveness seems to flatly contradict the teaching of Hebrews concerning the one time nature of the Lord’s offering. 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. The language used about “the prince” also seems impossible to understand about an immortal being. The whole prophecy was a command for the returning exiles from Babylon rather than prediction of the future. If we insist that every part of Ez. 40-48 is going to have a literal fulfilment in the Millennium, then we have to accept that Jesus will accept divorce and remarriage in His Kingdom- it’s just that the priests won’t be able to marry divorcees, but others will (44:22).

45:1 The problem is that the Hebrew text strangely omits the measurement unit. The “oblation”  would be about 60 miles square if we measure it in “reeds” as some Bibles assume, although this term isn’t in the Hebrew text here; if the “reed” is “six great cubits” as defined in 41:8, then 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, which would make the temple similar in dimension to Solomon’s temple (see on 41:26). 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 are described here in 45:1 is to be “the length of twenty five thousand”. 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. If it is going to be thousands of reeds, then it would be over one mile square. However, Jer. 30:18 RSV prophesies that “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.

45:8 The princes were not to oppress the people as they did in the recent past (45:8 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 were to have “just” balances (45:10), as opposed to the “unjust” balances which they had in the lead up to the captivity (Jer. 22:13 Heb.). In the past, they had brought strangers into the temple; but in the new system, they were not to do so (44:7 cp. 9).

45:16 “The people of the land” were to have a part in the new system of things (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 with whom Judah intermarried and whose gods and language they accepted (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 Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress these strangers / Gentiles. So much was made possible potentially that never happened, because of Judah’s short sightedness and failure to grasp it. The same is true in the lives of God’s people today.

46:11 “The prince” of 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 prince” offers as He is able (:11)- hard to apply to the Almighty Lord Jesus. He offers sacrifice for his own sin, and has children, to whom He will pass an inheritance. And he has to be warned not to oppress the people (:18). It is a more comfortable interpretation to see him as primarily referring to Zerubbabel or Joshua the High Priest (44:3). It is evident from 46:3 and 44:3 that the promised Messiah figure was to be both a king and a priest- which would fit Joshua. Those men could have been so much; but their dysfunctions meant that what had been potentially prepared for them didn’t come true. The very same happens in the lives of so many of God’s people. We must pray for wisdom to understand what God intends for us, and have the faith to realize that we really can realize it in our lives. Zechariah concluded his prophecy about this Messiah figure with the comment that it would come to pass, if he would 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 in a broad sense be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, *the* branch, although the details were the commands which God intended the Messiah figure of Ezekiel’s time to fulfil.

46:12 *One shall open for him the gate*- David in his humility aspired to be such an anonymous gatekeeper in God’s temple (Ps. 84:10). And yet “the prince” is defined as being “David” (34:24; 37:25). He was the prince exactly because he wished merely to the anonymous gatekeeper who would open the doors for the prince. In this we see the classic illustration of Christ’s teaching that true greatness is in humility; He will be the highest in the Kingdom because in this life He debased Himself lowest (Mt. 23:12; Mk. 9:35; 10:44).

46:13- see on 43:19.

46:18 They had gone into captivity for these kind of abuses, and 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.

47:12 This is alluded to in Rev. 22:2,14, where the future Kingdom of God on earth is spoken of as having a tree or forest of trees of life, giving healing to the nations each month. Again we see that the essence of Ezekiel’s vision will come true, but maybe not the exact details, which were tailored to Judah’s possible experience on return from captivity.

47:13 The restored Kingdom of God could have come when Judah returned from Babylon. It was therefore potentially possible for the returning exiles to inherit all the land outlined in 47:13-21 and share it out between the 12 tribes. But according to the record in Ezra and Nehemiah, 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.

47:16 The whole style of Ez. 40-48 is relevant to what could have been in Ezekiel’s own time, rather than a specific prediction of the future- the borders of the land are described as “Sibraim, which is between the border of Damascus… on the north northward is the border of Hamath”.

47:23 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. See on 43:10. Within Ezekiel, Israel are criticized for oppressing the stranger / Gentile who lived with them (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.

48:29 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* to deliver them from their 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.

48:31 Nehemiah arranged for 12 gates to be built in the wall, as Ez. 48:31-34 had commanded there to be. See on 40:29; 43:21. This verse is alluded to in Rev. 21:12, where it appears to be given a more symbolic application to the people of God, the new Jerusalem. Judah failed to build the new Jerusalem as intended, and so the essence of the vision was reapplied in a more abstract sense, and in this form will have its fulfilment in essence.

48:35- see on 35:10.