

A Study of Ezekiel

Part Three:

JUDGMENTS on JUDAH

Chapters 7-9, 11, 13-14, 19-22, 34

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Dedication

To those who have learned to fear the Lord and agree with His judgments

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PREFACE

In Part One, we saw an exiled priest of Israel, Ezekiel by name, visited by the God of Heaven and given a task that for most of us would seem unbearable. He is to speak to his Israelite family both around him and still in Israel, of coming judgment. He is only to speak as the Spirit gives Him the capacity to do so. He is to be totally under the control of the Spirit of God, or forfeit his life.

In Part Two we entered the assignment with him. Ezekiel is given a series of messages that are quite dramatic in nature, some of them bizarre by our own standards. But the people get the message, though Ezekiel is told up front not to be concerned whether they obey or don't obey, because, in God's words:

"They are a rebellious house."

Now in Part Three we see Ezekiel the "typical" prophet, given clear words of judgment from God, and delivering those messages in the preached word. But still there is the aura of the supernatural about him, as "the hand of God" falls on him from time to time. Still there will be visitations and revelations far beyond the norm for even a prophet of God.

Hear the first blast of the prophetic trumpet in chapter 7...

“An End! Disaster!Doom!”

1. Will any mercy now be allowed Judah?

7:1-22. The word of the LORD came to me: “And you, O son of man, thus says the Lord GOD to the land of Israel: An end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land. Now the end is upon you, and I will send my anger upon you; I will judge you according to your ways, and I will punish you for all your abominations. And my eye will not spare you, nor will I have pity, but I will punish you for your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the LORD.”

God could not say it more clearly. It is over, Judah. Not only for you, but for all the land of Israel. My mercy has run out. Christians need to be aware of this notion of a limited mercy. God’s mercy and grace are superabundant, but eventually they stop. Free rides don’t go on forever. Eventually God will have what *He* wants on the planet, not what man wants.

No. No more mercy. No pity. No answered prayer. Think of it!

“Thus says the Lord GOD: Disaster after disaster! Behold, it comes. An end has come; the end has come; it has awakened against you. Behold, it comes. Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land. The time has come; the day is near, a day of tumult, and not of joyful shouting on the mountains. Now I will soon pour out my wrath upon you, and spend my anger against you, and judge you according to your ways, and I will punish you for all your abominations. And my eye

will not spare, nor will I have pity. I will punish you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the LORD, who strikes.”

Does He need to repeat Himself? Evidently. The shock of this message has caught their attention, now let's say it again. This is the end! I've warned you time and again, but now it is truly over. We have had parents who similarly warned and warned, but "judgment day" finally came.

“Behold, the day! Behold, it comes! Your doom has come; the rod has blossomed; pride has budded. Violence has grown up into a rod of wickedness. None of them shall remain, nor their abundance, nor their wealth; neither shall there be preeminence among them. The time has come; the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn, for wrath is upon all their multitude. For the seller shall not return to what he has sold, while they live. For the vision concerns all their multitude; it shall not turn back; and because of his iniquity, none can maintain his life.”

Now the judgment is compared to a blossoming plant. We watch the buds in early spring. It seems they will never do what they are expected to do. Then one day we look and behold! a beautiful flower is before us.

The people of Israel had gotten away with their sin so long that they felt they could keep on with the same practices year after year. Has our present world reached the point of no return also? Has God been so lenient that we think this longsuffering is the full

description of His character? Well, mercy *is* His character. But eventually *so is judgment*.

The buying and selling images, per Macarthur, refer to the practice of returning land and property in the year of Jubilee, every fifty years in Israel.

Buyer, you just regained your property? Don't be happy. You're going to lose it all soon! Seller, you had to give up your goods and your land? No loss. You would have given it all up anyway when judgment begins to fall.

“They have blown the trumpet and made everything ready, but none goes to battle, for my wrath is upon all their multitude. The sword is without; pestilence and famine are within. He who is in the field dies by the sword, and him who is in the city famine and pestilence devour. And if any survivors escape, they will be on the mountains, like doves of the valleys, all of them moaning, each one over his iniquity.”

Bluster here. A trumpet sounds. “Forward march.” But no one moves. Israel and Judah are defenseless. No battle plan. No assistance from Heaven. No motivation. No strength. The Babylonian siege has weakened all in the city. Disease spreads. A few escape, but to a life of misery.

“All hands are feeble, and all knees turn to water. They put on sackcloth, and horror covers them. Shame is on all faces, and baldness on all their heads. They cast their silver into the streets, and their gold is like an unclean thing. Their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD. They

***cannot satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it.
For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity.”***

So money – the prosperity message even of ancient Israel – was at the heart of their troubles. A desire for security outside of the Father. A trusting in gold instead of God. They finally realized they had been pursuing the wrong deity. In shame they throw their coins into the street to be trampled by Babylonian soldiers.

It is the love of security, in the form of cash, that causes men to go after false gods. That is why the love of money is considered to be at the root of all evil. Israel is finally realizing that ageless principle.

“His beautiful ornament they used for pride, and they made their abominable images and their detestable things of it. Therefore I make it an unclean thing to them. And I will give it into the hands of foreigners for prey, and to the wicked of the earth for spoil, and they shall profane it. I will turn my face from them, and they shall profane my treasured place. Robbers shall enter and profane it.”

Is the “ornament” the Temple, in which Jews were setting up false forms of worship? Foreigners will now be given the Temple for destruction. Now it shall truly be profaned and brought to naught.

Or is the ornament still the silver and gold we are talking about here? They made not only luxurious clothing to walk in pride, but they used gold to make their idols. Now God will take all gold and silver and let them look at it extremely hard as they are casting it away from themselves.

The essence is the same: God gave silver and gold, great prosperity, to His people, with which to honor Himself and bless each other.

They had taken His gifts and used them to dishonor Him and hoard them for themselves.

Have we taken a look recently at the gifts with which we have been entrusted? The gifts themselves are not evil, but for what are they being used?

The Chain

2. What is Ezekiel instructed to make as a symbol of what is coming?

7:23-27. "Forge a chain! For the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence. I will bring the worst of the nations to take possession of their houses. I will put an end to the pride of the strong, and their holy places shall be profaned. When anguish comes, they will seek peace, but there shall be none. Disaster comes upon disaster; rumor follows rumor. They seek a vision from the prophet, while the law perishes from the priest and counsel from the elders. The king mourns, the prince is wrapped in despair, and the hands of the people of the land are paralyzed by terror. According to their way I will do to them, and according to their judgments I will judge them, and they shall know that I am the LORD."

Yes, another visual aid. I deliberately left this one out of Part Two because of the flow of the text here. Once more the prophet is asked to demonstrate by a physical portrayal what he is saying. Make a chain. Says the *Pulpit Commentary* on 7:23:

“Looking to the force of the verbs from which it is formed, its special meaning is that of a coupling chain, such as would be used in the case of captives marched off to their place of exile (Nahum 3:10). All previous sufferings were to culminate in this.”

Notice in this passage the utter frustration and desperation of the people. We see it today when troubles gather in the political or medical arenas.

First there are rumors. Speculations. Wild guesses. Conspiracy theories. It has been several years since Babylon took us here, reason the exiles. Will they strike our homeland again? Probably not. But you never know.

They run to prophets. False ones, I suppose. But none of them have answers. God is not speaking beyond what Ezekiel is telling them every day: judgment is coming. Second opinions are not available in that quarter.

They go to the priests. Tell us what the Law says about this. Silence. The priests are as corrupted as all the others. They have long since stopped understanding or believing the “Bible” of their day. If they could find anything it would only be more condemnation at the mouth of Moses.

Then the “ancients”. The old men. Supposedly wise men. But these men have listened for decades to the culture and can only say what the culture has taught them. No answers.

Zedekiah the king/prince is no help. He runs to Jeremiah, but burns his words in the fire. He listens to the prophet then does his own thing. He cowers in the corner and eventually runs for his life. What good is such a king?

The people are paralyzed with fear, with no one to whom they can turn. God has forsaken His people. It is an awful state of affairs for any land or any man.

But God still says, I am going to give them the judgment they deserve. Then they will know who I am, for they seem to have forgotten!

A Trip To Jerusalem

3. In what year did this visit take place?

8:1. *In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, with the elders of Judah sitting before me, the hand of the Lord GOD fell upon me there.*

Ezekiel has been careful to document for us the exact dates of visions and prophecies. That account began in the very first verse of Ezekiel where we learn that Ezekiel is dating all from the captivity of Jehoiachin, which coincides with his own captivity and exile. That year was 597 B.C. Other dates mentioned in the book are as follows: (years are calculated from 597, taking portions of years into account.)

- 8:1, 6th year: 592 B.C. The trip to Jerusalem.
- 20:1, 7th year: 591 B.C. Rebellion continues.
- 24:1, 9th year: 588 B.C. This was when the Jerusalem siege began.
- 26:1, 11th year: 586 B.C. Jerusalem destroyed.
- 29:1, 10th year: 587 B.C. Against Egypt.
- 29:17, 27th year: 571 B.C. Against Egypt.
- 30:20, 11th year: 587 B.C. Against Egypt.
- 31:1, 11th year: 587 B.C. Against Egypt/Pharaoh.
- 32:1, 12th year: 585 B.C. Against Egypt/Pharaoh.

- 32:17, 12th year: 585 B.C. Against Egypt.
- 33:21, 12th year: 585 B.C. The “fugitive” prophecy fulfilled.
- 40:1, 25th year: 573 B.C. Restoration prophecies.

Notice that in this encounter, Ezekiel is in his house. That first year of outside demonstrations (Part Two) , including lying on his side on the street for months, has passed. Phase two is about to kick in. No less strange from our vantage point than phase one.

Note also that the elders of this Tel-Abib community have paid the prophet a visit. The Jews even in exile have formed a government of sorts, and these men designated as elders were at the head of that regime. Were they coming to criticize or merely question the prophet? Whatever the reason, the Lord chooses this moment to remove the prophet from Tel-Abib and take him to the home of these elders, to the heart of the problem that is going soon to bring judgment on their people.

Later he will give these men and all the community, a full report of his visit.

4. Who suddenly appeared to Ezekiel?

8:2. Then I looked, and behold, a form that had the appearance of a man. Below what appeared to be his waist was fire, and above his waist was something like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming metal.

