EZEKIEL

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



The glory of God by the river Chebar, a watchman for a rebellious house, dry bones that live, and a river flowing out from the house of the LORD

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of Ezekiel. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

There were seasons I felt far from God. What brought me back was His love, and the people who loved me and served Him. They did not give up on me. Ezekiel saw God's glory leave the temple and return. God does come back to people who turn back to Him.

Ezekiel is the book of the glory of God. It opens with a priest in exile who sees the heavens opened and the throne of God coming to him in a foreign land. It follows that glory as it leaves the temple in Jerusalem because of sin, and it ends with the same glory coming back to a new temple and a city named "The LORD Is There" (48:35). In between are some of the strangest and most powerful scenes in the Bible: a prophet who lies on his side for over a year, a valley of dry bones that stands up as a living army, a shepherd God who goes looking for His lost sheep, and a promise of a new heart and a new spirit. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on Ezekiel. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand His Word. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in Ezekiel. Ezekiel did not preach in Jerusalem. He preached in Babylon, to Jews who had already been carried away from their land. For the first half of the book, Jerusalem is still standing, and the exiles are sure it will never fall because the temple of the LORD is there. Ezekiel tells them it will fall, and why. Then, in chapter 33, a man who escaped from Jerusalem arrives with the news: "The city has been struck" (33:21). From that point on, the

message turns to hope. If we read the promises of chapters 34 to 48 without the judgments of chapters 1 to 32, we miss how deep God's grace is. If we read only the judgments, we miss that God never gave up on His people Israel.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. Ezekiel is a real prophet who gave real messages on real dates, and this study takes him at his word. That does not mean every picture in the book is a photograph. Ezekiel himself tells us when he is seeing "visions of God" (1:1; 8:3; 40:2), when he is acting out a sign (4:3; 12:6), and when God tells him to "pose a riddle and speak a parable" (17:2). When the text says it is a vision, a sign or a parable, I read it that way, and I let the text explain its own pictures, as it usually does ("these bones are all the house of Israel," 37:11). When the text gives a plain promise, such as bringing Israel back to its own land, giving them one king, and putting God's sanctuary in their midst forever (37:21-28), I take it as a plain promise that God will keep. Those promises were made to Israel, and I believe God will keep them to Israel, as Paul says (Romans 11:25-29). A note on the name of God: in the SLB, when you see "LORD" in capital letters, it stands for God's personal name, Yahweh (often written YHWH), which He made known to Moses (Exodus 3:14-15). When you see "Lord" in regular letters, it translates a word that means master. Ezekiel's favorite way to begin a message is "Thus says the Lord GOD." There the Hebrew puts the two together, master and Yahweh, and the SLB prints the second one as "GOD" in capitals so the word LORD is not repeated. When you see "God," it usually translates Elohim, the general Hebrew word for God.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Hebrew, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Ezekiel has 48 chapters, so here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: forty-eight weeks, or about a year. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background together.
- A faster pace of twenty-five weeks, keeping chapters that belong together in the same meeting: chapter 1 on its own; then 2 and 3 (the call); 4 and 5 (the siege acted out); 6

and 7; 8 and 9 (the temple vision begins); 10 and 11 (the glory leaves); 12 and 13; 14 and 15; chapter 16 on its own; 17 and 18; 19 and 20; 21 and 22; 23 and 24; 25 and 26; 27 and 28 (Tyre); 29 and 30; 31 and 32 (Egypt); 33 and 34; 35 and 36; chapter 37 on its own; 38 and 39 (Gog); 40 to 42 (the temple measured); 43 and 44 (the glory returns); 45 and 46; and 47 and 48 (the river and the land).

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of Ezekiel are hard to read, and a leader should look at them ahead of time. In chapter 4 God tells Ezekiel to bake his bread over dung as a sign of the unclean food of exile (4:12-15). In chapter 5 and elsewhere the prophet speaks of the horrors of a city under siege, including famine so terrible that parents and children turn on each other (5:10). In chapter 9, men with weapons go through Jerusalem in a vision, and judgment begins at God's own sanctuary (9:5-7). In chapters 16 and 23, God pictures Jerusalem and Samaria as unfaithful wives, and the language is strong because their sin was ugly. I explain that imagery plainly and modestly, without dwelling on details, and I do not think those chapters should be read aloud in a group with young children present without a word from the leader first. In chapter 24, Ezekiel's wife dies and he is told not to mourn in public (24:15-27). Chapters 38 and 39 describe the future invasion of Israel by Gog and the slaughter of his armies, and chapters 40 to 48 describe a future temple with priests and sacrifices, which raises honest questions I try to answer carefully when we get there. Some people in your group may have lost a husband or wife, lived through war, been betrayed in marriage, or been hurt by people who used God's name to justify cruelty. Be ready to listen. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of Ezekiel. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of Ezekiel

Ezekiel is the twenty-sixth book of the Bible. It is one of the Major Prophets of the Old Testament, along with Isaiah, Jeremiah (with Lamentations) and Daniel. They are called major because their books are long, not because their message matters more than the twelve shorter prophets. In our Bibles Ezekiel sits between Lamentations and Daniel.

In Israel's history, Ezekiel belongs to the exile. Solomon's kingdom had split about 930 B.C. The northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. The southern kingdom of Judah lasted longer, but it too turned to idols. Babylon took the first captives from Jerusalem in 605 B.C., Daniel among them. In 597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar took King Jehoiachin and about ten thousand of the leading people of Judah to Babylon (2 Kings 24:10-16), and Ezekiel was one of them. Five years later, in 593 B.C., God called him to be a prophet by the river Chebar. He preached through the last years of Jerusalem, through its fall in 586 B.C., and on into the long years of exile. His last dated message comes in 571 B.C. (29:17). While Ezekiel spoke to the exiles in Babylon, Jeremiah was preaching the same warnings in Jerusalem, and Daniel was serving in the court of the king of Babylon.

The great theme of Ezekiel is that God will make Himself known. The words "you shall know that I am the LORD," or "they shall know that I am the LORD," come again and again, more than sixty times. God will be known by His judgment on Judah's sin, by His judgment on the nations around her, and most of all by bringing His people Israel home, cleansing them, and living among them forever. Alongside that runs the story of the glory of the LORD: seen in Babylon (chapter 1), leaving the temple (chapters 10 and 11), and coming back (chapter 43). At the heart of the promises is a new heart:

Ezekiel 36:26 (SLB)

"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh."

Ezekiel has 48 chapters and 1,273 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Ezekiel's Call (chapters 1 to 3)

- Chapter 1: The Vision of the Glory of God
- Chapter 2: The Call of Ezekiel
- Chapter 3: The Scroll and the Watchman

Part Two: Judgment on Jerusalem and Judah (chapters 4 to 24)

- Chapter 4: The Siege of Jerusalem Acted Out
- Chapter 5: The Sword, the Razor and the Hair
- Chapter 6: Against the Mountains of Israel
- Chapter 7: The End Has Come

- Chapter 8: Abominations in the Temple
- Chapter 9: The Mark on the Foreheads
- Chapter 10: The Glory Leaves the Temple
- Chapter 11: The Wicked Leaders and the Promise of a New Heart
- Chapter 12: The Exile Acted Out
- Chapter 13: Against the False Prophets
- Chapter 14: Idols in the Heart, and Noah, Daniel and Job
- Chapter 15: The Useless Vine
- Chapter 16: Jerusalem the Unfaithful Wife
- Chapter 17: The Two Eagles and the Cedar
- Chapter 18: The Soul Who Sins Shall Die
- Chapter 19: A Lament for the Princes of Israel
- Chapter 20: Israel's History of Rebellion
- Chapter 21: The Sword of the LORD
- Chapter 22: The City of Bloodshed
- Chapter 23: The Two Sisters, Oholah and Oholibah
- Chapter 24: The Boiling Pot and the Death of Ezekiel's Wife

Part Three: Judgment on the Nations (chapters 25 to 32)

- Chapter 25: Against Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia
- Chapter 26: Against Tyre
- Chapter 27: A Lament over Tyre
- Chapter 28: The King of Tyre and the Judgment of Sidon
- Chapter 29: Against Pharaoh and Egypt
- Chapter 30: The Day of the LORD on Egypt
- Chapter 31: Pharaoh the Fallen Cedar
- Chapter 32: A Lament over Pharaoh

Part Four: The Restoration of Israel (chapters 33 to 39)

- Chapter 33: The Watchman and the News of Jerusalem's Fall
- Chapter 34: The Shepherds of Israel and the Good Shepherd
- Chapter 35: Against Mount Seir
- Chapter 36: A New Heart and a New Spirit
- Chapter 37: The Valley of Dry Bones
- Chapter 38: Gog of the Land of Magog
- Chapter 39: The Defeat of Gog

Part Five: The New Temple and the Land (chapters 40 to 48)

- Chapter 40: The Vision of the New Temple
- Chapter 41: The Temple Building
- Chapter 42: The Priests' Chambers and the Temple Wall
- Chapter 43: The Glory Returns
- Chapter 44: The Prince, the Levites and the Priests
- Chapter 45: The Holy Portion and the Offerings
- Chapter 46: Worship in the Kingdom
- Chapter 47: The River from the Temple and the Borders of the Land
- Chapter 48: The Division of the Land and the City Named The LORD Is There

Where this book points to Christ: God calls Ezekiel "son of man" over ninety times. In Ezekiel it means a mere human being standing before the glory of God. Jesus took "Son of Man" as His own favorite name for Himself, mostly from Daniel 7:13, where one like a son of man receives an everlasting kingdom. The Son of Man is both truly human and the King from heaven. Ezekiel promises a tender shoot that God Himself will plant on the high mountain of Israel (17:22-24), a ruler to come to whom the right to judge belongs (21:27), and one Shepherd, "My servant David," over God's people forever (34:23; 37:24-25). Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11), and He is the Son of David who will sit on David's throne (Luke 1:32-33). The glory that left the temple came back in a body when "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory" (John 1:14), and that glory will fill the house of God again when He returns (43:1-5). The new heart and new spirit of 36:25-27 stand behind Jesus' words to Nicodemus that a man must be born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). And the river that flows out of the temple and makes everything live (47:1-12) points ahead to the river of the water of life that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22:1-2).

Background of the Book

Author: Ezekiel the son of Buzi, a priest (1:3). His name means God strengthens, or God makes hard, which fits the forehead "like diamond" God gave him (3:8-9). Almost the whole book is written in the first person ("I saw," "the word of the LORD came to me"), and its dated messages run in order. Jewish and Christian tradition have always held that Ezekiel wrote it. Some modern critical scholars have argued that later editors added or rearranged large parts, especially the temple vision of chapters 40 to 48. Most scholars today, conservative and many others, see the book as the work of one man, with one style and one plan from beginning to end. I take it as it presents itself: the words of Ezekiel, recorded by Ezekiel.

Who it was written to: The Jewish exiles in Babylon, whom God calls "the house of Israel" and, again and again, "a house of rebellion" (2:5). Many of the messages are about Jerusalem and were meant to be heard by the exiles, whose hopes were all tied to that city. Later messages speak to the nations around Israel and to the people of Israel in the last days.

Setting: Ezekiel lived among the exiles at Tel-abib by the river Chebar (1:1; 3:15). The Chebar is usually identified with a large canal near the city of Nippur, southeast of Babylon. The exiles were not slaves in chains. They lived in their own settlements, built houses and had elders, just as Jeremiah told them to (Jeremiah 29:4-7). Ezekiel had a house and a wife (8:1; 24:18), and the elders came to his house to hear from him (8:1; 14:1; 20:1). Several of his visions carried him in the Spirit to Jerusalem (8:3; 11:24) and later to the land of Israel in the age to come (40:2).