Not much is said about this man, or rather, this one who had the appearance of a man. Fire. Brightness like gleaming metal. Whoever it was, and most agree this is a pre-incarnate manifestation of the

Son of God, we have seen Him before. He appeared after Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim in chapter 1, as the grand climax of the revelation at that time, in connection with the very Throne of God. At that time, Ezekiel fell on his face in awe. This time, he will not have the opportunity to do that...

5. How did Ezekiel travel from his house near Chebar Canal, to Jerusalem?

8:3. He put out the form of a hand and took me by a lock of my head, and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem...

The narrative is straightforward enough, yes? The "Man" grabbed him by the hair, the Spirit caught him up, and there he was. Most want to say that Ezekiel's body remained in his house, Ezekiel was in a trance, and only his spirit man went to Jerusalem.

Now, God can transport people. Think Philip, and his trip to Azotus, Acts 8. Ezekiel will be observing, digging, lifted up, prophesying... why can't he be in Jerusalem in body?

The answer to that question, in most people's minds, is found in the words "in visions of God." God brought him there "in visions" not physically. He experienced everything in his spirit man, not in his body.

But we must not assume that "in visions" means "not real." Even when our bodies are experiencing things, it is the non-material part of our makeup that is actually recording the events. Invisible is real. Visible is temporary.

6. To what place, specifically, was Ezekiel brought? Why?

8:3-6. *to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north, where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the valley. Then he said to me, "Son of man, lift up your eyes now toward the north." So I lifted up my eyes toward the north, and behold, north of the altar gate, in the entrance, was this image of jealousy. And he said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary? But you will see still greater abominations."*

"The entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north." It was here that the Temple chiefs had erected an idol that had made God furiously jealous. For He is a jealous God.

God was directing him to the evil that was going on in Jerusalem, even now, after waves of persecution have passed over Judah. The first of these evils was this idol.

Interesting that, for the moment, the glory of God hovered over this scene, not because it was acceptable to God, but so that Ezekiel could see what he was supposed to see. The cherubim of chapter one were suddenly surrounding the area. And the vision of chapter one, recall, was a prelude to judgment.

Whatever it was in the Temple provoking the Lord to jealousy, it had been put there by Jews. Some say it was a statue of Ba'al, others Ashtarte, others supply different names. But here is the beginning suggestion that a false god placed in a holy place like the Temple is an abomination to God, and He will judge. The

abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel and hundreds of years later by Jesus Himself, then by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2, is something we should all keep in the back of our minds as we look for the signs of the end. Actually, only one sign is clearly given by the Lord, all the others being clues of the general season. That sign is the *abomination that makes desolate*, whose forerunner we are seeing here in Ezekiel.

Notice God says they have put this image here to drive Him from His sanctuary. We have thought that an abomination that makes “desolate” is one that drives *people* away. Here God clarifies the issue. *He* is the One driven away when we offer sacrifices to idols. Desolation in its purest form is the absence of God’s Presence.

But worse is coming, says the Lord.

7. How did Ezekiel visit a secret worship service?

8:7-13. *And he brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, there was a hole in the wall. Then he said to me, “Son of man, dig in the wall.” So I dug in the wall, and behold, there was an entrance. And he said to me, “Go in, and see the vile abominations that they are committing here.” So I went in and saw. And there, engraved on the wall all around, was every form of creeping things and loathsome beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel. And before them stood seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them. Each had his censer in his hand, and the smoke of the cloud of incense went up. Then he said to me, “Son of man, have you seen what the elders*

of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of pictures? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.'" He said also to me, "You will see still greater abominations that they commit."

A secret worship service is taking place. It is being conducted by elders of the house of Israel. Recall that Ezekiel's body is still sitting in front of the elders of his own community, no doubt men who would have gladly participated in these secret meetings had they the chance.

One wonders why God did not bring Ezekiel into the room directly, rather than asking him to take this circuitous route. Is it so that Ezekiel will experience more fully the clandestine nature of the meeting? Did these men in fact climb into this secret place in the same way as Ezekiel had?

Israel's fortunes have faded since the people have turned from the true God. Now they seek false gods of all sorts to get things moving again, to "make Israel great again" as we might say. But Israel will never be great again as long as she is evil. *That will apply to any nation. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord."*

And the opposite is true.

The portrayal of animals on the wall is quite possibly borrowed from the creature worship of Egypt, say Ellicott and others. But notice it is not only Egypt and the other nations accused here, for on the wall are "all the idols of the house of Israel." What a collection of abominations! All that she had borrowed, all that she had made on her own. Every possible means of throwing off the current curse of God, Israel's leaders are appealing to.

And they do it collectively. All seventy of the elders are present.

And who is this Jaazaniah? Son of Shaphan, the one who read the book of the law to Josiah.

Good king Josiah. Good scribe Shaphan. But both of them had sons who became wicked. One generation brought a Zedekiah and a Jaazaniah. How quickly the fate of a nation can turn and be decided. How swiftly judgment can fall on any nation. But, "It can never happen here!"

Really?

And they do it secretly. They are so depraved as to think that the God Who made heaven and earth cannot see them. The power of darkness rules in Israel.

Truly, all of this was greater than the one idol in the doorway described in verse 3... But wait! It gets worse?

8. Who was Tammuz and why were Israel's women weeping for him?

8:14-15. Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the LORD, and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz. Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? You will see still greater abominations than these."

Tammuz is the ancient god "Adonis" whose name means "Lord." A true "antichrist" if ever there was one, his career involved a death and resurrection, as did the life of our true God, the Lord Jesus. The women here are having the equivalent of a "Good Friday" service

for the slain Adonis, weeping over his death, as they did annually, but anticipating his resurrection. The people of Israel had totally lost sight of the One Who had brought them out of Egyptian bondage, brought them into the fruitful land of Canaan, sustained them against a myriad of enemies. It is a new and tragic day in Israel, and Ezekiel is given a close-up view, miraculously, of their degenerate state.

God classifies this practice as greater than the scene he has just viewed. Perhaps this is because Ezekiel is now back in the light of day. The men he had seen were doing their atrocities in secret. These women were broadcasting to the neighborhood that Tammuz was lord, and not Yahweh.

But one more step downward in Judah's depravity:

9. What else was Judah worshiping?

8:16-18. And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the LORD. And behold, at the entrance of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east, worshiping the sun toward the east. Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations that they commit here, that they should fill the land with violence and provoke me still further to anger? Behold, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore I will act in wrath. My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. And though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."

The sun. The ancient sun-worship has now become a staple of the Israelite worship. How incredible. “Between the porch and the altar” is the sacred place where only priests can go, says Macarthur. And twenty-five priests, one from each priestly order and the high priest himself, are all involved in this deadly ritual. The worst crime of all.

The nation is falling apart, says God. Violence about “which god” to follow, violence initiated because the moral law is being ignored. There is nothing in Israel to save. They simply are not looking, not listening.

“They put the branch to the nose” is explained by commentators such as Cambridge Bible, in this fashion:

“It is said that the Persian sun-worshippers held before them a branch or bunch of date, pomegranate or tamarisk tree, or according to some of the Homa tree, probably that their breath might not contaminate the glory of the rising deity.”

It wasn’t their bad breath, but their entire persona that was repugnant to the Spirit of God. Let them shout for mercy and pity now, it is too late. My ears are closed.

10. Who are these executioners that Ezekiel sees in his vision?

9:1-2. *Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, “Bring near the executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand.” And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate,*

which faces north, each with his weapon for slaughter in his hand, and with them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his waist. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar.

Recall that visions are realities, but in the spirit world. Ezekiel's "hair" was grasped, but it was the spirit of Ezekiel that was actually raised up. Ezekiel was actually in a dark room with evil men. But his body was at Chebar Canal, hundreds of miles away.

These six men were very real in the spirit world, make no mistake. They are called men and executioners so as to help us to visualize what is about to take place, but their persons and the effects of their work were not necessarily visible to those with whom they dealt. In other words, it would seem these "men" are angels. The identification is not without precedent in Scripture.

It was two "men" who visited Abraham with the Lord and who were then sent on the task of destroying Sodom.

As for angels of destruction: A "destroying angel" is released on Israel following David's allowing of a census.

Angels can destroy. The question here is, did they do their work independently, or is this another way of telling Ezekiel that destruction via Nebuchadnezzar is on the way to Judah?

The term "executioners" here and in many translations is a bit unusual. KJV and others simply have "those that have charge" or authority. The Hebrew means "visitation", in the official sense. These are individuals who have been given ultimate authority over Judah, a fact which rules out even further any

human entities. Human rulers of Judah, the “elders”, would not have participated in such a campaign as is about to follow. It is “principalities and powers” that are here being summoned against the Holy Land.

But why six? Could not one “angel of the Lord” do what needed to be done, as he had been summoned before in Israel’s past wanderings astray? Though I have no answer to that, I would point readers to the fact that actually there were seven, not six, for the “man clothed in linen” was of their number. And seven such angels, so-clothed, are called into action in the very last days, as seven plagues are unleashed on mankind, Revelation 15-16. The things God “could do” vs what He actually does, are in the area of speculation, and unhealthy at best.

In this case, one of the angels is given the role of recorder. The other six will be at war. Hence the distinction in clothing.

Other symbolism is added to the story for the sake of humans reading these things. Do angels need “pen and paper” to record evil and good? Not at all. But this seventh angel has a “writing case” by which he placed some sort of “mark” on men’s foreheads.

I cannot help but suggest that the “mark of the beast” may likewise be something of a spiritual mark as opposed to all the fanciful interpretations we read of today. How many men worldwide have already been marked by the Spirit, long before the coming of technology that allowed us to see something physical? How many men have been marked deep in their spirits and classified in heaven’s books as fit for eternal destruction?

11. When did the glory of God leave the Temple?

9:3. Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house.

10:4-5. And the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub to the threshold of the house, and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD. And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.

10:18-19. Then the glory of the LORD went out from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth before my eyes as they went out, with the wheels beside them. And they stood at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the LORD, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them.

11:22-23. Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.

Macarthur points out that the glory of the Lord left the Temple in stages, from the “mercy seat” in the Holy Place, to the “front door”, to the east gate, and finally to – says Macarthur – Mt Olivet, the very place where Jesus will one day return with all the glory of God.

When the glory of God leaves, the destruction can now begin. Men had been ignoring God's glory and had slowly chased it away. God now responds by removing Himself totally from Judah and allowing evil to descend in its place.

12. Who is spared when the judgment begins?

9:3-4. And he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his waist. And the LORD said to him, "Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it."

The mark of the Lord is on those who care. On those who are aware of the abominations taking place around them and are crying out to God about it. It seems to these men that they are not heard, and for years, perhaps decades, their cries seemingly go unanswered, because of the patience and longsuffering and grace and mercy of our God.

But one day judgment falls. Abominations are targeted. What a lesson for praying men today who are grieved at the evils taking place within the very church that Christ formed to be a holy place for Him and His people.

13. Will God have pity on Judah no more?

9:5-7. And to the others he said in my hearing, "Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. Kill old men outright,

young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary.” So they began with the elders who were before the house. Then he said to them, “Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out.” So they went out and struck in the city.

I spoke of it earlier, but it bears repeating: There comes a time when God’s mercy has played out. Years upon years of ignoring of God and His ways will finally result in catastrophe. “The millstones of the gods grind late, but they grind fine,” said Plutarch. What he said of the false gods is true of our God. It seems justice will never come to the planet. Evil prevails. “Evil seducers shall wax worse and worse,” says the King James.

But in the end God will have His way. And in that day, the time for crying out will have passed. No more mercy. No forgiveness. Tears will not avail. No protests. No “human rights”. None of this color or that color “matters” any longer. Only God matters in that day.

So it was in Judah’s time. That it is not the end of all things, however, is revealed in Ezekiel’s question in the next verse, and God’s answer to the same question in chapter 11.

14. Is there not a remnant of grace, even in this awful scene?

9:8-10. And while they were striking, and I was left alone, I fell upon my face, and cried, “Ah, Lord GOD! Will you destroy all the remnant of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?” Then he said to me, “The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is

exceedingly great. The land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice. For they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see.' As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; I will bring their deeds upon their heads." And behold, the man clothed in linen, with the writing case at his waist, brought back word, saying, "I have done as you commanded me."

Ezekiel is convinced that some will be saved. For one thing, God has placed His "mark" on those few who see the reality of evil and are crying out to God about it. Surely those few will not be destroyed?

God's response here is not very hopeful. He merely repeats His intention to destroy all and spare not. Period.

We are happy that through the instigation of the Holy Spirit, we are given another response to the same question in chapter 11. We will record question and answer there, and in Part Five. God is not finished with the people He foreknew!

15. What other assignment was the "man clothed in linen" given?

10:2, 6-7. And he said to the man clothed in linen, "Go in among the whirling wheels underneath the cherubim. Fill your hands with burning coals from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city." And he went in before my eyes. And when he commanded the man clothed in linen, "Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim," he went in and stood beside a wheel. And a cherub stretched out his hand from between the

cherubim to the fire that was between the cherubim, and took some of it and put it into the hands of the man clothed in linen, who took it and went out.

We discussed at length the contents of chapter 10 in Part One, noting the *description* of cherubim that duplicates what Ezekiel saw in chapter 1. Here in chapter 10, we see these special living beings in a different context, actively involved in assisting the destroying angels in their duty.

Symbolically, the marking angel is to get a handful of burning coals and scatter them over the city of Jerusalem. The reality that this vision portrays is the physical burning of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

Ezekiel watches all of this and then remembers that he has seen the cherubim before, while with the exiles at the Chebar Canal (vv 15 and 20).

16. Who are the “twenty-five men” to whom Ezekiel is directed?

11:1-3. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the house of the LORD, which faces east. And behold, at the entrance of the gateway there were twenty-five men. And I saw among them Jaazaniah the son of Azzur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people. And he said to me, “Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked counsel in this city; who say, ‘The time is not near to build houses. This city is the cauldron, and we are the meat.’”

We have met a Jaazaniah before, in chapter 8. But the man of that name in this chapter has a different father. And we have seen twenty-five men before, in that same chapter 8. Are they the same twenty-five? Some suggest that whereas the first group was of the priestly profession, these men seem to be secular leaders. Two of them are even called “princes of the people.” I do not see this as proof that the two groups are separate. Priests could easily have other roles. Ezekiel, for example...

Observe here that a handful of evil people can turn a nation in the wrong direction. Need I comment on how that works, speaking as I do from the vantage point of the year 2021 in the United States?

These men were the purveyors of lies. They assured the people that it was time to fight for their lives, the opposite of Jeremiah’s counsel to submit to the punishment about to be rendered via Nebuchadnezzar’s forced exile.

17. How could Ezekiel prophesy if he was there only in spirit?

11:4. *“Therefore prophesy against them; prophesy, O son of man.”*

Now Ezekiel is being told to prophesy against their lies. Which immediately causes us to ponder. In what way is Ezekiel speaking the word of the Lord here? We have nearly concluded – though I still want to leave open the door to the other side – that Ezekiel is present only in spirit. We believe his body was still sitting in front of the elders back in Babylonia.

During his prophecy we will see a man present in Jerusalem drop to the floor, dead. Ezekiel sees it and reacts. That rules out the

possibility that he gave this prophecy only after he returned to the captives, though he does deliver a report at the end of this chapter.

So in his immaterial body he is witnessing the entire scene. In that same body he prophesies. Is he visible to the residents of Judah? I think not. Does Pelatiah die as a response to hearing the words of Ezekiel, or does he pick up in the spirit world the judgment of God and die from the inner voice?

Unfortunately, the text does not describe any of this in detail. We only know that in some sense, Ezekiel was in Jerusalem, was speaking the word of the Lord, and was heard. All of this in vision. All of it in reality.

18. What exactly was Ezekiel to prophesy?

11:5-12. And the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and he said to me, "Say, Thus says the LORD: So you think, O house of Israel. For I know the things that come into your mind. You have multiplied your slain in this city and have filled its streets with the slain. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Your slain whom you have laid in the midst of it, they are the meat, and this city is the cauldron, but you shall be brought out of the midst of it. You have feared the sword, and I will bring the sword upon you, declares the Lord GOD. And I will bring you out of the midst of it, and give you into the hands of foreigners, and execute judgments upon you. You shall fall by the sword. I will judge you at the border of Israel, and you shall know that I am the LORD. This city shall not be your cauldron, nor shall you be the meat in the midst of it. I will judge you at the border of Israel,

and you shall know that I am the LORD. For you have not walked in my statutes, nor obeyed my rules, but have acted according to the rules of the nations that are around you.”

Simultaneous with the command to prophesy came the words of the prophecy and the power of the Spirit to speak them. The message was simply this, addressed to false prophets:

“Yes, many have died. You assume that unless you do something, all will die. You assume you must fight to survive. Not so. I will bring some of you out of this place to be judged elsewhere. Do not resist.”

It was the message of Jeremiah (as in Jeremiah 27, for example), updated for these twenty-five men, who had surely heard it before.

19. Why the reaction of Ezekiel to the death of Pelatiah?

11:13. And it came to pass, while I was prophesying, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then I fell down on my face and cried out with a loud voice and said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel?”

It would be distressing enough in a natural setting for a congregant to drop dead in the middle of a service. But this is a vision. Being full of the Spirit, Ezekiel is seeing things he might not normally see. Though he has just prophesied that some will be brought out of Jerusalem’s destruction, this death triggers a fear that the judgment of God is going to be so encompassing as to wipe out the nation altogether, and that it has begun here with this man.

Recall that Ezekiel has asked this question before. At that time, the answer was severe and implied that indeed all of Israel would be judged.

But the Lord graciously responded in a different tone this time. Verse 14-20 tell of a time when a remnant shall return and be given a new heart, a promise that coincides with other passages in this book. I have gathered together all such promises to comprise Part Five of this study, the Restoration of Israel.

20. What is to be the fate of the evil men of Israel?

11:21. "But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, declares the Lord GOD."

This one negative statement follows a message of hope given to the prophet for the future of Israel. As stated, I will deal with that message in Part Five.

Here it is made clear that the messages of good will are for the remnant. The ones who did not bow the knee to Ba'al. The ones who sighed and cried to God because of the abominations all around them. There were some holy people left. Though Israel be scattered, she shall be regathered.

But the evil non-repentant Israelites pictured in this entire vision, chapters 8-11, will suffer loss. What they wanted they shall obtain: a life without the God of Israel.

21. How does Ezekiel now return to Chaldea?

11:22-25. Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city. And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to the exiles. Then the vision that I had seen went up from me. And I told the exiles all the things that the LORD had shown me.

We are once more called upon to deal with the logistics of this section of the book. It has all been a vision after all. But that is not to say it was a dream. Nor was it Ezekiel's imagination. A vision is reality. It is something one person can see, and those around cannot. Cornelius had a vision of an angel, says Luke in Acts. An angel appeared to him, but to him only. It was something he saw, hence, a vision.

Ezekiel has seen this entire series of events, from the movements of the cherubim, to the false worship of his people, to the death of a leader of Israel. The men sitting at his house in Chaldea did not see any of this. Ezekiel had to tell them from start to finish what he had just experienced.

The vision ends with the glory of God leaving the Temple and situating on a nearby hillside. Ezekiel, who was there in Jerusalem, is now transported back to his own house. And the vision "went up." The window to heaven was shut to him. He saw now only what men see.

It must have seemed to the elders in his house that he “woke up.” And immediately Ezekiel began to tell of his marvelous journey into the world of the Spirit.

The following chapter was covered in Part Two, as it deals with portrayals and a proverb. We now move on to the prophecy against prophecies... false prophecies, that is, and the men who proclaim them.

A Prophecy Against Prophecies

22. How were the false prophets receiving their messages?

13:1-3. *The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, who are prophesying, and say to those who prophesy from their own hearts: 'Hear the word of the LORD!' Thus says the Lord GOD, Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!"*

We dealt with the term "Son of man" in Part One, where we shared that this title is applied scores of times to Ezekiel, unlike any other man. He is not "the" Son of Man, an appellation given only to Jesus, but there is something unique about this prophet, for sure.

As to God's description of the false prophets of Ezekiel's day, they are amazingly like the company of charlatans who have invaded the church in our own generation. There have always been a few, but there is a veritable flood today.

Their method: listening to the inner recesses of their own heart. They may seem very spiritual in this posture. Eyes closed, concentrating, trying to hear what's on the inside.

But they have seen nothing, says God. A prophet is a "Seer". A true prophet sees things. Consider all the visions accorded to Ezekiel already in the book. These were not his imaginings. He actually saw cherubim. He saw the evil inside the Temple, though he was many days' journey from it. He saw Pelatiah die.

Prophets see. False prophets imagine, think, conjure up.

Are there not true prophets in our day? Does God not give visions and messages? In my experience, no. And my experience is not

definitive. But let the prophets speak according to what Scripture has already said, if they speak at all. Let them submit their messages to those in the church with discernment, as says Paul to the Corinthians.