Ezekiel the priest: Ezekiel was a priest of the line of Zadok, or close to it. That explains why the temple, the glory, holiness, clean and unclean, and the Sabbaths fill his book. A priest was a man from the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron who served God at the altar, offered the sacrifices, and taught the people the difference between holy and common (44:23). Ezekiel would have expected to serve in the temple in Jerusalem. Instead, God made him a prophet in a foreign land, and he saw the glory of God there.

When it was written: During the exile, between 593 B.C. and about 571 B.C. The messages were given over those twenty-two years, and Ezekiel likely gathered them in their present order near the end of that time.

When the events happened: Ezekiel dates his messages by the year of King Jehoiachin's exile (1:2), which began in 597 B.C. The first year of that exile is about 597 B.C., so the fifth year is about 593 B.C., and so on. Scholars give slightly different conversions to our calendar, depending on when they start each year, so I give these as "about." Here are the dated headings in the book:

- 1:1-2: the fifth year of the exile, fourth month, fifth day: about 593 B.C., Ezekiel's call.
- 8:1: the sixth year, sixth month, fifth day: about 592 B.C., the vision of the temple and the glory leaving (chapters 8 to 11).
- 20:1: the seventh year, fifth month, tenth day: about 591 B.C., the elders come to consult the LORD.

- 24:1: the ninth year, tenth month, tenth day: about 588 B.C., the day the siege of Jerusalem began, the same date given in 2 Kings 25:1.
- 26:1: the eleventh year, first of the month: about 587 or 586 B.C., against Tyre.
- 29:1: the tenth year, tenth month, twelfth day: about 587 B.C., against Egypt.
- 29:17: the twenty-seventh year, first month, first day: about 571 B.C., the latest date in the book.
- 30:20: the eleventh year, first month, seventh day: about 587 B.C.
- 31:1: the eleventh year, third month, first day: about 587 B.C.
- 32:1 and 32:17: the twelfth year: about 585 B.C., two laments over Egypt.
- 33:21: the twelfth year, tenth month, fifth day: about 585 B.C., the escapee arrives with the news "The city has been struck."
- 40:1: the twenty-fifth year of the exile, "the fourteenth year after the city was struck down": about 573 B.C., the vision of the new temple.

Ezekiel 1:1 also mentions "the thirtieth year." Ezekiel does not say what it counts from. Many believe it was his own age, the year a priest would begin to serve (Numbers 4:3).

The kings in Ezekiel's day: Ezekiel names few kings, but these are the kings of Judah in and around his life, with their approximate dates. As in my other studies, I follow the dates worked out by Edwin Thiele and those who built on his work, and I give them as "about."

- Josiah: about 640 to 609 B.C., the last godly king of Judah. Ezekiel was likely born during his reign.
- Jehoahaz: 609 B.C., three months, taken to Egypt (the lion cub of 19:3-4).
- Jehoiakim: about 609 to 598 B.C. In his reign Babylon took the first captives, in 605 B.C.
- Jehoiachin: about 598 to 597 B.C., three months, taken to Babylon with Ezekiel. He lived on in Babylon, and the exiles still counted the years by him.
- Zedekiah: about 597 to 586 B.C., the last king of Judah. Ezekiel calls him "the prince" in Jerusalem (12:10-13). He broke his oath to Nebuchadnezzar, was blinded and taken to Babylon, and the city fell in 586 B.C.
- Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon: about 605 to 562 B.C., the king God used to judge Judah, Tyre and Egypt (26:7; 29:18-19).

Ezekiel's sign acts: More than any other prophet, Ezekiel was told to act out his messages. He built a model of Jerusalem under siege, lay on his side for months, shaved his head with a sword, packed his bags and dug through a wall, and did not mourn his wife in public. God called him "a portent to the house of Israel" (12:6). The people would not listen to words, so God gave them pictures they could not ignore.

Purpose: To explain to the exiles why Jerusalem would fall: not because the LORD was weak or had forgotten them, but because His people had filled His land with idols and violence and had driven Him from His own house. To call each person to turn from sin and live (18:30-32). To warn the nations that the God of Israel rules over them too. And to promise, after the fall, that God

would gather Israel from the nations, give them a new heart and His Spirit, raise up His servant David as their Shepherd and King, defeat their last enemy, and dwell in their midst forever.

Chapter 1: The Vision of the Glory of God

Scripture

1:1-14 And it was in the thirtieth year, in the fourth ***month***, on the fifth ***day*** of the month, and I ***was*** in the midst of the exiles by the river Chebar, ***that*** the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. On the fifth ***day*** of the month, it ***was*** the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin, the word of the LORD surely came to Ezekiel the son of Buzi, the priest, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was on him there. And I saw, and look, a storm wind coming from the north, a great cloud and fire flashing, and brightness ***was*** all around it, and from its midst ***there was something*** like the appearance of the shining substance, from the midst of the fire. And from its midst ***came*** the likeness of four living creatures; and this ***was*** their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. And each one had four faces, and each one of them had four wings. And their feet ***were*** a straight foot, and the sole of their feet ***was*** like the sole of the foot of a calf; and ***they were*** gleaming like the appearance of burnished bronze. And the hands of a man ***were*** under their wings on their four sides; and the four of them had their faces and their wings. Their wings ***were*** touching, each one to another; they did not turn when they went; each one went in the direction of its face. And the likeness of their faces ***was*** the face of a man; and the four of them had the face of a lion on the right ***side***; and the four of them had the face of an ox on the left ***side***; and the four of them had the face of an eagle. And their faces and their wings ***were*** spread out above; each one had two ***wings*** touching one another, and two ***wings*** covering their bodies. And each one went in the direction of its face; wherever the spirit was ***about*** to go, they went; they did not turn when they went. And ***as for*** the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance ***was*** like coals of fire burning, like the appearance of the torches; it was moving about between the living creatures; and the fire ***had*** brightness, and from the fire lightning was going out. And the living creatures were running and returning like the appearance of the flash.

1:15-28 And I saw the living creatures, and look, one wheel ***was*** on the ground beside the living creatures, for ***each of*** its four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their construction ***was*** like the appearance of chrysolite, and the four of them had one likeness; and their appearance and their construction ***were*** as it would be, the wheel in the midst of the wheel. When they went, they went on their four sides; they did not turn when they went. And ***as for*** their rims, they had height, and they had awesomeness; and their rims ***were*** full of eyes all around the four of them. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from on the ground, the wheels were lifted up. Wherever the spirit was ***about*** to go, they went, there the spirit ***was*** to go; and the wheels were lifted up close beside them, for the spirit of the living creature ***was*** in the wheels. When they went, these went; and when they stood still, these stood still; and when they were lifted up from on the ground, the wheels were lifted up close beside them, for the spirit of the living creature ***was*** in the wheels. And ***there was*** a likeness over the heads of the living creature, an expanse like the appearance of the awesome ice, spread out over their heads above. And under the expanse their wings ***were*** straight, each one toward another; each one had two ***wings*** covering them, and each one had two ***wings*** covering them, their bodies. And I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the sound of

the Almighty, when they went, the sound of a tumult like the sound of an army; when they stood still, they let their wings drop. And ***there*** was a voice from above the expanse which ***was*** over their head; when they stood still, they let their wings drop. And above the expanse which ***was*** over their head, like the appearance of a sapphire stone, ***was*** the likeness of a throne; and on the likeness of the throne ***was*** a likeness like the appearance of a man on it, above. And I saw ***something*** like the appearance of shining substance, like the appearance of fire with an enclosure for it all around, from the appearance of His hips and upward; and from the appearance of His hips and downward I saw ***something*** like the appearance of fire, and brightness ***was*** all around Him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of the rain, so ***was*** the appearance of the brightness all around. That ***was*** the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And I saw ***it***, and I fell on my face, and I heard a voice speaking.

Chapter 1 Preview

Ezekiel's book opens far from home. He is a young priest who should have been serving in the temple in Jerusalem, but he is sitting among the exiles by a canal in Babylon. There, in the fifth year of the exile, the heavens open. A storm comes out of the north, and in it Ezekiel sees four living creatures, wheels full of eyes, a crystal platform, and above it all a throne with One on it who looks like a man, wrapped in fire and surrounded by a rainbow. It is "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD" (1:28).

This is one of the hardest chapters in the Bible to picture, and Ezekiel himself struggles to describe it. He keeps saying "like" and "the appearance of" because what he saw was bigger than his words. The main point is not hard, though. God had not stayed behind in Jerusalem. He was on the move, His throne came to His people in exile, and He was coming to judge and, in the end, to save. As we read, we will not try to draw a blueprint of every wing and wheel. We will look for what the vision teaches about who God is.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1-3 *And it was in the thirtieth year, in the fourth **month**, on the fifth **day** of the month, and I **was** in the midst of the exiles by the river Chebar, **that** the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. On the fifth **day** of the month, it **was** the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin, the word of the LORD surely came to Ezekiel the son of Buzi, the priest, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was on him there.*

Ezekiel gives us the date, the place and the man. "The thirtieth year" is not explained. Many believe it was Ezekiel's own age. A priest began his full service at thirty (Numbers 4:3). The very year Ezekiel should have put on the priest's robes in Jerusalem, God met him in Babylon instead.

Verse 2 ties the date to the calendar the exiles used: "the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin." Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon in 597 B.C., with Ezekiel and about ten thousand others (2 Kings 24:12-16). The fifth year is about 593 B.C. Jerusalem was still standing. Zedekiah was on the throne there, and most of the exiles thought they would be home soon.

Ezekiel was "in the midst of the exiles by the river Chebar." The Chebar was likely a large canal near the city of Nippur. Psalm 137 shows us how the exiles felt by the waters of Babylon: they sat and wept. That is where God showed up. "The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God."

Then Ezekiel names himself: "Ezekiel the son of Buzi, the priest." He adds two phrases that run through the whole book. "The word of the LORD surely came" to him, so this is not his opinion. And "the hand of the LORD was on him there." The hand of the LORD means God's power taking hold of a man to make him see and speak (3:14, 22; 8:1; 37:1; 40:1).

Do you ever feel that God is far away from where you are? The exiles did. Ezekiel's first lesson is that there is no place on earth too far for God to reach, and no exile so deep that His word cannot come there.

1:4 *And I saw, and look, a storm wind coming from the north, a great cloud and fire flashing, and brightness **was** all around it, and from its midst **there was something** like the appearance of the shining substance, from the midst of the fire.*

The vision begins with "a storm wind coming from the north, a great cloud and fire flashing." In the Old Testament, God often comes in storm, cloud and fire: at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-18), to Elijah (1 Kings 19:11-12), and in the Psalms (Psalm 18:9-13). The north was also the direction from which Babylon's armies would come against Jerusalem (Jeremiah 1:14). The storm Ezekiel sees is not a weather report. It is God Himself coming, and coming in judgment.

At the center was something "like the appearance of the shining substance." The Hebrew word here is hashmal, and no one is sure exactly what it was. Some think of polished amber, others of glowing metal. Ezekiel uses it only for the brightness around God (1:27; 8:2). Whatever its exact meaning, it was a light too bright to look at for long.