Where have you seen such submission, such comparison, among those calling themselves prophets in our day?

Much more common, in fact, is the fortune-teller. This is the “prophet” who reads the news, is savvy politically, makes guesses about what is coming. Sometimes he is right. Because he is smart. Sometimes he is wrong because he is not that smart.

Biblically, the “wrong” prophet must be ignored at least, executed at most.

The true prophets spoke often of the false prophets. Moses, Jeremiah, and our present prophet are three that come to mind. False prophecy is a theme of Jesus, Paul, Peter, Jude. God hates false prophesying.

23. How are false prophets like “jackals among ruins”?

13:4-5. *“Your prophets have been like jackals among ruins, O Israel. You have not gone up into the breaches, or built up a wall for the house of Israel, that it might stand in battle in the day of the LORD.”*

The *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* explains this passage:

“The main idea... is that their operations only increase the devastation and undermine and bring down anything that may yet be standing. In a declining and disastrous time the minds of men are

excited and feed on the wildest schemes, and feeling themselves helpless they readily turn to those who pretend to speak to them in God's name. And it only adds to their ruin when those to whom they turn have no higher wisdom than themselves."

Some translations say "foxes" instead of jackals, but the image is the same. Foxes rummage around the ruins of a building, pushing here, trampling there, finishing the destruction begun by some disaster. They do nothing helpful to rebuild or strengthen the edifice.

The people of God are in a ruined state and are about to receive even more pillaging. The false prophets come along and add to the carnage by saying things in the name of the Lord that totally mislead.

24. Is it possible the false prophets were seeing something besides their own spirits?

13:6-7. "They have seen false visions and lying divinations. They say, 'Declares the LORD,' when the LORD has not sent them, and yet they expect him to fulfill their word. Have you not seen a false vision and uttered a lying divination, whenever you have said, 'Declares the LORD,' although I have not spoken?"

This is not to contradict what He has just said about the prophets seeing nothing. Those who "prophesy" out of their own spirits do indeed see nothing. But the door seems to be opened here to the possibility that some false prophets are seeing images given to them from the outside, from demonic influence.

These seem to be the options still. Our 21st century prophets speak either on their own or from what the Bible calls “familiar” spirits that have been granted a measure of truth, but since they are ambassadors of the father of lies, they end up as deceivers.

It was a deceiving spirit, for example, that lured Ahab to his final battle, one that ended in his demise.

Notice the “declares the Lord”, or as we used to say, “Thus saith the Lord.” Today you hear it everywhere: “The Lord told me” or “The Lord spoke to me.” And what the prophet, or tragically, just the ordinary Christian, says after those words, you are expected to believe. No argument. God has spoken.

God does speak to His people. Through the Scriptures. Through godly counsel. Through preaching. And yes, through that inner witness. But that inner witness can get confused with the old deceitful heart, and needs to be confirmed by the main means of confirmation, His Word and His people. Why else have a Bible and a Spirit-filled church if we are meant to receive words from God on our own?

25. How are the false prophets to be punished?

13:8-9. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: “Because you have uttered falsehood and seen lying visions, therefore behold, I am against you, declares the Lord GOD. My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and who give lying divinations. They shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter

the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord GOD."

1. God is against them.
2. God's *hand* will be against them.
3. No longer will they be looked to as "counsellors" in Israel. Stay away from them, people! Note today how these gurus of prophecy sell books by the millions, and have people begging them for advice about the future... which the "prophets" know nothing about!
4. More. They will not even be registered as Israelites. Their names will be blotted out of all registers. Men without a country.
5. Worse. They are not even to enter the territory of Israel. Their message is worthless, their lives too will be considered worthless to My people. *Persona non grata*.

That is how God views false prophets and their prophecies. Should God's church not view them in a similar fashion? Leave us. You do not belong here. Your messages are not welcome, and you are not welcome.

In my opinion, yes, that is exactly what our view should be.

26. How does the prophecy of "peace" equate to a whitewashed wall?

13:10-16. "Precisely because they have misled my people, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace, and because, when the people build a wall, these prophets

smear it with whitewash, say to those who smear it with whitewash that it shall fall! There will be a deluge of rain, and you, O great hailstones, will fall, and a stormy wind break out. And when the wall falls, will it not be said to you, 'Where is the coating with which you smeared it?' Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I will make a stormy wind break out in my wrath, and there shall be a deluge of rain in my anger, and great hailstones in wrath to make a full end. And I will break down the wall that you have smeared with whitewash, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be laid bare. When it falls, you shall perish in the midst of it, and you shall know that I am the LORD. Thus will I spend my wrath upon the wall and upon those who have smeared it with whitewash, and I will say to you, The wall is no more, nor those who smeared it, the prophets of Israel who prophesied concerning Jerusalem and saw visions of peace for her, when there was no peace, declares the Lord GOD."

Judgment is coming to Israel and Judah. Again. The land reeks with evil. Nothing will stop this deluge of destruction, not even tears and crying.

But the false prophets erected – virtually, as it were – a wall of protection for their audiences. And on their supposedly stable wall they splashed some whitewash. Oh it was a beautiful wall! No judgment is coming. There is no war, either in heaven or on earth. All is peace. Relax. Don't listen to the prophets of doom, like this fraud Ezekiel. See how his wife died? God may be judging him, but not us. Peace! Peace!

We hear it all today, don't we? Nothing to fear but fear. Don't be afraid. Think positive. Our nation will be great again. God loves us so much. There are a few narrow-minded preachers out there, but the vast majority of our nation's people know that happy times are going to be here again. The crisis will pass. Normalcy will return.

God says, Hush! There's a storm coming. And I'm in that storm. A huge downfall of rain from the north (chapter 1). And that rain will first take all that whitewash off your feeble wall. Then comes the wind and more rain, and your entire structure will be destroyed.

After I deal with the wall, says God, I will deal with you who dared to construct it and raise it up in my face, to contradict what I have said to my real prophets. Whitewash, wall, and builders, be gone. You are liars, and your lies will not stand.

27. How were women involved in all this falseness?

13:17-19. "And you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people, who prophesy out of their own hearts. Prophesy against them and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the women who sew magic bands upon all wrists, and make veils for the heads of persons of every stature, in the hunt for souls! Will you hunt down souls belonging to my people and keep your own souls alive? You have profaned me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, putting to death souls who should not die and keeping alive souls who should not live, by your lying to my people, who listen to lies."

We can't overlook what the women were doing during this time. They too were involved in the séance-like whispering of "words" from God, words which came from within, not without, not from God.

And they had other devices. Their wrists were clothed with a magic band which helped with their "prophecies." Their heads, and perhaps entire bodies were covered with a special veil. People who saw such women were attracted to them and in this way the women were "hunting down" victims to whom they could pass on their lies.

Yes, "New Age" tactics are being used among "Christian" people today. Readings, and cards, and more are being employed to deceive people into thinking that the Christian faith is no different than other Eastern religions. Come along with us and be safe.

Even more. The prophetesses worked for income. Oh their prices were not high, for the nation was not prospering at the time. But people could afford "handfuls of barley" or "pieces of bread."

Thus did these evil women suggest to the people that their wares were worthy of some sacrifice. They must be valuable.

The result of their work, says Yahweh, is that "good" people believed them and condemned their own souls. "Bad" people are promised life by these false ones, but wrongly so.

28. And how would the women be punished?

13:20-23. *"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against your magic bands with which you hunt the souls like birds, and I will tear them from your arms,*

and I will let the souls whom you hunt go free, the souls like birds. Your veils also I will tear off and deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall be no more in your hand as prey, and you shall know that I am the LORD. Because you have disheartened the righteous falsely, although I have not grieved him, and you have encouraged the wicked, that he should not turn from his evil way to save his life, therefore you shall no more see false visions nor practice divination. I will deliver my people out of your hand. And you shall know that I am the LORD.

1. The magic bands to be torn off their arms. Perhaps by invading Babylonians.
2. All their customers will go free. Their business will therefore fail ultimately.
3. Their veils too will be ripped off.
4. Israelites will no longer be their victims. You promised good things to evil people, and evil things to good people. They will be delivered from all your lies.
5. You will be unable to see or proclaim any false messages.

And notice the constantly recurring, "You shall know that I am the Lord." This is what God has wanted for all Israel all the time. One day it will come to pass. "They will all know me, from the least to the greatest," says Jeremiah (31:34) to this same people and to us.

Do we humans not like being known by someone or some group? How much more does the Lord want to be known and recognized for Who He is?

The Elders of Judah Refused an Audience

29. Why have certain of the elders come to Ezekiel's house?

14:1-3. *Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. And the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them?"*

We've met these men before. Back in chapter 8, a group of men had come to Ezekiel's quarters, and while they were sitting there, Ezekiel was whisked off in the Spirit to Jerusalem! Were they being ignored by God even then? If so, they fare no better now.

They have come again, maybe multiple times, but the Lord says to show them no hospitality. They have come to ask advice from the prophet. They disobey the Law of the Lord day in and day out, but they have some questions about their future or about religion or about their enemy, so they come to Ezekiel for his opinions.

Should God give an audience to those who daily ignore Him?

30. What is God's response to a man who is full of idolatry?

14:4-8. *"Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to*

the prophet, I the LORD will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols. Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, I the LORD will answer him myself. And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

If a man approaches God for reasons of his own, but is fully intent on serving some other god, the true God's response is not going to be all that wonderful. Yet verses 4-5 and 7-8 seem to indicate that God will answer such a man. The question is, how?

The answer: "...in view of the multitude of his idols in order to lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel." And "...in My own person. I will set My face against that man, make him a sign and a proverb, and cut him off from My people."

God Himself will answer these evil men, yes. But they will not like the answer. The fool will be answered according to his folly. The prophet will be bypassed in these situations, as the Lord Himself will cut the idolater off. The answer is judgment.

What a serious warning to people who dare to approach God or the man of God for some request, when their hearts are totally set

against the ways of God. What an insult to God's holiness. Just who do they think they are to come into the Throne Room of the King of Kings asking favors, when they belong to the army of an enemy nation?

31. Does God deceive men?

14:9-11. "And if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear their punishment—the punishment of the prophet and the punishment of the inquirer shall be alike— that the house of Israel may no more go astray from me, nor defile themselves anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be my people and I may be their God, declares the Lord GOD."

My question is not meant to be offensive, but it surely is to some. Nevertheless I refer only to the very words of the Lord Himself. There are false prophets. They have been deceived. When people are deceived, they deceive others. And both deceiver and deceived will be punished. Poison is poison and it kills, whether one knew it was poison or not. These are the laws of nature and the supernatural too. Imbided lies will cause the cessation of spiritual life, the cutting off from God.

But the question is, who started all this deception? There is a story told in 1 Kings 22, to which I have referred before, that is very instructive here, and God's people need to understand this principle.

King Jehoshaphat, a generally good king, if not the wisest in his ecumenical approach toward life, has been asked by the wicked king of Israel, Ahab, to join him in a military endeavor. Before they finalize their plans, Jehoshaphat wants to “pray about it.” That is, he wants to hear what a prophet of God might say.

Ahab parades all the false prophets before the royals, and, to a man, they agree that this is a good enterprise, that Ahab will succeed and prosper, etc. Jehoshaphat wants to hear from a prophet of Yahweh. There is only one available, a serious truth-teller who is against Ahab and who is in turn hated by that king.

In sarcasm, this prophet – Micaiah – joins the false men with the message of peace and prosperity. Ahab knows he is lying and forces him to speak his mind. Micaiah then tells of a vision he had. In it the Lord is asking how he will be able to entice Ahab to go on this venture and die! A spirit approaches the Throne and offers to be a lying spirit in the mouth of the false prophets. Yahweh loves the plan and tells the spirit to do what he has suggested.

God tells us in this story that when he is fed up with the evil ways of a nation, or dare we say, a person, he will himself send deceiving spirits to them to hasten their downfall.

That’s what He says. And that’s what is going on here in Ezekiel 14. God allows a lying spirit to enter a false prophet, and after he has done this evil deed, he, and the ones he deceived, will be judged.

But wait. The question again comes, who started all this deception? Was it not the evil life over long decades and centuries that was the reason for God’s final methods? God starts things with blessing and provision and protection and so much more. Man starts the deceitfulness, the disobedience, the reasons for judgment. May we never blame God for man’s sin.

Notice the outcome also. God takes this cancer called the false prophet out of the body called Israel, so that the body can live and prosper, “that Israel may no more go astray from Me, nor defile themselves.” Always God wants good things for His people.

32. How do Noah, Daniel, and Job enter the book of Ezekiel?

14:12-20. *And the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it and break its supply of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast, even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, declares the Lord GOD .If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they ravage it, and it be made desolate, so that no one may pass through because of the beasts, even if these three men were in it, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the land would be desolate. Or if I bring a sword upon that land and say, Let a sword pass through the land, and I cut off from it man and beast, though these three men were in it, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they alone would be delivered .Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off from it man and beast, even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, they would deliver*

neither son nor daughter. They would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness.”

There are times when Ezekiel’s prophecies have almost a poetic ring to them. Here are four “stanzas” of a poetic statement that all say the same thing, namely: There may be a few personal exceptions to my coming judgment, but generally what is coming is for everyone! Suddenly we are not looking at poetry but a harsh word from Yahweh.

Jeremiah agrees (5:1-4). *“Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem... to see if you can find a man who does justice...”*

The cause of the judgment is stated first: the “faithless” acts of a people. The KJV talks about “grievous” trespassing. The stronger word seems to be the most appropriate translation of the Hebrew which means sin, or treachery.

When a land sins and grieves God, it can expect famine, the tyranny of wild animals, violence, and disease. When a culture is so pervasively evil, it can expect to be wiped out in this way.

But in the middle of such lands there are often holy and righteous people, the ones Ezekiel saw “sighing and crying”, the ones who pray for and try to win the lost, the ones whose lives are in complete contradistinction to those around them.

But, says God, though such men might in less sinful times be able to call down God’s mercy on that nation by their intercession, there comes a point of no return where their prayers will save no one but themselves. The nation will still suffer annihilation.

He mentions three intercessors as examples. Noah preached to the world before the flood, by a life of righteousness, a life of obedience, actions that warned of judgment. Noah was able to save

his family. But the world was destroyed. God says He is so distraught with Jerusalem and surroundings that if Noah lived in this wicked time, even his family would not be saved, only him!

Daniel was living in Babylonia at this very hour. Daniel was an intercessor. He knew of the evil of his people and confessed it. Daniel was loved in Heaven. And Daniel's life was indeed spared. But his nation was destroyed. Proof of the principle.

And Job? Interesting to note here that, unlike some of our "intelligentsia" today, Ezekiel – and God Himself – knew that Job was a real person, not just a character in an ancient wisdom book.

Job also was called upon to intercede, and serves as an example of God forgiving men who sin but are willing to submit to repentance, able to acknowledge their sin. But if Job's three friends had succumbed to the cultural influences of Judah and Samaria, Job's prayers would not have saved them. Only Job, made righteous by God, would escape the condemnation.

It is interesting, as MacArthur note, to compare Ezekiel's three men to Jeremiah's two, in Jeremiah 15:1, *"Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My heart would not turn toward this people."*

A unique and evil time has come upon Israel. Will any be spared?

33. Who are the "survivors" God mentions next?

14:21-23. "For thus says the Lord GOD: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast! But behold, some survivors will be left in it, sons and daughters who will

be brought out; behold, when they come out to you, and you see their ways and their deeds, you will be consoled for the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem, for all that I have brought upon it. They will console you, when you see their ways and their deeds, and you shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, declares the Lord GOD.”

Does God open the door now to the possibility that there are some, like Noah, Daniel, and Job, that are so righteous in Israel that they will escape the sword, the famine, the beasts, the diseases? Will their holiness be what consoles the exiles, as more and more escapees come to Babylonia and settle there?

No. That is not what is being said. Quite the opposite. Wicked people do not change because of a change of address. The exiles already in Chaldea will witness the evil of the new arrivals, those who are rounded up by Nebuchadnezzar in 586, and will agree with God that judgment was needed.

Already Ezekiel is having to deal with the wickedness of the exiles, as in the last chapter. All of the signs and parables of the book are directed to people outside of Judah as well as to those awaiting judgment. The nation is totally corrupt wherever it resides.

But God will be vindicated. His judgments are just always. Men will all eventually agree that they were wrong, and He was and is Right.

Next follow a series of parables and proverbs which we covered in Part Two. We move to chapter 19, another parable of sorts, but which is labeled a “lamentation” by God.

The Lamentation of Ezekiel

34. Is this lament a general expression of sorrow or does Ezekiel have specific persons in mind?

19:1-2. And you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, and say: What was your mother? A lioness! Among lions she crouched; in the midst of young lions she reared her cubs.

This is a very specific dirge. “Your mother, a lioness...” is the nation of Judah, described in similar terms by Jacob, in his final blessing to his sons (Genesis 49:9). *“Judah is a lion’s cub... he crouched as a lion and as a lioness...”*

Judah is seen as a lion among lions. These other lions may be the kings of Judah or kings surrounding Judah. Her cubs will be easily identifiable in the coming verses.

We have heard of the Lamentations of Jeremiah. Now hear the lamentation of Ezekiel, a dirge telling of the dismal fall of a proud lioness and her cubs, the “princes”, that is, the final kings of the nation.

35. Who is the first of the cubs of the lioness?

19:3-4. And she brought up one of her cubs; he became a young lion, and he learned to catch prey; he devoured men. The nations heard about him; he was caught in their pit, and they brought him with hooks to the land of Egypt.

This is Jehoahaz. His story is told in 2 Kings 23. Following the tragic death of his father Josiah, the people took this one, Josiah's son, and made him king. He was not the oldest son, thus explaining the terminology of "making him" king, instead of the normal progression to the elder son. It is not clear why he was chosen. But there turned out to be no good choices among Josiah's issue.

He began an evil reign but only lasted three months before Pharaoh Neco of Egypt, still perhaps enraged by the senseless attack by his father Josiah, took Jehoahaz out of Jerusalem, then on to Egypt. Judah "waited in vain" (v.5) for his return.

36. Who was the second "cub"?

19:5-9. When she saw that she waited in vain, that her hope was lost, she took another of her cubs and made him a young lion. He prowled among the lions; he became a young lion, and he learned to catch prey; he devoured men, and seized their widows. He laid waste their cities, and the land was appalled and all who were in it at the sound of his roaring. Then the nations set against him from provinces on every side; they spread their net over him; he was taken in their pit. With hooks they put him in a cage and brought him to the king of Babylon; they brought him into custody, that his voice should no more be heard on the mountains of Israel.

the Lord speaks here of Jehoiachin. But in the story told in the kings, it is Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah, that somehow becomes king next. Some of the commentators suggest that he was a usurper. The people were waiting on Jehoahaz, their favorite son, to return. They waited in fact eleven years through Jehoiakim's reign until he

finally died, and evidently Jehoahaz died also during that time, in Egypt.

Jehoiakim was a wicked king, as his brother had been and his son would be, but he died in peace in Jerusalem, never suffering the humiliation for which this elegy is composed. Both Jehoahaz and now Jehoiachin were taken away in shame by foreign leaders, one left to die, one left incarcerated for thirty-six years.

As his uncle Jehoahaz, Jehoiachin would reign only three months before his tragic arrest by Nebuchadnezzar (597 B. C.).

We are left to wonder how much evil this one man, actually both of these men, could have manufactured in three short months. Whence the “prowling” and devouring, and seizing of widows, laying waste of cities, the roaring of this cub mentioned in the prophecy?

The Scriptures and the commentators are all noticeably quiet about the matter. I am led to believe that in this latter case, Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, began his awful acts in connection with his ruling father as a teenager bent on saving Israel and establishing her authority in the region. Without God, of course. And when Dad died, he continued these acts of aggression until Nebuchadnezzar had had enough and was forced to stop him.

The cage was not an unknown method of bringing in special prisoners, or Ezekiel is merely using the image of a lion still, which could often be found thus.

So,

Cub 1, Jehoahaz, brought to Egypt to die.

Cub 2, young Jehoiachin, brought to Babylon to face a jail term of 36 years. He will not be free until he is in his mid-50's. Indeed, his voice will no longer be heard "on the mountains of Israel."

37. And the mother, what became of her?

19:10-13. Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard planted by the water, fruitful and full of branches by reason of abundant water. Its strong stems became rulers' scepters; it towered aloft among the thick boughs; it was seen in its height with the mass of its branches. But the vine was plucked up in fury, cast down to the ground; the east wind dried up its fruit; they were stripped off and withered. As for its strong stem, fire consumed it. Now it is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land.