1:5-9 *And from its midst **came** the likeness of four living creatures; and this **was** their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. And each one had four faces, and each one of them had four wings. And their feet **were** a straight foot, and the sole of their feet **was** like the sole of the foot of a calf; and **they were** gleaming like the appearance of burnished bronze. And the hands of a man **were** under their wings on their four sides; and the four of them had their faces and their wings. Their wings **were** touching, each one to another; they did not turn when they went; each one went in the direction of its face.*

Out of the fire came "the likeness of four living creatures." Ezekiel is careful. He does not say they were men. He says "they had the likeness of a man," which most likely means they stood upright, with a body shaped somewhat like a man's. In chapter 10 he tells us what they were: cherubim (10:15, 20).

What are cherubim? They are a high order of angels who are always pictured near the throne and presence of God. Cherubim guarded the way to the tree of life after Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3:24). Two golden cherubim were made on top of the ark of the covenant, the gold-covered chest that held the tablets of the law in the Most Holy Place, with their wings spread over the mercy seat (Exodus 25:18-22). God is often called the One who sits enthroned above the

cherubim (Psalm 80:1; 99:1). Cherubim are not chubby babies with bows and arrows. They are fearsome, powerful servants who guard the holiness of God.

Each one "had four faces" and "four wings." Their legs were straight, their feet were "like the sole of the foot of a calf," and they gleamed "like the appearance of burnished bronze." They had human hands under their wings. Their wings touched one another, and "they did not turn when they went; each one went in the direction of its face." With a face looking every way, they never had to turn around. Wherever God sent them, they were already facing that way.

1:10-11 *And the likeness of their faces **was** the face of a man; and the four of them had the face of a lion on the right **side**; and the four of them had the face of an ox on the left **side**; and the four of them had the face of an eagle. And their faces and their wings **were** spread out above; each one had two **wings** touching one another, and two **wings** covering their bodies.*

Now Ezekiel describes the four faces: the face of a man in front, a lion on the right, an ox on the left, and an eagle. Many Bible teachers have seen in these four the best of God's creation. The lion is the king of wild beasts. The ox is the strongest of the tame animals. The eagle rules the sky. Man is the crown of creation. All of them, at their highest, serve the throne of God. Nothing in creation is so strong or so noble that it does not bow before Him.

John saw four living creatures around the throne in heaven, too: "the first living creature was like a lion, and the second living creature like a calf, and the third living creature having the face as a man, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle" (Revelation 4:7). John's creatures each have one face and six wings, and they cry out "Holy" day and night, like the seraphim of Isaiah 6. Ezekiel's have four faces and four wings. Are they the same beings? Some teachers think so, and others think they are different orders of angels with similar features. Either way, the point is the same in both books: the throne of God is surrounded by living creatures who serve Him and give Him glory.

Some Christians since the early church have also linked the four faces with the four Gospels, which show Jesus as King (Matthew, the lion), Servant (Mark, the ox), Man (Luke) and the Son of God from above (John, the eagle). That is a picture some have found helpful, but Scripture does not make that link itself, so I would not build anything on it.

Two wings were spread out touching the next creature, and "two wings covering their bodies." Even these mighty beings cover themselves in the presence of God.

1:12-14 *And each one went in the direction of its face; wherever the spirit was **about** to go, they went; they did not turn when they went. And **as for** the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance **was** like coals of fire burning, like the appearance of the torches; it was moving about between the living creatures; and the fire **had** brightness, and from the fire lightning was going out. And the living creatures were running and returning like the appearance of the flash.*

"Wherever the spirit was about to go, they went." The creatures moved as one, under one will. The word for spirit can also mean wind or breath. Here it is the spirit that moved the creatures, the same spirit that is "in the wheels" (1:20). Whether Ezekiel means the Holy Spirit Himself or the

life and will of the creatures moving at God's command, the point is that they did nothing on their own. They went where they were sent.

Their appearance was "like coals of fire burning, like the appearance of the torches." Fire moved back and forth among them, and lightning flashed from it. They "were running and returning like the appearance of the flash." These are not slow, heavy beings. They move like lightning. When God gives a command, it is carried out at once.

That says something to us. The angels obey God instantly and completely. Jesus taught us to pray, "let Your will come about, as in heaven, also on the earth" (Matthew 6:10). We are asking God to make us as quick to obey as His servants in heaven.

1:15-18 *And I saw the living creatures, and look, one wheel **was** on the ground beside the living creatures, for **each of** its four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their construction **was** like the appearance of chrysolite, and the four of them had one likeness; and their appearance and their construction **were** as it would be, the wheel in the midst of the wheel. When they went, they went on their four sides; they did not turn when they went. And **as for** their rims, they had height, and they had awesomeness; and their rims **were** full of eyes all around the four of them.*

Next Ezekiel sees wheels, "one wheel was on the ground beside the living creatures." The wheels gleamed "like the appearance of chrysolite," a yellow or green precious stone, and they were made "the wheel in the midst of the wheel." That most likely means two wheels set crosswise inside each other, like a gyroscope, so they could roll in any of four directions without turning. That is why Ezekiel says again, "they did not turn when they went."

The rims were tall and "they had awesomeness," and they were "full of eyes all around." What do the eyes mean? Scripture often uses eyes to picture God's knowledge. "In every place are the eyes of the LORD, watching evil ones and good ones" (Proverbs 15:3). The wheels are part of God's throne-chariot (1 Chronicles 28:18 calls the cherubim over the ark "the chariot"). This throne can go anywhere, and it sees everything.

The people of Judah thought God lived in the temple in Jerusalem and nowhere else. Many of the nations around them believed each god ruled only his own land. Ezekiel's vision blows that idea apart. The throne of God has wheels. It came to Babylon. God is not tied to one building or one country. He sees all, and He goes where He wills.

1:19-21 *And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from on the ground, the wheels were lifted up. Wherever the spirit was **about** to go, they went, there the spirit **was** to go; and the wheels were lifted up close beside them, for the spirit of the living creature **was** in the wheels. When they went, these went; and when they stood still, these stood still; and when they were lifted up from on the ground, the wheels were lifted up close beside them, for the spirit of the living creature **was** in the wheels.*

The wheels moved with the living creatures. When the creatures went, the wheels went. When the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose too. When they stood still, the wheels stood

still. Why? "For the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels." The whole vision, creatures, wheels and all, moved as one living thing under one direction.

Ezekiel repeats himself in these verses, and that is on purpose. Hebrew writing often repeats to drive a point home. He wants us to see that there is perfect unity and order around the throne of God. Nothing pulls in a different direction. God's purposes do not get stuck, and they do not fall apart.

We live in a world that often feels like it is out of control. Ezekiel's world certainly did. His king was in prison, his city was about to be destroyed, and he was living in a refugee camp. Yet he saw a throne that moved with perfect order and purpose. God was not shaken by Babylon. He is not shaken by what shakes us.

1:22-25 *And **there was** a likeness over the heads of the living creature, an expanse like the appearance of the awesome ice, spread out over their heads above. And under the expanse their wings **were** straight, each one toward another; each one had two **wings** covering them, and each one had two **wings** covering them, their bodies. And I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty, when they went, the sound of a tumult like the sound of an army; when they stood still, they let their wings drop. And **there** was a voice from above the expanse which **was** over their head; when they stood still, they let their wings drop.*

Over the heads of the living creatures was "an expanse like the appearance of the awesome ice." The word for expanse is the same word used for the sky in Genesis 1:6-8. It was a platform, clear and shining like crystal, spread out over the creatures. Under it their wings were stretched out straight.

Then Ezekiel heard the sound of their wings: "like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty." It was a roar like a waterfall or the ocean, like a great army on the march. Later Ezekiel will hear the voice of God Himself as "the sound of many waters" when the glory returns (43:2), and John heard the risen Jesus speak with a voice "like the sound of many waters" (Revelation 1:15).

Then "there was a voice from above the expanse." When the voice spoke, the creatures stood still and lowered their wings. All the motion, all the noise, all the power stopped, because God was speaking. That is the right response to the voice of God. Everything else goes quiet, and we listen.

1:26-27 *And above the expanse which **was** over their head, like the appearance of a sapphire stone, **was** the likeness of a throne; and on the likeness of the throne **was** a likeness like the appearance of a man on it, above. And I saw **something** like the appearance of shining substance, like the appearance of fire with an enclosure for it all around, from the appearance of His hips and upward; and from the appearance of His hips and downward I saw **something** like the appearance of fire, and brightness **was** all around Him.*

Now Ezekiel looks above the platform, and this is the high point of the vision. There was "the likeness of a throne," like "a sapphire stone," and on the throne was "a likeness like the appearance of a man on it, above."

Notice how carefully Ezekiel words this. He does not say he saw God plainly. He saw a likeness, an appearance, something like a man. He is reverent and careful, and we should be too. No one can see God the Father in His full glory and live (Exodus 33:20; John 1:18). Yet God chose to show Himself to Ezekiel in a form like a man, seated on a throne.

From His waist up, Ezekiel saw something like glowing hashmal, like fire all around. From His waist down, he saw something like fire, and "brightness was all around Him." Ezekiel cannot describe a face. All he can see is fire and light.

Who was the One on the throne? Many Bible teachers believe this was the Son of God, appearing in the likeness of a man long before He took on flesh in Bethlehem. The New Testament tells us that the Son is "the radiance of the glory" of God (Hebrews 1:3), that no one has seen God at any time but the only begotten Son has made Him known (John 1:18), and that when Isaiah saw the Lord on His throne, "Isaiah said these things when he saw His glory, and he spoke concerning Him," that is, concerning Jesus (John 12:41). When John saw the risen Christ, he saw Him with eyes like a flame of fire, feet like fine bronze, and a voice like many waters (Revelation 1:13-15), very close to what Ezekiel saw. So I believe it is right to see the Son pictured here, as many teachers do, while being careful not to say more than the text says. What we can say plainly is that the God of the throne chose to show Himself in the likeness of a man, and in the fullness of time He became a man in Jesus Christ.

1:28 *Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of the rain, so **was** the appearance of the brightness all around. That **was** the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And I saw **it**, and I fell on my face, and I heard a voice speaking.*

Around the One on the throne was a brightness "like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of the rain." A rainbow. John saw the same thing in heaven: "a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like emeralds" (Revelation 4:3). After the flood, God set His bow in the cloud as the sign of His covenant promise never again to destroy the earth by water (Genesis 9:12-17). At the very center of a vision full of fire and judgment, there is a reminder of mercy. God was about to judge Jerusalem, but He had not forgotten His promises.

Then Ezekiel gives us the meaning of the whole vision in one sentence: "That was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD." The Hebrew word for glory, kabod, carries the idea of weight. God's glory is the shining out of who He really is, His holiness, His majesty, His worth. Ezekiel had seen it.

How did he respond? "I fell on my face." Every person in Scripture who truly sees the glory of God does the same. Isaiah cried out, "Woe to me!" (Isaiah 6:5). John fell at Jesus' feet as if dead (Revelation 1:17). Seeing God as He is humbles us. It does not make us proud of our spiritual experience. It puts us on our faces.

And then "I heard a voice speaking." The vision was not given for its own sake. It was given so Ezekiel would be ready to listen. In chapter 2 that voice will call him to his work.

What does this chapter mean for us? We will not see what Ezekiel saw, and we do not need to. Paul tells us that God has shone in our hearts to give "the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). The glory Ezekiel saw in fire, we now see in the face of Jesus. And one day every believer will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

Chapter 1 Summary

In the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile, about 593 B.C., Ezekiel the priest was by the river Chebar in Babylon when the heavens opened and he saw visions of God. A storm came from the north with fire and cloud. In it were four living creatures, later named cherubim, each with four faces (man, lion, ox and eagle), four wings and human hands, moving like lightning wherever the spirit went. Beside them were wheels within wheels, gleaming and full of eyes, that moved with the creatures in any direction. Over them was a crystal expanse, and above it a throne like sapphire, with One on it in the likeness of a man, surrounded by fire and by a brightness like a rainbow. Many see in Him the Son of God before His birth. It was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD, and Ezekiel fell on his face and heard a voice speaking. The vision teaches that God is not tied to Jerusalem, that He sees all and rules all, and that He came to His people even in exile.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. Where was Ezekiel, and who was he with, when the heavens opened? (1:1-3)

2. What did Ezekiel see coming out of the north, and where else in Scripture does God come in storm and fire? (1:4)

3. Describe the four faces of the living creatures. What do you think they teach about God's creation and His throne? (1:10)

4. How did the living creatures and the wheels move, and what does that teach about God's purposes? (1:12, 19-21)

5. What did the eyes on the wheels show about God? (1:18; Proverbs 15:3)

6. What happened to the creatures when the voice spoke from above the expanse? (1:24-25)

7. How does Ezekiel describe the One on the throne, and why do you think he is so careful with his words? (1:26-27)

8. What does the rainbow around the throne remind us of? (1:28; Genesis 9:12-17; Revelation 4:3)

9. The exiles felt far from God. When have you felt that way, and what does this chapter say to you about it?

10. Ezekiel fell on his face when he saw God's glory. How does seeing God as He really is change the way you pray and worship? (2 Corinthians 4:6)

Chapter 2: The Call of Ezekiel

Scripture

2:1-10 And He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you." And a spirit came into me when He spoke to me, and it made me stand on my feet; and I heard ***Him*** speaking to me. And He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to nations, the rebelling ***ones*** who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. And the sons ***are*** stern of face and hard of heart; I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' And they, whether they hear or whether they refrain, for they ***are*** a house of rebellion, they will know that a prophet has been in their midst. And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words, for briers and thorns ***are*** with you, and you are dwelling among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words, and do not be dismayed at their faces, for they ***are*** a house of rebellion. And you shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refrain, for they ***are*** rebellious. And you, son of man, hear what I am speaking to you: do not be rebellious like the house of rebellion; open your mouth and eat what I am giving to you." And I looked, and look, a hand ***was*** stretched out to me, and look, in it ***was*** a scroll of a book. And He spread it out before me, and it ***was*** written front and back, and written on it ***were*** lamentations and moaning and woe.

Chapter 2 Preview

Ezekiel is lying face down before the glory of God. Now the voice from the throne speaks to him, and the Spirit lifts him to his feet. God sends him to the people of Israel in exile, and He is honest with him from the start: they are rebellious, stubborn and hard-hearted, and they may not listen. Ezekiel's job is not to make them listen. His job is to speak God's words to them, whether they hear or refuse.

The chapter ends with a hand holding out a scroll, written on both sides with "lamentations and moaning and woe" (2:10). Before Ezekiel can speak God's word, he has to take it in. This short chapter is a model for anyone God calls to speak for Him, and in some way that includes every believer: stand up by God's Spirit, do not be afraid, do not be like the rebels, and say what God says.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1-2 *And He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you." And a spirit came into me when He spoke to me, and it made me stand on my feet; and I heard* ***Him*** *speaking to me.*

"Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you." This is the first of more than ninety times God calls Ezekiel "son of man." In Hebrew, son of man means simply a human being, a mortal. After the blazing vision of chapter 1, the title reminds Ezekiel how small he is. He is dust standing before the throne of the Almighty. God never calls him by his own name in the book. He calls him what he is: a man.

Jesus later took "the Son of Man" as His favorite name for Himself. His use comes mainly from Daniel 7:13, where one like a son of man comes with the clouds of heaven to receive an everlasting kingdom. Ezekiel is a son of man because he is only human. Jesus is the Son of Man because He is truly human and also the King from heaven. It is the same phrase, but Ezekiel and Jesus stand on opposite sides of the throne.

God told Ezekiel to stand, but Ezekiel could not do it on his own. "A spirit came into me when He spoke to me, and it made me stand on my feet." Most teachers take this as the Spirit of God, since in 3:24 and 11:5 the same Spirit fills and moves the prophet. God never gives a command without giving the power to keep it. What He tells us to do, His Spirit enables us to do.

2:3-4 *And He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to nations, the rebelling **ones** who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. And the sons **are** stern of face and hard of heart; I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.'*

God sent Ezekiel "to the sons of Israel, to nations, the rebelling ones who have rebelled against Me." Notice the strong word "nations." That was the word usually used for the Gentile peoples. God is saying that His own people have become like the pagan nations around them. And their rebellion was nothing new: "they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day."

The people Ezekiel would speak to were "stern of face and hard of heart." They were stubborn on the outside and on the inside. These were not people who had never heard of God. They had the law, the temple, the prophets and the history of God's mercy. Their problem was not lack of knowledge. It was a hard heart.

Ezekiel's message would always begin the same way: "Thus says the Lord GOD." A prophet was someone God chose to speak His words to the people. He was God's mouthpiece, not the author of his own message. That one phrase gave Ezekiel his authority, and it also kept him humble. He was not sent to share his opinions. He was sent to deliver a message from the King.

2:5 *And they, whether they hear or whether they refrain, for they **are** a house of rebellion, they will know that a prophet has been in their midst.*

"And they, whether they hear or whether they refrain, for they are a house of rebellion, they will know that a prophet has been in their midst."

This verse sets the measure of success for Ezekiel's whole ministry. Success was not counted by how many people listened. It was counted by whether Ezekiel was faithful. If they listened, good. If they refused, they would still know that a prophet had been among them. No one would be able to say God never warned them.

That is a freeing truth for anyone who shares the gospel or teaches God's Word. We are not responsible for how people respond. We are responsible to speak the truth in love and leave the results to God. Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6).

"House of rebellion" will become one of Ezekiel's most common names for Israel. It appears again and again in these first chapters (2:6, 8; 3:9, 26, 27). It is a hard name, but it was true.

2:6-7 *And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words, for briers and thorns **are** with you, and you are dwelling among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words, and do not be dismayed at their faces, for they **are** a house of rebellion. And you shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refrain, for they **are** rebellious.*

Three times in one verse God tells Ezekiel not to be afraid. "Do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words," because "briers and thorns are with you, and you are dwelling among scorpions." Briers and thorns scratch and tear. Scorpions sting. God is telling Ezekiel ahead of time that his own people will hurt him. They will mock him, resist him and make his life painful.

Why tell him this? Because a man who expects opposition is not knocked down when it comes. Jesus did the same with His disciples: "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before you" (John 15:18). God does not promise His servants an easy road. He promises to be with them on the hard one.

The command in verse 7 is simple: "And you shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refrain." Not Ezekiel's words. Not softer words to make them like him. God's words. The pressure on any preacher, teacher or Christian friend is to soften the message so people will accept it. God tells Ezekiel to say what He says and leave it there.

2:8 *And you, son of man, hear what I am speaking to you: do not be rebellious like the house of rebellion; open your mouth and eat what I am giving to you."*

Now God turns the warning on Ezekiel himself: "do not be rebellious like the house of rebellion." It would be easy to read this chapter and think the problem is only "them." But the same hard heart that was in Israel could take root in the prophet too. Ezekiel had to obey before he could call anyone else to obey.

The test of his obedience comes right away: "open your mouth and eat what I am giving to you." Ezekiel did not yet know what God was going to give him. He had to agree to obey before he saw it. That is what real obedience is. We do not tell God to show us first so we can decide. We say yes, and then He shows us.

There is a word here for every believer. It is easy to see the rebellion in other people, in our culture or in other churches. The harder question is whether I am listening to God myself. Before I warn anyone else, am I doing what He has told me?

2:9-10 *And I looked, and look, a hand **was** stretched out to me, and look, in it **was** a scroll of a book. And He spread it out before me, and it **was** written front and back, and written on it **were** lamentations and moaning and woe.*

A hand stretched out toward Ezekiel, and in it was "a scroll of a book." Books in Ezekiel's day were long strips of leather or papyrus, rolled up. God unrolled it in front of him, and "it was written

front and back." Scrolls were usually written on one side only. This one was full on both sides. There was no room left to add anything. God's message was complete.

What was written on it? "Lamentations and moaning and woe." That was the content of Ezekiel's first message: grief, mourning and judgment. Before Jerusalem fell, Ezekiel would have very little good news to give. The good news would come later, after the fall (chapters 33 to 48). But it could not come first. People have to see their sin and its cost before they will welcome a Savior.

John was given a scroll to eat in Revelation 10:8-11, and it too was sweet in his mouth and bitter afterward, a message of judgment on the earth. Both prophets had to take God's word into themselves before they could speak it to others. In chapter 3, Ezekiel will eat this scroll.

Chapter 2 Summary

The voice from the throne called Ezekiel "son of man," a reminder that he was only human, and the Spirit entered him and set him on his feet. God sent him to the sons of Israel, a rebellious people, hard of face and heart, just like their fathers. His task was to say, "Thus says the Lord GOD," whether they listened or refused, so that they would know a prophet had been among them. God told him three times not to be afraid, even though the people would be like thorns and scorpions to him, and warned him not to be rebellious himself. Then a hand held out a scroll written on both sides with lamentations, moaning and woe, and God told Ezekiel to open his mouth and eat what He gave him.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. What did God call Ezekiel, and what does that name mean? (2:1)

2. How was Ezekiel able to stand up when God told him to? (2:2)

3. How does God describe the people Ezekiel was sent to? (2:3-4)

4. What would show that Ezekiel's ministry was a success, even if no one listened? (2:5)

5. What did God compare the people to, and what did He tell Ezekiel not to do? (2:6)

6. What warning did God give Ezekiel about himself? (2:8)

7. What was written on the scroll, and why was it written on both sides? (2:9-10)

8. How is the title "son of man" for Ezekiel different from the way Jesus uses "the Son of Man"? (Daniel 7:13)

9. Have you ever been afraid to say what God's Word says because of how people might react? What does this chapter say to you about that?

10. It is easy to see rebellion in others. Is there an area of your life where God has spoken and you have not yet obeyed? (2:8)

Chapter 3: The Scroll and the Watchman

Scripture

3:1-15 And He said to me, "Son of man, what you find, eat; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." And I opened my mouth, and He made me eat this scroll. And He said to me, "Son of man, make your belly eat, and fill your inward parts ***with*** this scroll which I am giving to you." And I ate ***it***, and it was in my mouth like honey for sweetness. And He said to me, "Son of man, go, come to the house of Israel, and you shall speak with My words to them. For not to a people deep of lip and heavy of tongue are you sent, ***but*** to the house of Israel; not to many peoples deep of lip and heavy of tongue, whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I had sent you to them, they would listen to you. And the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to Me; for all the house of Israel ***are*** hard of forehead and stern of heart. Look, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their forehead. Like diamond, harder than flint, I have made your forehead. You shall not fear them, and you shall not be dismayed at their faces, for they ***are*** a house of rebellion." And He said to me, "Son of man, all My words which I will speak to you, take into your heart, and hear with your ears. And go, come to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and you shall speak to them and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' whether they hear or whether they refrain." And a spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a sound of a great rumbling: "Blessed ***be*** the glory of the LORD from His place!" And ***there was*** the sound of the wings of the living creatures touching each one to another, and the sound of the wheels close beside them, and a sound of a great rumbling. And a spirit lifted me up and took me, and I went bitter in the heat of my spirit, and the hand of the LORD was strong on me. And I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who were dwelling by the river Chebar, and I sat ***where*** they were dwelling, and I sat there seven days, appalled, in their midst.