The lioness imagery now becomes the vine. The Lord has already used this image in chapter 15. There Judah is called a useless vine about to be burned. Here, in the sad historic lamentation, we see the vine in its strength and beauty. Planted well, nourished bountifully. Producing great kings, who towered above their peers in surrounding lands.

But the picture changes dramatically. A force unseen from above but seen on earth as great Babylon, plucks up the entire vine and throws it down, strips it of its fruit and allows it to wither and be burned to nothing. What is left of this tragic plant is now deposited in the dry godless soil of a pagan nation.

Oh indeed, a story worthy of tears. A true lamentation. Weep for Israel. Weep for Judah. Weep for Jerusalem.

38. Is the final verse of the lament about the final king?

19:14. *And fire has gone out from the stem of its shoots, has consumed its fruit, so that there remains in it no strong stem, no scepter for ruling. This is a lamentation and has become a lamentation.*

As Ezekiel receives his revelation, Zedekiah has been reigning in Judah for several years. He will reign several more. Questions have arisen about this last verse as to whether the prophet is predicting here, or simply commenting on the current evil in Judah that will lead to its final fruitlessness.

The fire is from Babylon, the burning of Jerusalem. The stem is the withered nation consuming all. And in Judah, says the Lord, no *strong* stem remains. Zedekiah is there. But his eleven-year reign has all the earmarks of evil that his nephew Jehoiachin and his brothers Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim displayed.

No scepter worthy of ruling God's Holy Land. But wait. As MacArthur points out:

"... for nearly 2,600 years since the house of David ended in shame, Israel has had no king of David's line. When Messiah came they rejected Him and preferred Caesar. Messiah still became their Savior and will return as their King."

But for now, says the Lord, what you have just heard not only *is* a lamentation, but will remain so.

Next, in spite of the warnings of chapter 14, the elders return to Ezekiel's house "to inquire of the Lord."

Amazing.

The Return of the Elders

39. Has God changed His mind about listening to the questions of the exiled elders of Judah?

20:1-3. In the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the LORD, and sat before me. And the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD, Is it to inquire of me that you come? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you."

Months have passed. Have the elders forgotten their strong rebuke, recorded for us in chapter 14? They were told then that because there were idols in their heart, because they internally still worshiped other gods, that He, the true God, would not hear them.

No, there is no change. Obviously, they have not changed in their idolatry and He will not change in regard to granting them an audience.

40. In what way is Ezekiel asked to judge Israel along with Yahweh?

20:4. "Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Let them know the abominations of their fathers."

It is in this same time period, the seventh or eighth year of Ezekiel's exile, that the parable of Oholah and Oholibah is dictated to the prophet for his communication to his hearers (chapter 23). There also, Ezekiel is asked to judge. In that setting, covered in Part Two,

Ezekiel is as a courtroom judge, with Yahweh giving His testimony and asking to be vindicated.

There is a similar request in this verse, only Ezekiel is the lawyer, being given his case from above. He is to list historically the events that have caused God's anger to accumulate through the years and bring Israel to this brink of destruction.

41. Where does the history of Israel as a nation begin?

20:5-6. "and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day when I chose Israel, I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob, making myself known to them in the land of Egypt; I swore to them, saying, I am the LORD your God. On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands."

The idea of the nation Israel is in seed form in Abraham of Chaldea. It is in mini scale as we see the formation of the family through Jacob, and the promises passed down to him of a mighty people to come. But it was not until Jacob brought that family to Egypt under Joseph, and that family multiplied exponentially there, that we can talk of a nation named after Joseph's father, Israel.

The promise to which Ezekiel is to refer is found in Exodus 3:17, "I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to ... a land flowing with milk and honey," and Exodus 6:2 ff. "I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel... I will bring you out... I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham... for a

possession..." Moses spoke, the passage goes on to say, but the tyranny-broken people in Egypt did not listen.

42. What one thing did the Lord ask of the Israelites in Egypt?

20:7-8. "And I said to them, 'Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.' But they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me. None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt."

We are all aware of the golden calf in the wilderness. We know of Israel's idolatrous ways in their own land, and the constant effort that the few godly kings put forth to rid Israel of false worship. But God says that this all began even *before* He brought them out of their bondage.

Such knowledge is not communicated directly in Genesis or early Exodus, when Israel was in Egypt and coming increasingly under her cruel power. But consider:

"Household gods" come up as early as the story of Jacob and Rachel. When the family of Jacob is attempting to escape Laban (Genesis 31), that in-law of the patriarch accuses Jacob of stealing his little idols. The sin that is discussed in the passage is theft, not idolatry, but idolatry it was. It seems there was a strain of false worship that had crept into the family already.

More to the point, Joseph in Egypt has been introduced to Egyptian culture and religion. And he is given the daughter of a priest as his wife! It is easy to imagine how his sons Ephraim and Manasseh imbibed the ways of Egypt from their idolatrous mother. Ephraim (the tribe) was the very center of false worship in years to come.

And whence the calf worship at the very foot of Mt. Sinai? This was Egyptian devotion. The people of Israel were contaminated from the beginning! The idols of Egypt followed the children of Israel into the wilderness!

43. So why did God help to free a contaminated people, clinging to their gods on their very trek out of Egypt?

20:9-10. "But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt. So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness."

We would all do well to understand that all that God does, He does for His glory. We like to think of ourselves as the center of God's attention, but that philosophy will lead us into many wrong ways. He is the center still. His glory is above all things.

Think of it. It was the God of Israel Who brought down on the Egyptian people a series of catastrophes that singled Him out as the only true Power in the universe. As far away as Canaan they had heard of the greatness of this God.

So could God now change His mind about setting His heart on Israel, working for them, totally freeing them from Pharaoh? Would

the nations then not begin to wonder about the limitations of this God, and laugh at Him? No, He would finish what He started. On into the wilderness, gods and all...

44. With what did God counter the ungodliness and idolatry of Israel, in the wilderness?

20:11-14. "I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live. Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them. But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out."

We tend to sympathize with the poor slaves of Egypt. And well we should. So did the Father. But our sympathy must be tempered with reality. The Israelites, like all of us, were awful sinners.

God's law shows man just how far away He is from God, and the impossibility of ever bridging the gap that exists.

"If a person does them, he shall live," is the key. But people never do them perfectly, and they are placed under a curse. This we understand now, but Israel is in its infancy in the wilderness. Eventually some will comprehend and repent.

Note that the Sabbath is singled out as one of the special provisions of the law of Moses, one given specifically to Israel. Not only did Israel spurn that day, but they disobeyed all the other rules as well.

So God is ready and justified in His readiness, to judge Israel from the beginning. But once more His own name's glory kicks in. Israel will get its Promised Land... because of the purposes and glory of God, not because of Israel's great worthiness.

45. How did God demonstrate justice and mercy to His people?

20:15-17. "Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands, because they rejected my rules and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. Nevertheless, my eye spared them, and I did not destroy them or make a full end of them in the wilderness."

God changes His mind? No, and He is not double-minded. But thankfully He is a God of mercy as well as a God of justice. Is this twin capacity not in your own heart to some measure? You know what is right and you impose that rightness on your family or your students or others under your care. But sometimes what is right is too hard for others to bear. You slow down. You show mercy, and forgiveness. That is our God.

Right-ness demanded annihilation of the entire nation, and the sooner the better. Such evil! Such affrontery! Such ingratitude! Such idolatry! Kill them all. Start a new project.

But mercy spoke up. He did love those who were young and perhaps would follow Him. There were at least two men who had obeyed. They too could be spared. I'll not end this thing. Not yet.

46. So the children of the disobedient obeyed?

20:18-21. *“And I said to their children in the wilderness, ‘Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor keep their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols. I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules, and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.’ But the children rebelled against me. They did not walk in my statutes and were not careful to obey my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned my Sabbaths. “Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness. But I withheld my hand and acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out.”*

No, not at all. The children took after their parents. Examples are given in Numbers and Deuteronomy. Numbers 25:1-2 tells of this new generation's fascination with Moabite women and Moabite gods, as the people of Israel approach the boundaries of the

Promised Land. It never stops. Moses laments in Deuteronomy 31:27 that these people have been so evil in his lifetime as to make him tremble at what they will do after he dies.

Though the Lord continues to be grieved with Israel's performance, He withholds judgment on them, once more for His own Name's sake, not for any deserving of the Israelites.

47. What other promise is made to the children of the disobedient, should they continue in the sin of their parents?

20:23-24. "Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, because they had not obeyed my rules, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers' idols."

It took many years of mercy for this promise to come to pass, but even now Ezekiel's generation is seeing it happen before their eyes. The promise referred to is in Leviticus 20:33...

"And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste."

Many more warnings are given Israel, all of which went unheeded, all of which came to pass. It is as though God is reminding Israel of the words of Moses in that entire 26th chapter. He said He would do it if they kept disobeying. They kept disobeying. He did it.

Can we learn from this?

48. God gave them statutes that were not good? How is this possible?

20:25-26. *“Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and rules by which they could not have life, and I defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn, that I might devastate them. I did it that they might know that I am the LORD.”*

He has already praised the statutes He gave them in the wilderness (see verse 11), so we know He is not speaking of the Mosaic law here. His comment has to do rather with the fact that Israel has rejected His commands and has gone its own way. And as the Lord indicates through Paul, He is able to give people over to their lusts eventually. He allowed them to go their way without Him.

When Israel heard from false prophets and false teachers that other gods were acceptable, and God did nothing to stop these men after a while, it was as though God Himself had brought these men to expose their evil hearts through false worship.

The offering up of the firstborn to the fires of Molech is only one example of how far their hearts had gone away from truth when God “gave them over.” Romans 1 explains this phenomenon.

All of this should make us check our own lives. Is there an area He has warned us about many times but has now decided to release us to? Has our conscience been seared so much that we think the things we are doing are actually the way of the Lord, when they are only our own way? Will we stand before Him one day and loudly

proclaim that we are innocent of this or that, and genuinely believe it? Oh how we must guard our hearts.

49. Did the people called Israel change when they finally got to the Promised Land?

20:27-28. "Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: In this also your fathers blasphemed me, by dealing treacherously with me. For when I had brought them into the land that I swore to give them, then wherever they saw any high hill or any leafy tree, there they offered their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering; there they sent up their pleasing aromas, and there they poured out their drink offerings. (I said to them, 'What is the high place to which you go?' So its name is called Bamah to this day.)"

So when the slaves finally realized they were free, not only from Egypt, but from the long wilderness wandering, did they finally shape up and start acting like the people of God?