3:16-27 And it was at the end of seven days, and the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; and you shall hear a word from My mouth, and you shall warn them from Me. When I say to the wicked ***man***, 'You shall surely die,' and you do not warn him, and do not speak to warn the wicked ***man*** from his wicked way to keep him alive, that wicked ***man*** shall die in his iniquity, and his blood I will require from your hand. And you, if you warn the wicked ***man***, and he does not turn from his wickedness and from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; and you have delivered your soul. And when a righteous ***man*** turns from his righteousness and does injustice, and I put a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not warn him, he shall die in his sin, and his ***acts of*** righteousness which he did shall not be remembered; and his blood I will require from your hand. And you, if you warn him, the righteous ***man***, that the righteous ***man*** should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he was warned; and you have delivered your soul." And the hand of the LORD was on me there, and He said to me, "Arise, go out to the plain, and there I will speak with you." And I arose and went out to the plain, and look, there ***was*** the glory of the LORD standing, like the glory which I had seen by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face. And a spirit came into me and made me stand on my feet, and He spoke with me and said to me, "Go, shut yourself in the midst of your house. And you, son of man, look, they will put ropes on you and bind you with them, and you shall not go out in their midst. And I will make your tongue cling

to your palate, and you shall be mute, and you shall not be to them a reproving man, for they ***are*** a house of rebellion. And when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' The ***one*** hearing, let him hear; and the ***one*** refraining, let him refrain; for they ***are*** a house of rebellion."

Chapter 3 Preview

Ezekiel eats the scroll, and it tastes like honey. God makes his forehead as hard as diamond so he can stand against a hard people. Then the Spirit carries him back to the exiles at Tel-abib, and he sits among them for seven days, stunned by what he has seen and heard.

At the end of the seven days, God gives Ezekiel his job title: "a watchman for the house of Israel" (3:17). A watchman stood on the city wall and warned the people when an enemy was coming. If he warned them and they ignored him, their blood was on their own heads. If he kept quiet, their blood was on his. This is one of the most sobering passages in the Bible for anyone who teaches God's Word. We will look closely at what it meant for Ezekiel and what it does and does not mean for us. The chapter ends with Ezekiel shut in his house, bound and unable to speak except when God opens his mouth.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1-3 *And He said to me, "Son of man, what you find, eat; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." And I opened my mouth, and He made me eat this scroll. And He said to me, "Son of man, make your belly eat, and fill your inward parts* ***with*** *this scroll which I am giving to you." And I ate* ***it****, and it was in my mouth like honey for sweetness.*

"Son of man, what you find, eat; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." The order matters. First eat, then go, then speak. God's messenger has to take God's word into himself before he gives it out.

Did Ezekiel really eat a scroll? This happened in a vision (1:1), so most teachers believe it was something Ezekiel experienced in the vision, not a meal in his kitchen. Either way, the meaning is plain. God's word was not to stay on the outside of Ezekiel like a script he read from. It was to fill his "belly" and his "inward parts." It was to become part of him.

And "it was in my mouth like honey for sweetness." That is surprising, since the scroll was full of "lamentations and moaning and woe" (2:10). How can a message of judgment taste sweet? Because it is God's word, and there is sweetness in knowing and doing God's will, even when the message is hard. The psalmist said God's words were sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:10; 119:103). Jeremiah said the same: when he found God's words, he ate them, and they were the joy and delight of his heart (Jeremiah 15:16).

Do you treat God's Word as something to take in, or only something to read? Reading the Bible is good. Letting it fill us, until it shapes how we think and speak, is what God is after.

3:4-7 *And He said to me, "Son of man, go, come to the house of Israel, and you shall speak with My words to them. For not to a people deep of lip and heavy of tongue are you sent,* ***but*** *to the house of Israel; not to many peoples deep of lip and heavy of tongue, whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I had sent you to them, they would listen to you. And the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to Me; for all the house of Israel* ***are*** *hard of forehead and stern of heart.*

God now tells Ezekiel something that should have made his task easy and instead shows how hard it was. He was not being sent to "a people deep of lip and heavy of tongue," that is, to foreigners whose language he could not understand. He was being sent to his own people, who spoke his language.

Then God says something remarkable: "Surely if I had sent you to them, they would listen to you." If Ezekiel had gone to the pagan nations, they would have listened. We see this happen with Jonah, whose short message brought all of Nineveh to repentance (Jonah 3:5). Jesus said the same about His own generation: the men of Nineveh and the Queen of the South would rise up in judgment against those who heard Him and did not repent (Matthew 12:41-42).

But "the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to Me." Ezekiel was not to take their rejection personally. They were not rejecting him. They were rejecting God. Jesus told His disciples the same thing (Luke 10:16). The more light people have, the harder their hearts can become if they refuse it. That is a warning for those of us who have grown up around the Bible.

3:8-9 *Look, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their forehead. Like diamond, harder than flint, I have made your forehead. You shall not fear them, and you shall not be dismayed at their faces, for they* ***are*** *a house of rebellion."*

Israel was "hard of forehead and stern of heart" (3:7). So God says, "Look, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their forehead." The name Ezekiel means God strengthens, or God makes hard. God was living up to Ezekiel's name. "Like diamond, harder than flint, I have made your forehead."

This is not a call to be harsh or unkind. It is a call to be steady. A forehead of diamond does not crack when people push against it. Ezekiel would face mockery, anger and years of rejection. God made him strong enough to keep standing.

Again God says, "You shall not fear them, and you shall not be dismayed at their faces." God gives His servants what the work requires. If He calls you to stand firm in a hard place, He will give you the backbone to do it.

3:10-11 *And He said to me, "Son of man, all My words which I will speak to you, take into your heart, and hear with your ears. And go, come to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and you shall speak to them and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' whether they hear or whether they refrain."*

Before Ezekiel goes, God gives one more instruction: "all My words which I will speak to you, take into your heart, and hear with your ears." Notice that the heart comes first, then the ears. God wants His words received deeply, not just heard.

Then He tells Ezekiel where to go: "to the exiles, to the sons of your people." Ezekiel was not sent to strangers. He was sent to his neighbors, the people he lived with every day. Sometimes the hardest place to speak for God is at home, among the people who know us best.

And once more: "whether they hear or whether they refrain." Ezekiel's success would be measured by his faithfulness, not by their response (2:5, 7).

3:12-13 *And a spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a sound of a great rumbling: "Blessed **be** the glory of the LORD from His place!" And **there was** the sound of the wings of the living creatures touching each one to another, and the sound of the wheels close beside them, and a sound of a great rumbling.*

"A spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a sound of a great rumbling: Blessed be the glory of the LORD from His place!" As the vision moved away, Ezekiel heard a roar, like an earthquake, and in it a cry of praise. The glory of the LORD was being blessed by the beings around the throne.

He also heard the sound of the wings of the living creatures touching each other and the sound of the wheels, the same throne-chariot he saw in chapter 1. The vision did not just fade away. It left with a roar of praise. Ezekiel's ministry would be full of judgment, but it began and ended with the glory of God.

3:14-15 *And a spirit lifted me up and took me, and I went bitter in the heat of my spirit, and the hand of the LORD was strong on me. And I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who were dwelling by the river Chebar, and I sat **where** they were dwelling, and I sat there seven days, appalled, in their midst.*

"A spirit lifted me up and took me, and I went bitter in the heat of my spirit, and the hand of the LORD was strong on me." The scroll had been sweet in his mouth, but now Ezekiel felt the bitterness of the message. He was angry, burdened and shaken. He felt what God felt about Israel's sin, and he knew what he would have to tell them.

He came to the exiles at Tel-abib, by the river Chebar. Tel-abib means something like mound of green grain, a hopeful name for a camp of refugees. And for seven days he "sat there seven days, appalled, in their midst." He did not say a word. Seven days was the time of mourning for the dead (Genesis 50:10; Job 2:13). Ezekiel sat among his people like a man at a funeral, because he knew what was coming on Jerusalem.

A good teacher of God's Word feels the weight of the message before he speaks it. Ezekiel was not eager to announce judgment. He was overwhelmed by it.

3:16-17 *And it was at the end of seven days, and the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; and you shall hear a word from My mouth, and you shall warn them from Me.*

"At the end of seven days," Ezekiel says, "the word of the LORD came to me." God now gave Ezekiel his office: "Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; and you shall hear a word from My mouth, and you shall warn them from Me."

In the ancient world a watchman stood on the city wall or in a tower day and night. He watched the roads for an approaching army. When he saw danger, he blew the trumpet to warn the city so people could get inside the walls and the soldiers could take their places. A city with a sleeping watchman was a city in danger.

Ezekiel's warning was not his own. He was to "hear a word from My mouth" and pass it on. The danger he warned of was the judgment of God, which was coming on Jerusalem by the hand of Babylon. God will repeat this charge in 33:1-9, at the turning point of the book, when the news of Jerusalem's fall arrives.

3:18-19 *When I say to the wicked **man**, 'You shall surely die,' and you do not warn him, and do not speak to warn the wicked **man** from his wicked way to keep him alive, that wicked **man** shall die in his iniquity, and his blood I will require from your hand. And you, if you warn the wicked **man**, and he does not turn from his wickedness and from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; and you have delivered your soul.*

God now spells out the watchman's responsibility in four cases. The first two are about "the wicked man."

In the first case, God says to a wicked man, "You shall surely die," and the watchman does not warn him. "That wicked man shall die in his iniquity, and his blood I will require from your hand." The wicked man is still guilty. His death is his own fault. But the silent watchman shares the guilt, because he could have warned him and did not.

In the second case, the watchman warns the wicked man, and the man refuses to turn. He dies in his iniquity, but "you have delivered your soul." The watchman is clear. He did his job.

What kind of death is in view? In Ezekiel's setting, "you shall surely die" first of all meant death in the coming judgment on Jerusalem, by sword, famine and plague (5:12; 6:11-12). It was the death the covenant law had warned would come on those who broke it (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). Ezekiel's warnings were urgent and practical: turn now, or you will die when the city falls. At the same time, a man who dies in his iniquity, unrepentant and turned away from God, faces something worse than a sword. That is why the warning mattered so much.

3:20-21 *And when a righteous **man** turns from his righteousness and does injustice, and I put a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not warn him, he shall die in his sin, and his **acts of** righteousness which he did shall not be remembered; and his blood I will require from your hand. And you, if you warn him, the righteous **man**, that the righteous **man** should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he was warned; and you have delivered your soul."*

The last two cases are about "a righteous man" who "turns from his righteousness and does injustice." If the watchman does not warn him, "he shall die in his sin, and his acts of righteousness which he did shall not be remembered," and again the watchman is held responsible. But if the watchman warns him and he does not sin, "he shall surely live, because he was warned; and you have delivered your soul."

God says, "I put a stumbling block before him." This does not mean God tempts people to sin (James 1:13). It means God brings a test or a judgment into the path of a man who has already turned away, and he falls over it because his heart has gone wrong.

Does this passage teach that a believer today can lose his salvation? I do not believe it does, and here is why. First, this is about Ezekiel's office, not a teaching on eternal salvation. God was explaining Ezekiel's duty as a watchman and his accountability for the people of Israel under the old covenant, in the days just before Jerusalem fell. Second, "righteous" here means a man who had been living rightly by the law, outwardly faithful to the covenant. Ezekiel 18 explains it further: God judges each person by the path he is on, and a man cannot count on his past good deeds while he is living in sin now (18:24). Third, the "death" in view was first the death that came in the judgment on Jerusalem. Ezekiel is not talking about the new birth by the Holy Spirit, which came later in God's plan (36:26-27; John 3:5).

The New Testament speaks plainly to believers in Christ. Jesus said of His sheep, "I give them eternal life, and they will certainly never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28). Paul says "There is therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1), and that believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption (Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30). Salvation rests on what Christ has done, not on our record. At the same time, the New Testament also warns that a person who claims to know God and lives in steady, unrepentant sin should examine whether he ever truly knew Him (1 John 2:19; 2 Corinthians 13:5). Real faith shows itself in a changed life.

So what does the watchman passage mean for us? Christians today are not Old Testament prophets, and we are not held responsible for anyone's blood in the way Ezekiel was. But the principle carries over. Paul seems to have had this passage in mind when he told the elders of Ephesus, "I am clean from the blood of all. For I did not hold back from declaring to you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27). Pastors and teachers will give an account for how they handled God's Word (Hebrews 13:17; James 3:1). And every believer has been given the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). If we know the way of salvation and keep it to ourselves, we are like a watchman asleep on the wall. We cannot make anyone turn. But we can make sure they have been warned and have heard the good news.

3:22-23 *And the hand of the LORD was on me there, and He said to me, "Arise, go out to the plain, and there I will speak with you." And I arose and went out to the plain, and look, there **was** the glory of the LORD standing, like the glory which I had seen by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face.*

"The hand of the LORD was on me there," and God told Ezekiel to go out to the plain, where He would speak with him. When he got there, "there was the glory of the LORD standing, like the glory which I had seen by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face."

God met him again with the same glory. Ezekiel had just been given a hard and lonely job, and before he started it, God showed him His glory a second time. That is often how God works. Before a hard season, He reminds us who He is. The vision of God's glory is what keeps a servant going when the people will not listen.

3:24-25 *And a spirit came into me and made me stand on my feet, and He spoke with me and said to me, "Go, shut yourself in the midst of your house. And you, son of man, look, they will put ropes on you and bind you with them, and you shall not go out in their midst.*

The Spirit came into Ezekiel again and set him on his feet, as in 2:2. Then God gave him a strange command: "Go, shut yourself in the midst of your house." The prophet would not go out and preach on the street corners. The people would have to come to him.

"They will put ropes on you and bind you with them, and you shall not go out in their midst." Who are "they"? It may mean the exiles themselves would tie him up to keep him quiet, or it may be a picture of how God Himself would restrain him (4:8 says God would put ropes on him). Either way, Ezekiel's freedom to come and go was taken away. His very life became a sign to the people.

3:26-27 *And I will make your tongue cling to your palate, and you shall be mute, and you shall not be to them a reproving man, for they **are** a house of rebellion. And when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' The **one** hearing, let him hear; and the **one** refraining, let him refrain; for they **are** a house of rebellion."*

"I will make your tongue cling to your palate, and you shall be mute." Ezekiel would not be able to speak in the ordinary way. He would not be "a reproving man" who argued with the people or rebuked them on his own. This silence lasted until the day the news of Jerusalem's fall arrived, years later (24:27; 33:22).

But the silence had one exception: "when I speak with you, I will open your mouth," and Ezekiel would say, "Thus says the Lord GOD." Ezekiel was not completely silent for seven years. Chapters 4 to 24 are full of his messages. The point is that he would speak only when God gave him a word. Everything that came out of his mouth in those years came straight from God. The people could not dismiss it as Ezekiel's opinion, because Ezekiel had no opinions to offer. He only spoke when God spoke.

The chapter ends where chapter 2 began: "The one hearing, let him hear; and the one refraining, let him refrain; for they are a house of rebellion." Jesus often ended His teaching with a similar call: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 4:9). God speaks. Each person must choose what to do with what he hears.

Chapter 3 Summary

Ezekiel ate the scroll God gave him, and it was sweet as honey in his mouth. God sent him to his own people, warning that they would not listen because they would not listen to God, and He made Ezekiel's forehead harder than flint so he would not fear them. The Spirit carried him to the exiles at Tel-abib, where he sat stunned for seven days. Then God appointed him a watchman for the house of Israel. If he failed to warn the wicked, or a righteous man who turned to sin, their blood would be required from his hand, but if he warned them, he would deliver his own soul whatever they chose. This was Ezekiel's office and accountability under the old covenant, not a teaching that believers in Christ can lose their salvation, though it reminds every believer to warn others and share the good news. The glory of the LORD appeared to Ezekiel again on the plain, and God told him to shut himself in his house, where he would be bound and mute except when God opened his mouth to speak His word.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. What did God tell Ezekiel to do with the scroll, and what did it taste like? (3:1-3)

2. Why would foreign nations have listened to Ezekiel when Israel would not? (3:5-7)

3. What did God do to Ezekiel's forehead, and why? (3:8-9)

4. How did Ezekiel feel when he came to the exiles, and what did he do for seven days? (3:14-15)

5. What does a watchman do, and what did God appoint Ezekiel to be? (3:17)

6. What happens to the watchman if he does not warn the wicked? What happens if he does warn them? (3:18-19)

7. How do John 10:28 and Romans 8:1 help us understand what 3:20-21 does and does not teach?

8. What did Paul mean when he told the Ephesian elders he was "clean from the blood of all"? (Acts 20:26-27)

9. God showed Ezekiel His glory again before his hard work began (3:23). How has God encouraged you before a hard season?

10. Is there someone in your life who has never clearly heard the gospel from you? What would it look like for you to be a faithful watchman for that person?

Chapter 4: The Siege of Jerusalem Acted Out

Scripture

4:1-8 "And you, son of man, take for yourself a brick, and set it before you, and engrave on it a city, Jerusalem. And put a siege against it, and build a siege wall against it, and pour out a mound against it, and set camps against it, and set battering rams against it all around. And you, take for yourself a griddle of iron, and make it a wall of iron between you and the city; and set your face toward it, and it shall be in siege, and you shall lay siege against it. It ***is*** a sign for the house of Israel. And you, lie down on your left side, and put the iniquity of the house of Israel on it; ***for*** the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity. And I have given to you the years of their iniquity according to a number of days, three hundred and ninety days; and you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And you shall complete these, and you shall lie down on your right side a second ***time***, and you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days; a day for the year, a day for the year, I have given it to you. And toward the siege of Jerusalem you shall set your face, and your arm ***shall be*** bared, and you shall prophesy against it. And look, I will put ropes on you, and you shall not turn yourself from your side to your side until you complete the days of your siege.

4:9-17 And you, take for yourself wheat and barley and beans and lentils and millet and spelt, and put them in one vessel, and make them into bread for yourself; ***according to*** the number of the days that you are lying on your side, three hundred and ninety days, you shall eat it. And your food which you eat ***shall be*** by weight, approximately 8 ounces (twenty shekels) a day; from time to time you shall eat it. And you shall drink water by measure, approximately 2/3 quart (a sixth of the hin); from time to time you shall drink ***it***. And you shall eat it ***as*** a cake of barley, and you shall bake it on dung of the excrement of man before their eyes." And the LORD said, "Thus the sons of Israel shall eat their bread unclean among the nations where I will drive them." And I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Look, my soul has not been made unclean; and a carcass and a torn animal I have not eaten from my youth until now, and foul flesh has not come into my mouth." And He said to me, "See, I have given to you the dung of the cattle in place of the dung of man, and you shall make your bread on it." And He said to me, "Son of man, look, I am breaking the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and they shall eat bread by weight and in anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure and in horror, so that they may lack bread and water, and they shall be appalled, a man and his brother, and they shall waste away in their iniquity."

Chapter 4 Preview

Ezekiel's first messages are not sermons. They are signs. God tells him to draw Jerusalem on a clay brick and build a little siege around it, with ramps, camps and battering rams. Then he is to lie on his left side for 390 days and on his right side for 40 days, bearing the iniquity of Israel and Judah, while he lives on a small daily ration of bread and water. The exiles walking past his house would see the prophet acting out the siege of the city they were sure would never fall.

This chapter also contains one of the most uncomfortable commands in the Bible. God tells Ezekiel to bake his bread over human dung, as a picture of the unclean food Israel would eat in

exile (4:12-15). Ezekiel protests, and God allows him to use cattle dung instead. We will handle that part plainly and briefly. The point of the whole chapter is simple: the siege is coming, it will be long and bitter, and it is the result of years of sin.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1-3 *"And you, son of man, take for yourself a brick, and set it before you, and engrave on it a city, Jerusalem. And put a siege against it, and build a siege wall against it, and pour out a mound against it, and set camps against it, and set battering rams against it all around. And you, take for yourself a griddle of iron, and make it a wall of iron between you and the city; and set your face toward it, and it shall be in siege, and you shall lay siege against it. It* ***is*** *a sign for the house of Israel.*

"Take for yourself a brick, and set it before you, and engrave on it a city, Jerusalem." Bricks in Babylon were large, flat blocks of clay, and the Babylonians often drew or wrote on them while the clay was soft. Ezekiel was to draw a map of Jerusalem on one.

Then he was to "put a siege against it." A siege was the way ancient armies took walled cities. They surrounded the city, cut off food and water, built a siege wall around it so no one could escape, poured out ramps of earth up to the walls, set up camps, and brought battering rams to break down the gates. Ezekiel was to build all of that around his little clay Jerusalem, like a model on a table.

Next he was to take "a griddle of iron," a flat iron pan used for baking, and set it up as "a wall of iron between you and the city." Ezekiel was playing the part of God. The iron wall pictured the barrier between God and Jerusalem. Their sin had cut them off from Him, and their prayers would not get through (Isaiah 59:2; Lamentations 3:44). "Set your face toward it" means Ezekiel was to look at the city with fixed determination, as God's face was set against it.

"It is a sign for the house of Israel." That phrase explains the whole chapter. A sign was an object lesson, a message acted out so people could see it. The exiles believed Jerusalem was safe because God's temple was there. Ezekiel's little brick said otherwise.

4:4-6 *And you, lie down on your left side, and put the iniquity of the house of Israel on it;* ***for*** *the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity. And I have given to you the years of their iniquity according to a number of days, three hundred and ninety days; and you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And you shall complete these, and you shall lie down on your right side a second* ***time****, and you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days; a day for the year, a day for the year, I have given it to you.*

Now Ezekiel was to lie down on his left side and "put the iniquity of the house of Israel on it." For "three hundred and ninety days," he would "bear their iniquity." After that he would lie on his right side "forty days" for "the iniquity of the house of Judah." God explains the numbers: "a day for the year, a day for the year." Each day stood for a year.

To "bear iniquity" means to carry the guilt or the punishment of sin. Ezekiel was not taking away anyone's sin. He was acting out the punishment the nation was about to bear. Only one Person has ever truly borne the sins of others to take them away. Isaiah said of the Servant of the LORD, "their iniquities He Himself will bear" (Isaiah 53:11), and Peter says Jesus "bore our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). Ezekiel on his side is a faint picture of what Christ would do in full.

What do the 390 years and 40 years stand for? Scripture does not explain them directly, and good teachers give different answers. Many count the 390 years as the long time of Israel's sin, from Solomon's turn to idols late in his reign (1 Kings 11:4-8), through the golden calves Jeroboam set up about 930 B.C., down to the fall of Jerusalem. Others count them as years of punishment still to come. The 40 years for Judah may echo the forty years in the wilderness, a full generation under judgment (Numbers 14:33-34). Either way, the message is clear. Israel's sin was not a sudden slip. It was centuries deep, and God had been patient a very long time.

The left side and the right side likely match directions. Facing east, the north is on your left and the south on your right. Israel was the northern kingdom and Judah the southern. Ezekiel's body became a map of God's people.