No. After the land was conquered, and the peace had settled in, their old habits resurfaced. Chapter after history chapter, we view the Israelites participating in pagan rituals, worshiping pagan gods, fellowshiping with evil men and women, ignoring Yahweh.

In verse 29, God, or a prophet, is asking God's people, "What 'bamah' are you going to today?" Evidently "bamah" was the word used by the pagans to define where their altars were located in the

high places. So the name caught on. Now even Hebrew prophets are using pagan names to define where Israel is worshiping.

Would the people never learn? It seems not. And that brings us to the present need for a major correction.

50. What event had brought about this dissertation to begin with?

20:30-32. *“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and go whoring after their detestable things? When you present your gifts and offer up your children in fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you. What is in your mind shall never happen—the thought, ‘Let us be like the nations, like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone.’”*

At the beginning of the chapter, the elders of Israel had wanted an audience with the prophet, and thus with the Lord. They wanted to continue in their idolatry yet somehow feel connected to Yahweh, in case He happened to be the true God with true ways. They listened to the false prophets, but also, in fairness, they gave Ezekiel a chance to air his beliefs too.

His answer here is as clear as can be. Forget it! You want to be like the nations, worship their gods? And serve Me too? Ain't gonna happen.

There follows one of the incredible Ezekiel passages pointing in the opposite direction altogether: God is going to restore Israel! I have collected all of those sublime promises into a section I will call Part Five.

For now, one final word in this chapter involving the “southland.”

About the Southland

51. What and/or where is the “south” to which Ezekiel is now directed?

20:45-48. *And the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, set your face toward the southland; preach against the south, and prophesy against the forest land in the Negeb. Say to the forest of the Negeb, Hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree in you and every dry tree. The blazing flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from south to north shall be scorched by it. All flesh shall see that I the LORD have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.”*

A rudimentary knowledge of Bible geography answers this one fairly quickly. Nothing new is being said here. Ezekiel’s prophecies are directed to Judah. Israel has already been judged. Judah was in the southern part of Canaan, south of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar would be coming from the north, though Babylon is due east from Jerusalem. Armies traveled along proven roads, and the road from Babylon to Canaan goes first northwest, then directly south.

The fire is a literal one, as are the forests. The land will be devastated by the attacks of the Babylonian regime.

But the elders of Judah are still not convinced.

52. What did the attendant elders think of Ezekiel's message from God?

20:49. Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! They are saying of me, 'Is he not a maker of parables?'"

People believe what they want to believe. The elders could not accept the fact that God was all this angry at them. And they had seen the prophet going through all kinds of performances over the past years. Surely what he had just told them was only another parable that they were to interpret later.

When they communicated this to Ezekiel, he cried out to God in frustration.

Concerning the Sword

53. What specific aspect of the coming judgment is Ezekiel now to announce?

21:1-5. *The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuaries. Prophecy against the land of Israel and say to the land of Israel, Thus says the LORD: Behold, I am against you and will draw my sword from its sheath and will cut off from you both righteous and wicked. Because I will cut off from you both righteous and wicked, therefore my sword shall be drawn from its sheath against all flesh from south to north. And all flesh shall know that I am the LORD. I have drawn my sword from its sheath; it shall not be sheathed again.*

Are the elders of Judah still sitting before Ezekiel wanting a word from him? Will they accuse him of uttering yet another parable when he talks now of the sword?

Whose sword will devastate Judah? God says it is His sword, yet he makes it equally clear later in the chapter that it is the sword of the king of Babylon that will do the work. Until Jesus comes this is the way of the Lord in terms of punishment. He raises up one nation against another when the need arises, but He is the One responsible for the correction that takes place.

Notice here that "the land of Israel", which has already been conquered by the Assyrians, is in the view of Heavenly judgment again, not only the South.

Also worthy of note is that God is going to cut off righteous and wicked. All flesh. The land is so saturated with evil that only a

complete cleansing will do. This is a difficult idea, and Ezekiel 9 has already told us that certain righteous people are to be marked. Does this mean that they will be spared any trouble when judgment falls? No. They will experience a chastisement, and as they are God's remnant, they will survive either in this life or the next.

But we know even in our own dealings with God's judgment today, that when the wicked are plagued or attacked or humiliated in some way, even the righteous are affected. But difficulties of this sort can only serve to make the righteous more righteous. God does not forsake His own.

54. Ezekiel is called to yet another visual portrayal?

21:6-7. "As for you, son of man, groan; with breaking heart and bitter grief, groan before their eyes. And when they say to you, 'Why do you groan?' you shall say, 'Because of the news that it is coming. Every heart will melt, and all hands will be feeble; every spirit will faint, and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it is coming, and it will be fulfilled,'" declares the Lord GOD.

Yes, once more the prophet is asked to personify a future event. Imagine a man walking around town – or is he sitting with the elders in his home? – moaning and groaning, for no obvious reason.

It is hard for people living in comfort to believe bad times are coming. We are confident that life will go on as it has. And when a "prophet of doom" lets us know the truth, we write him off as mad or at least misinformed.

55. What is the significance of a “polished” or “furbished” sword?

21:8-13. And the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord, say: “A sword, a sword is sharpened and also polished, sharpened for slaughter, polished to flash like lightning!

(Or shall we rejoice? You have despised the rod, my son, with everything of wood.) So the sword is given to be polished, that it may be grasped in the hand. It is sharpened and polished to be given into the hand of the slayer. Cry out and wail, son of man, for it is against my people. It is against all the princes of Israel. They are delivered over to the sword with my people. Strike therefore upon your thigh. For it will not be a testing— what could it do if you despise the rod?” declares the Lord GOD.

In the first paragraph, we read of God drawing out the sword from its sheath. Now that sword is being prepared to do what swords must do. For it to be effective, of course a sword must be sharp. But God is after even more for this particular sword. It is to be sharpened so well as to bring a shine that will electrify its opponents. It will be fit perfectly to the soldier’s hand. A perfect sword. For perfect slaughter. The princes of Israel must fall by this sword.

No, says God, this is not some mere disciplinary action, not some warning shot, not an applying of the rod. I have done all of that, and you have despised it. A wooden rod was applied to your back many times, but you shook it off and continued your idolatrous ways. I

now put the wood aside and take to my hand the rod of iron, the polished sword.

56. Why is the sword to come down three times in Ezekiel's dramatization?

21:14-17. "As for you, son of man, prophesy. Clap your hands and let the sword come down twice, yes, three times, the sword for those to be slain. It is the sword for the great slaughter, which surrounds them, that their hearts may melt, and many stumble. At all their gates I have given the glittering sword. Ah, it is made like lightning; it is taken up for slaughter. Cut sharply to the right; set yourself to the left, wherever your face is directed. I also will clap my hands, and I will satisfy my fury; I the LORD have spoken."

Ezekiel is now to portray a swordsman swinging a sword to the left and right, bringing down man after man of Israel. Both Ezekiel and the Lord are to clap their hands, a show of emotion and approbation. God is not shy, as we tend to be, when meting out just punishment on the wicked.

The three times seems to signify swift action, double or even triple the normal speed of execution. Take down one man, no two, no three, quickly, to stun the Israelite forces, and cause them to realize the futility of their defense.

57. Explain the portrayal of a signpost.

21:18-23. *The word of the LORD came to me again: "As for you, son of man, mark two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to come. Both of them shall come from the same land. And make a signpost; make it at the head of the way to a city. Mark a way for the sword to come to Rabbah of the Ammonites and to Judah, into Jerusalem the fortified. For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination. He shakes the arrows; he consults the teraphim; he looks at the liver. Into his right hand comes the divination for Jerusalem, to set battering rams, to open the mouth with murder, to lift up the voice with shouting, to set battering rams against the gates, to cast up mounds, to build siege towers. But to them it will seem like a false divination. They have sworn solemn oaths, but he brings their guilt to remembrance, that they may be taken."*

God knows the end of the battle from the beginning and the beginning from the end. Nebuchadnezzar is headed into the southland. On one side of the Jordan River is Judah. On the other side is Ammon. If that name sounds familiar, it is not only a name we learn as early as Genesis, but it sounds a lot like the capital of modern Jordan. Ammon has been the frequent enemy of Israel. But in the situation before us, the Ammonites have allied themselves to the Jews in resistance to Babylon.

A futile resistance, of course. The giant coming in from the north simply has to decide which pagan entity to wipe out first. This is what is portrayed by the two road signs Ezekiel is to erect. "This way to Ammon" and "this way to Jerusalem."

Nebuchadnezzar is a deeply religious man. We meet him intimately in the book of Daniel, where he is convinced that Daniel's God is certainly the best, if not the only, of the deities out there.

But here we see him consulting everyone but Yahweh, yet being directed by the sovereign will of Yahweh regardless, to come to Judah first. There he prepares for the siege so graphically portrayed by the mini city of Ezekiel, built years before (chapter 4).

The King arrives at his decision by shaking arrows, letting them fall, then looking at the pattern; he consults his portable idols; he looks at the liver of an animal. All point to the right. Jerusalem.

Interesting, the people of the true religion, who have long since apostatized from it, will look at Nebuchadnezzar's crude superstitions and write them off. But God through Nebuchadnezzar will soon starve the city anyway.

58. Who is the one who will come to bring judgment?

21:24-27. "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have made your guilt to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your deeds your sins appear—because you have come to remembrance, you shall be taken in hand. And you, O profane wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come, the time of your final punishment, thus says the Lord GOD: Remove the turban and take off the crown. Things shall not remain as they are. Exalt that which is low, and bring low that which is exalted. A ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it. This also shall not be, until he comes,

the one to whom judgment belongs, and I will give it to him.”

Clearly the “profane wicked one” is Zedekiah. His wickedness is documented in 2 Kings 25 and in portions of Jeremiah. This is the Zedekiah that imprisoned a prophet, burned a portion of God’s Word, rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, tried to escape when God was telling people to submit, and so on.

His day had come. He would see his sons killed. He would be blinded and brought to Babylon, there to die in utter shame.

But the rest of this passage may not be so clear. When the priestly turban and the kingly crown were removed from Zedekiah’s kingdom, that was the end of things for Israel’s sovereign nation under God. Gentiles have ruled since then. So Bible scholars have opined that the one who is to “come with judgment” is none other than Jesus Christ, to whom the kingdom will be given. Genesis 49:10 is seen by many as the reference here:

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”

Benson’s commentary explains it thus:

“It shall never recover its former lustre and dignity; until he come, &c. — Till the Messiah come to take his kingdom. To the same purpose is Lowth’s paraphrase on the verse: ‘After that Zedekiah is deprived of his regal authority, there shall be no more kings of that family till Christ come, the King so often foretold and promised, who in due time shall reign upon the throne of his father David, and of whose kingdom there shall be no end, Luke 1:32-33.’”