4:7-8 *And toward the siege of Jerusalem you shall set your face, and your arm **shall be** bared, and you shall prophesy against it. And look, I will put ropes on you, and you shall not turn yourself from your side to your side until you complete the days of your siege.*

While lying there, Ezekiel was to set his face "toward the siege of Jerusalem," with "your arm shall be bared." In battle, a soldier pulled back his sleeve to free his arm for fighting. A bared arm meant God was ready to act (Isaiah 52:10). The prophet lay in silence, but his posture preached: God was coming against the city.

"And look, I will put ropes on you, and you shall not turn yourself from your side to your side until you complete the days of your siege." Did Ezekiel lie on his side every hour of every day for over a year? Most teachers think not. In verses 9 to 15 he prepares his own food, so he must have been up at times. It is likely that he lay on his side for part of each day, perhaps the hours when people would see him, as a public sign. What matters is that he kept it up, day after day, for more than a year. That is a long sermon, and he preached it without a word.

God's ropes held him there. Ezekiel could not quit when he got tired. That is a picture of the siege itself. Once Babylon surrounded the city, no one could leave until it was over.

4:9-11 *And you, take for yourself wheat and barley and beans and lentils and millet and spelt, and put them in one vessel, and make them into bread for yourself;* ***according to*** *the number of the days that you are lying on your side, three hundred and ninety days, you shall eat it. And your food which you eat* ***shall be*** *by weight, approximately 8 ounces (twenty shekels) a day; from time to time you shall eat it. And you shall drink water by measure, approximately 2/3 quart (a sixth of the hin); from time to time you shall drink* ***it****.*

During the 390 days, Ezekiel was to eat bread made from "wheat and barley and beans and lentils and millet and spelt" all mixed together "in one vessel." In good times, no one baked bread out of such a mix. This was siege bread, made from whatever scraps of grain and beans were left in the jars.

His food was to be "by weight, approximately 8 ounces (twenty shekels) a day," and his water "approximately 2/3 quart (a sixth of the hin)." That is about half a pound of bread and about two and a half cups of water a day. It is enough to keep a man alive, but only barely. He was to eat and drink "from time to time," at set times, the way people ration food when supplies are running out.

This is what life inside Jerusalem would be like when Nebuchadnezzar's army surrounded it. Jeremiah describes the same days: the bread in the city ran out, and the people of the land had nothing to eat (Jeremiah 52:6). The exiles who watched Ezekiel weigh out his little loaf each day were watching the future of their own families back home.

4:12-15 *And you shall eat it* ***as*** *a cake of barley, and you shall bake it on dung of the excrement of man before their eyes." And the LORD said, "Thus the sons of Israel shall eat their bread unclean among the nations where I will drive them." And I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Look, my soul has not been made unclean; and a carcass and a torn animal I have not eaten from my youth until now, and foul flesh has not come into my mouth." And He said to me, "See, I have given to you the dung of the cattle in place of the dung of man, and you shall make your bread on it."*

This is one of the hardest commands in the book, and it is meant to be. God told Ezekiel to bake his barley cake "on dung of the excrement of man before their eyes." In that part of the world, dried animal dung was a common fuel for cooking fires, since wood was scarce. But human waste was something else. The law of Moses required it to be buried outside the camp, because the LORD walked in the midst of His people and the camp was to be holy (Deuteronomy 23:12-14). Using it as fuel for food would make the food unclean.

In the law, clean and unclean did not mean dirty and washed. Something unclean was unfit to come into God's presence or to be used in worship, and the food laws taught Israel every day that they belonged to a holy God and were set apart from the nations. God explained the sign: "Thus the sons of Israel shall eat their bread unclean among the nations where I will drive them." In exile, God's people would not be able to keep the food laws. They would be scattered among Gentiles, eating whatever they could get, in a land that was not His holy land. The disgusting fuel pictured the disgrace of exile.

Ezekiel was horrified. "Ah, Lord GOD! Look, my soul has not been made unclean." He was a priest, and he had kept the law carefully all his life. He had never eaten an animal that died on its own or

was torn by wild beasts (Leviticus 22:8), or meat that had gone foul (Leviticus 7:18). This was too much.

And God listened. "See, I have given to you the dung of the cattle in place of the dung of man." God did not throw out His sign. The bread would still be baked over dung, as the poorest people did. But He took His servant's honest objection seriously and allowed him to use the ordinary fuel instead.

What do we learn here? God does not want us to pretend. Ezekiel spoke honestly, and God answered with mercy. It is also a reminder of how seriously God takes our sin. Israel had treated holy things as common for years. Now they would learn what it was like to live without anything holy at all. I also think we should be careful how we teach this passage in a group. It is meant to shock, and it does. There is no need to say more than the text says.

4:16-17 *And He said to me, "Son of man, look, I am breaking the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and they shall eat bread by weight and in anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure and in horror, so that they may lack bread and water, and they shall be appalled, a man and his brother, and they shall waste away in their iniquity."*

God now explains the ration of bread and water: "look, I am breaking the staff of bread in Jerusalem." Bread was called the staff of life because people leaned on it like a walking stick. When God breaks the staff, people fall. The law had warned this would happen if Israel broke the covenant (Leviticus 26:26).

"They shall eat bread by weight and in anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure and in horror." People inside the city would weigh every crumb and worry about the next meal. "They shall be appalled, a man and his brother, and they shall waste away in their iniquity." Neighbors would look at each other in shock as they grew thin and weak.

Why did God do this? "In their iniquity." The famine was not bad luck. It was the result of sin, as the law had said. That is a hard truth, but it is also a hopeful one. If the judgment came because of sin, then turning from sin was the way back to God. Even in this dark chapter, the door of repentance was still open.

For us, the lesson is that sin always costs more than it promises. Israel thought idols would bring rain and harvest and safety. In the end, their sin left them weighing out crumbs. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; the one coming to Me will certainly not hunger" (John 6:35). The only lasting bread is found in Him.

Chapter 4 Summary

God told Ezekiel to draw Jerusalem on a brick, build a model siege around it, and set an iron griddle between himself and the city as a sign of the barrier sin had raised between God and His people. He was to lie on his left side 390 days for the iniquity of Israel and on his right side 40 days for Judah, a day for each year, with his arm bared against the city and bound by God's ropes. During that time he ate a small daily ration of siege bread made from mixed grains and beans and

drank a small measure of water, a picture of the famine to come. God told him to bake his bread over human dung as a sign that Israel would eat unclean food in exile, and when Ezekiel protested as a priest who had never eaten anything unclean, God let him use cattle dung instead. God was breaking the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and the people would waste away in their iniquity.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. What did Ezekiel draw on the brick, and what did he build around it? (4:1-2)

2. What did the iron griddle between Ezekiel and the city picture? (4:3; Isaiah 59:2)

3. How long did Ezekiel lie on each side, and what did each day stand for? (4:4-6)

4. What was Ezekiel's daily ration of food and water, and what did it show about the coming siege? (4:9-11, 16)

5. What did God say the bread baked over dung would picture? (4:12-13)

6. How did Ezekiel respond, and how did God answer him? (4:14-15)

7. What does it mean that God would break "the staff of bread"? (4:16; Leviticus 26:26)

8. Ezekiel bore the iniquity of Israel in a picture. How did Jesus bear our sins in reality? (Isaiah 53:11; 1 Peter 2:24)

9. Ezekiel was honest with God about a command that troubled him, and God listened. How honest are you with God in prayer?

10. Israel's sin left them weighing out crumbs. Where have you seen sin promise much and deliver little? How does Jesus as the bread of life answer that? (John 6:35)

Chapter 5: The Sword, the Razor and the Hair

Scripture

5:1-17 "And you, son of man, take for yourself a sharp sword; ***as*** a barbers' razor you shall take it for yourself, and make ***it*** pass over your head and over your beard; and take for yourself scales of weight and divide them. A third you shall burn with fire in the midst of the city when the days of the siege are completed; and you shall take a third ***and*** strike ***it*** with the sword all around it; and a third you shall scatter to the wind, and I will draw out a sword after them. And you shall take from there a few in number and bind them in your skirts. And from them again you shall take and throw them into the midst of the fire and burn them in the fire; from it a fire will go out to all the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord GOD: 'This ***is*** Jerusalem; I have set it in the midst of the nations, and lands ***are*** around it. And it has rebelled against My judgments in wickedness more than the nations, and ***against*** My statutes more than the lands that ***are*** around it; for they have rejected My judgments, and My statutes, they have not walked in them. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because your turmoil ***is*** more than the nations that ***are*** around you, ***and*** you have not walked in My statutes, and you have not done My judgments, and you have not ***even*** done according to the judgments of the nations that ***are*** around you, therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** against you, even I, and I will execute judgments in your midst before the eyes of the nations. And I will do in you that which I have not done, and that which I will not do like it again, because of all your abominations. Therefore fathers shall eat sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments on you, and I will scatter all your remnant to every wind. Therefore, ***as*** I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because you have made My sanctuary unclean with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, I also will diminish ***you***, and My eye shall not pity, and I also will not spare. A third of you shall die by the pestilence and be consumed by the famine in your midst; and a third shall fall by the sword all around you; and a third I will scatter to every wind, and I will draw out a sword after them. And My anger shall be spent, and I will cause My rage to rest on them, and I will comfort Myself; and they shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken in My jealousy, when I have spent My rage on them. And I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations that ***are*** around you, before the eyes of everyone who passes by. And it shall be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror to the nations that ***are*** around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and in rage and with rebukes of rage. I, the LORD, have spoken. When I send against them the evil arrows of the famine, which shall be for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, then I will add famine on you and break the staff of bread for you; and I will send on you famine and evil beasts, and they will bereave you; and pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring a sword on you. I, the LORD, have spoken.'"

Chapter 5 Preview

The signs continue. God tells Ezekiel to take a sharp sword, use it like a barber's razor, and shave his head and beard. He weighs the hair on scales and divides it into three parts. One third he burns, one third he strikes with the sword, and one third he scatters to the wind. A few hairs he

tucks into the fold of his robe, and even some of those are thrown into the fire. Then God explains the sign in plain words: "This is Jerusalem" (5:5).

The rest of the chapter is one of the strongest statements of judgment in the Bible. Jerusalem had been set in the center of the nations to show them who God is, but she had become worse than the nations. So God would do to her what He had never done before. This is a hard chapter to read, and it includes the horror of famine in a city under siege (5:10). But it ends with the same truth that runs through all of Ezekiel: "they shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken" (5:13).

Chapter 5 Study

5:1-2 *"And you, son of man, take for yourself a sharp sword; **as** a barbers' razor you shall take it for yourself, and make **it** pass over your head and over your beard; and take for yourself scales of weight and divide them. A third you shall burn with fire in the midst of the city when the days of the siege are completed; and you shall take a third **and** strike **it** with the sword all around it; and a third you shall scatter to the wind, and I will draw out a sword after them.*

"Take for yourself a sharp sword; as a barbers' razor you shall take it for yourself, and make it pass over your head and over your beard." For a priest, this was shocking. The law told priests not to shave their heads or the edges of their beards (Leviticus 21:5). Shaving the head was a sign of deep mourning or disgrace (Isaiah 15:2; Jeremiah 41:5). In the ancient world, when a conquering army shaved its captives, it was a mark of humiliation (2 Samuel 10:4). Isaiah had used the same picture: the Lord would shave Judah with a razor hired from beyond the river, the king of Assyria (Isaiah 7:20).