Others see only Nebuchadnezzar in the office of conqueror and king. Truly Judah is about to be given into his hands. Perhaps a dual reference?

The final verses of the chapter speak of judgment coming to that other nation under God's wrath, that Nebuchadnezzar took next: Ammon. We will discuss Ammonite judgment and the punishment of other neighboring nations in Part Four.

On to chapter 22, dealing with Israel's shedding of blood.

The Bloody City

59. Why is Ezekiel again being called to enter into God's judging?

22:1-5. And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "And you, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Then declare to her all her abominations. You shall say, Thus says the Lord GOD: A city that sheds blood in her midst, so that her time may come, and that makes idols to defile herself! You have become guilty by the blood that you have shed, and defiled by the idols that you have made, and you have brought your days near, the appointed time of your years has come. Therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all the countries. Those who are near and those who are far from you will mock you; your name is defiled; you are full of tumult."

This is one of several times that Ezekiel is called to sit in judgment with God on the holy city, which has become most unholy. The next chapter records another such incident. To be God's man means to be in perfect agreement with all that God has ever said or will say. Once more we must pause and look at those calling themselves prophets in our own day. Often these men are far from proclaimers of God's Word.

The theme now is blood. Blood being shed by Israelites. Not only is idolatry called out in this passage, but the specific types of idolatry that involve blood.

It is true that a multitude of bloody sacrifices were enjoined upon God's people. Animals were killed by the multiplied thousands on a

regular basis in Judah, and God said not a word when the people were simply obeying His commands to show atonement for sin.

But this is different. The people saw that some of their neighbors were being “blessed” by another sacrifice. These people were offering *their own children* to their false god. The Israelites decided to give it a try. The sky didn’t fall. The rains continued to come. Food continued to appear on their tables. The killing of children must be fine with the God of Heaven.

Weep not for the Jews. Weep for the nations of the world who in our own enlightened day sacrifice the fruit of their womb on abortion tables. In exchange for the killing of their babies, these misled millions receive less responsibility for raising a family, therefore more income, less guilt, more enticement to more sinful lifestyle... and so on.

If the Jews were considered a bloody people, what judgment awaits bloody Americans? Israel will be made a reproach to the nations, says God. It is clear that America is headed in that direction.

The massacre of children was not the only crime in Israel that filled her streets with blood. The blood of prophets and other righteous men befouled her also. And one can only imagine that the normal allotment of murders took place in a culture that had lost its respect for human life. Violence. Treachery.

God will step in and stop this bloodbath with a bloodbath of His own.

60. What other sins had become commonplace in Jerusalem and surroundings?

22:6-12. *“Behold, the princes of Israel in you, everyone according to his power, have been bent on shedding blood. Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you. You have despised my holy things and profaned my Sabbaths. There are men in you who slander to shed blood, and people in you who eat on the mountains; they commit lewdness in your midst. In you men uncover their fathers’ nakedness; in you they violate women who are unclean in their menstrual impurity. One commits abomination with his neighbor’s wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; another in you violates his sister, his father’s daughter. In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take interest and profit and make gain of your neighbors by extortion; but me you have forgotten, declares the Lord GOD.”*

- Evil in the government
- Parents disrespected
- Orphans and widows abused
- Holy things despised
- Sabbath ignored
- False witnesses cause the death of innocents
- Idolatrous practices in the high places

- Sexual perversions of every stripe
- Bribed persons cause more deaths
- Exorbitant interest rates exacted on neighbors
- Above all, they have forgotten God!

Corruption is everywhere. There is nothing worth saving. To allow this to continue will put a blight on the name of God to every generation. The surgery must take place to save the patient. And the Patient is the glory of God.

61. When will Israel be scattered among the nations?

22:13-16. "Behold, I strike my hand at the dishonest gain that you have made, and at the blood that has been in your midst. Can your courage endure, or can your hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with you? I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it. I will scatter you among the nations and disperse you through the countries, and I will consume your uncleanness out of you. And you shall be profaned by your own doing in the sight of the nations, and you shall know that I am the LORD."

Some see another "dual" prophecy here, for Israel has been scattered more than once, and is scattered to this day, though there is a land in the Middle East called "Israel" in our time. God has brought back many Jews, but far from all of them.

Here in this sixth century B.C., God is about to use Babylonian might to scatter the Jews to various parts of the Empire. In the first

century A.D., a similar occurrence took place, which has lasted to modern times. As Jews trickle back to the land, I believe from reading Matthew that their future could well have yet another scattering.

Matthew 24 is thought by most to have reference only to the A.D. 70 scattering. But a careful reading shows that the scattering Jesus is speaking of is connected to a worldwide Tribulation, followed immediately by His return.

Will they be scattered yet again? For, when they return the final time, they will have met the Lord, and they will know Who He is, and Who is His Son. A repentant Israel. Such is the sense of all the restoration passages of Ezekiel and other portions of Holy Writ. Though there are a handful of believers in Israel now, the huge majority is still anti-Jesus and still awaiting a final Trouble that will encompass the world. Definitely, modern day Israel is not a repentant people.

62. Why compare the Israelites to a series of metals?

22:17-22. And the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to me; all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are dross of silver. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have all become dross, therefore, behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As one gathers silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into a furnace, to blow the fire on it in order to melt it, so I will gather you in my anger and in my wrath, and I will put you in and melt you. I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of my wrath,

and you shall be melted in the midst of it. As silver is melted in a furnace, so you shall be melted in the midst of it, and you shall know that I am the LORD; I have poured out my wrath upon you.”

Ezekiel has become famous for his parable-like lessons to the people of the exile community.

Dross is a polite way of saying scum. Waste. Base. Filth. The Pulpit Commentary describes best what Ezekiel is hearing from God:

“In Malachi 3:2, 3 we have the same imagery. Baser metals have been mingled with the silver, and must be burnt out, but there is hope, as well as terror, in the parable. Men throw the mixed metals into the smelting-pot in order that the silver may be separated from the dross and come out pure (comp. 1 Peter 1:7). And this was to be the issue of the ‘fiery trial’ through which Jerusalem and its inhabitants were to pass.”

God’s wrath, the fire.

Disobedient Israel, the scum left over when the fire is finished doing its work.

But, perhaps, a purified Israel is also the refined silver when all the scum is removed? Did Israel learn her lesson once and for all?

63. How does God once more state his case against Israel?

22:23-29. And the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, say to her, You are a land that is not cleansed or rained upon in the day of indignation. The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing

the prey; they have devoured human lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst. Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' when the LORD has not spoken. The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without justice."

The list goes on. The imagery multiplies. Israel's prophets are a roaring lion devouring human lives. Her leaders are likewise violent, as wolves tearing up their prey.

An unclean land. Lies everywhere. Thievery. Violence. Profanity. Confusion. Sabbath breaking. Riches by fraud. Sins whitewashed by religious leaders. False prophecies. Extortion. Poor and needy oppressed. Even travelers visiting Judah are abused.

A litany of evil unsurpassed in human history, when one factors in the truth that God had revealed Himself and His ways more fully to this nation than to any nation on earth. They knew His power. They knew His laws. They had prospered at His hand over and over. Deliverances, victories, special miracles.

All to no avail. The wickedness of human flesh can only be dealt with through the inner workings of the Spirit of God. This is the lesson being taught by the Master Teacher, the schoolmaster that will one day bring remnant Israel and a host of Gentiles too, into that Kingdom that shall never be destroyed.

64. Why does the Lord seem to exclude Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others in his statement here?

23:30-31. "And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them. I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. I have returned their way upon their heads, declares the Lord GOD."

The Lord seems to be talking about a strong political leader here. One who could rise up and call the people to action. The prophets were the voice of God in the land. He is saying that no one heard the prophets. And no wonder. When confronted with sin, personal or national, people tend to be defensive, and denying. Jesus Himself was not able to break through the wickedness of human hearts when He was here.

But upon the return of Jesus, things will be a bit different.

Notice the tense used here when speaking of Israel's destruction. It is such an established fact in God's mind that He can talk about it as though it were already accomplished. Such are all the prophecies of God. He speaks, it is settled.

We now pass over a number of chapters that deal with the judgment of God on surrounding nations. They will be covered in the next part of this series.

One more subject this time, in chapter 34: the false shepherds.

False Shepherds of Israel

65. What is God's problem with the shepherds of Israel?

34:1-6. The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them."

It seems that here the prophet begins to deal with a local problem, then shifts, by the Spirit, into another gear altogether and is speaking about things that have not yet occurred on the earth.

These first six verses are a clear accusation of guilt directed at the shepherds of Israel. We understand that this has nothing to do with keepers of literal sheep. These are the men who were responsible for caring for the spiritual needs of the Jewish people, but who used their position to bring comfort and riches to themselves. Sounds familiar. God is against false shepherds and will replace them.

By working with opposites in the text, we get a picture of what true shepherds, then and now, should look like. We call them pastors or elders today, but the duties are the same:

- Shepherds feed the flock.
- Shepherds do not use the flock to keep themselves warm and comfortable.
- Shepherds strengthen weak sheep.
- Shepherds heal the sick sheep.
- Shepherds dress the wounds of injured sheep.
- Shepherds go after straying sheep.
- Shepherds search for lost sheep.
- Shepherds rule with gentleness and humility.

Shepherds/pastors who do not govern this way cause the sheep to go looking for food elsewhere, with disastrous results.

What a perfect description of the leaders of God's people. Unfortunately, Israel's top men did not meet these requirements, and judgment is pronounced on them.

66. And how will God remedy the shepherd situation?

30:6-10. "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not

searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.”

The worst punishment any pastor – any human – can hear, is “I am against you.” Nothing matters after God has taken this stance. The result of God being against the shepherds:

Fired! You are no longer shepherds. No more will you abuse God’s heritage. I will take your sheep from you and give them to someone else.

The extended fulfillment of this state of affairs will be discussed in the next portion of Ezekiel 34. And because it deals with the restoration of Israel, I have included it in Part Five. Rest assured that the news is good. Ezekiel’s prophecy is filled with some of the worst judgments, but some of the most precious of promises for Israel, and all that is eventually “Israel.”

Next...

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Chapters 21, 25-32, 33, 35, 38-39

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