The razor was a sword. The sign was not about haircuts. It was about war. God's sword, the army of Babylon, would pass over Jerusalem and leave it bare.

Then Ezekiel was to "take for yourself scales of weight and divide them." The hair was weighed out carefully. God's judgment is not random or careless. It is measured and exact.

One third Ezekiel was to burn "in the midst of the city when the days of the siege are completed," likely on the clay model from chapter 4. One third he was to strike with the sword all around the city. One third he was to "scatter to the wind," and God says, "I will draw out a sword after them." Verse 12 explains each third.

5:3-4 *And you shall take from there a few in number and bind them in your skirts. And from them again you shall take and throw them into the midst of the fire and burn them in the fire; from it a fire will go out to all the house of Israel.*

"And you shall take from there a few in number and bind them in your skirts." The skirt here is the fold or hem of a robe, where a person tucked away something valuable to keep it safe. These few hairs picture a remnant, a small group of survivors God would preserve.

The word remnant is important in the prophets. It means the part that is left after judgment, the faithful few God keeps for Himself so that His promises will not fail. Even in this hard chapter, God was keeping a remnant.

But verse 4 adds a sober note: "And from them again you shall take and throw them into the midst of the fire." Even some of the survivors would face more judgment. History bears this out. After Jerusalem fell, some of those left in the land murdered the governor Gedaliah, fled to Egypt against God's word, and died there (2 Kings 25:25-26; Jeremiah 42 to 44). Being spared once is not the same as being safe forever. Those who are spared still need to turn to God.

"From it a fire will go out to all the house of Israel." The judgment on Jerusalem would spread its effects to the whole nation.

5:5-6 *Thus says the Lord GOD: 'This **is** Jerusalem; I have set it in the midst of the nations, and lands **are** around it. And it has rebelled against My judgments in wickedness more than the nations, and **against** My statutes more than the lands that **are** around it; for they have rejected My judgments, and My statutes, they have not walked in them.*

Now God explains the sign: "This is Jerusalem; I have set it in the midst of the nations, and lands are around it."

God had placed Jerusalem at the crossroads of the ancient world, between Egypt to the south and Assyria and Babylon to the north and east, along the great trade routes. He put her there for a purpose. Israel was to be a light to the nations, a kingdom of priests who would show the world what the true God is like (Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 4:6-8). Her worship, her justice and her holy living were meant to draw the nations to the LORD.

Instead, "it has rebelled against My judgments in wickedness more than the nations." Jerusalem had not just failed to be a light. She had become darker than the darkness around her. "They have rejected My judgments, and My statutes, they have not walked in them."

That is a warning for every church and every believer. God puts His people where they are on purpose, in their neighborhood, their workplace, their family. We are meant to be a light (Matthew 5:14-16). The question is whether the people around us see Christ in us, or only see people who know the truth and do not live it.

5:7-9 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because your turmoil **is** more than the nations that **are** around you, **and** you have not walked in My statutes, and you have not done My judgments, and you have not **even** done according to the judgments of the nations that **are** around you, therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** against you, even I, and I will execute judgments in your midst before the eyes of the nations. And I will do in you that which I have not done, and that which I will not do like it again, because of all your abominations.*

"Because your turmoil is more than the nations that are around you." God's charge is that Jerusalem had not even lived up to the standards of the pagans. They had "not even done according to the judgments of the nations that are around" them. The nations at least were loyal to their false gods. Israel was not loyal to the true God (Jeremiah 2:10-11).

So God says, "Look, I am against you, even I." Those are some of the most frightening words in the Bible. Israel had always counted on God being for them. Now He declared Himself their opponent. The One who had fought for them at the Red Sea and in Canaan would now fight against them.

"I will do in you that which I have not done, and that which I will not do like it again, because of all your abominations." An abomination is something God finds disgusting, especially idol worship and the evil that comes with it. The fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. was the worst disaster in Israel's history up to that point. Jesus would later speak of a time of great tribulation, "such as has not happened from the beginning of the world until now" (Matthew 24:21), in the days just before His return. Ezekiel's words are about the judgment on Jerusalem in his own day. The pattern of severe judgment on unrepentant sin is the same.

5:10 *Therefore fathers shall eat sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments on you, and I will scatter all your remnant to every wind.*

"Therefore fathers shall eat sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers." This is one of the darkest verses in the Bible, and I will not dwell on it. When a city was under siege for a long time and the food ran out, people were driven to unthinkable things to survive. The law had warned that this would happen if Israel broke the covenant (Leviticus 26:29; Deuteronomy 28:53-57). It happened in Samaria during a siege (2 Kings 6:28-29), and Lamentations says it happened in Jerusalem (Lamentations 4:10).

Why would God say this? Not because He takes pleasure in it. He says plainly later in this book that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (18:23; 33:11). He says it because it is the truth about where sin leads when a people refuses every warning. Sin destroys families, love and life itself. The judgment of the siege would strip away everything, even the most basic love of parents and children.

"I will scatter all your remnant to every wind." Those who survived would be driven out among the nations.

If this verse troubles you, it should. It shows us how serious sin is, and how much it cost God to save us from it. At the cross, the Father gave His Son for us, so that we would not have to face the judgment our sin deserves (Romans 8:32).

5:11-12 *Therefore, **as** I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because you have made My sanctuary unclean with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, I also will diminish **you**, and My eye shall not pity, and I also will not spare. A third of you shall die by the pestilence and be consumed by the famine in your midst; and a third shall fall by the sword all around you; and a third I will scatter to every wind, and I will draw out a sword after them.*

"Therefore, as I live, declares the Lord GOD." When God swears by His own life, the matter is settled. The reason for the judgment comes first: "because you have made My sanctuary unclean with all your detestable things and with all your abominations." The worst sin of all was what they had done in the temple. Chapter 8 will show us exactly what Ezekiel meant. They had brought idols into the house of God.

"My eye shall not pity, and I also will not spare." This phrase comes again and again in Ezekiel (7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:10). God's patience had run its course. For years He had pitied and spared them. Now the time for mercy was ending.

Verse 12 explains the three thirds of hair. "A third of you shall die by the pestilence and be consumed by the famine in your midst." That is the third burned inside the city. "A third shall fall by the sword all around you." That is the third struck with the sword. "And a third I will scatter to every wind, and I will draw out a sword after them." That is the third thrown to the wind. Some would die inside the walls, some would be killed trying to escape, and some would be scattered among the nations, still pursued by trouble.

5:13-15 *And My anger shall be spent, and I will cause My rage to rest on them, and I will comfort Myself; and they shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken in My jealousy, when I have spent My rage on them. And I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations that **are** around you, before the eyes of everyone who passes by. And it shall be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror to the nations that **are** around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and in rage and with rebukes of rage. I, the LORD, have spoken.*

"And My anger shall be spent, and I will cause My rage to rest on them, and I will comfort Myself." God's anger is not like ours. It is not a loss of temper. It is His holy and settled opposition to evil. When God's anger is "spent," it means justice has been fully done. He will not punish more than is right.

"And they shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken in My jealousy." Jealousy here is not petty envy. It is the right love of a husband who will not share his wife with another. God had bound Himself to Israel in covenant, and they had given themselves to idols. His jealousy was the fire of a love that had been betrayed (Exodus 20:5; 34:14).

Jerusalem would become "a ruin and a reproach," and "a warning and a horror to the nations" around her. The city that should have been a light would become a warning sign. The nations would look at the ruins and say, This is what happens to a people who turn from their God (Deuteronomy 29:24-28).

"I, the LORD, have spoken." That phrase closes the case. When God speaks, it will happen.

5:16-17 *When I send against them the evil arrows of the famine, which shall be for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, then I will add famine on you and break the staff of bread for you; and I will send on you famine and evil beasts, and they will bereave you; and pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring a sword on you. I, the LORD, have spoken.'"*

God ends the chapter by naming His weapons: "the evil arrows of the famine," "famine and evil beasts," and "pestilence and blood," and finally "a sword." These were the judgments the law had warned of for a nation that broke the covenant (Leviticus 26:22-26; Deuteronomy 32:23-25). God was not doing anything new or unfair. He was doing exactly what He had said He would do, long before.

God will "break the staff of bread for you." This repeats the warning of 4:16. And once more God says, "I, the LORD, have spoken."

It is easy to read a chapter like this and think God is harsh. But remember the whole story. God had warned Israel for over eight hundred years, from Moses to Ezekiel. He had sent prophet after

prophet. He had waited and pleaded. Peter says God is patient, "not wishing any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). But God's patience is not the same as approval, and it does not last forever. The same God who judged Jerusalem offers forgiveness now to anyone who comes to Him through Jesus. Today is the day to come.

Chapter 5 Summary

God told Ezekiel to shave his head and beard with a sword and to divide the hair by weight into three parts: one third burned in the city, one third struck with the sword, one third scattered to the wind, with a few hairs tucked into his robe and some of those burned as well. God explained that this was Jerusalem, set in the center of the nations to be a light, but more wicked than the nations around her. Because she defiled His sanctuary with detestable idols, God declared Himself against her. A third of the people would die by plague and famine, a third by the sword, and a third would be scattered and pursued. The siege would be so terrible that families would turn on each other, as the law had warned. Jerusalem would become a ruin and a warning to the nations, and they would know that the LORD had spoken in His jealousy.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. What did God tell Ezekiel to use as a razor, and why was shaving his head shocking for a priest? (5:1; Leviticus 21:5)

2. How was the hair divided, and what happened to each third? (5:2, 12)

3. What did the few hairs tucked into Ezekiel's robe picture, and what happened to some of them? (5:3-4)

4. Why had God set Jerusalem in the midst of the nations? (5:5; Exodus 19:5-6)

5. How did Jerusalem compare to the nations around her? (5:6-7)

6. What did God mean when He said, "Look, I am against you, even I"? (5:8)

7. What was the worst sin God named in this chapter? (5:11)

8. What does God's jealousy mean, and how is it different from human jealousy? (5:13; Exodus 34:14)

9. God placed Jerusalem where she was for a purpose. Where has God placed you, and what would it look like to be a light there? (Matthew 5:14-16)

10. This chapter shows how serious sin is. How does it help you understand what Jesus did for you on the cross? (Romans 8:32)

Chapter 6: Against the Mountains of Israel

Scripture

6:1-14 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, and say, 'Mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys: Look, I, even I, am bringing a sword on you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be made desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken, and I will make your slain fall before your idols. And I will put the corpses of the sons of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars. In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate, so that your altars may be laid waste and be held guilty, and your idols shall be broken and cease, and your incense altars shall be cut down, and your works shall be wiped out. And the slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. And I will leave ***a remnant***, in that you will have escapees of the sword among the nations, when you are scattered among the lands. And your escapees shall remember Me among the nations where they have been taken captive, how I have been broken ***by*** their heart that plays the prostitute, which has turned aside from Me, and ***by*** their eyes that play the prostitute after their idols; and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have done, for all their abominations. And they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD; not in vain did I speak of doing this evil to them. Thus says the Lord GOD: Strike with your palm and stamp with your foot, and say, "Alas, because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, who shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence!" The ***one*** far off shall die by the pestilence, and the ***one*** near shall fall by the sword, and the ***one*** who remains and the ***one*** who is preserved shall die by the famine; and I will spend My rage on them. And you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, when their slain are in the midst of their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the tops of the mountains, and under every luxuriant tree, and under every leafy terebinth, the place where they gave a soothing aroma to all their idols. And I will stretch out My hand against them and make the land a desolation and a horror, more than the wilderness toward Diblah, in all their dwelling places; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD.'"

Chapter 6 Preview

After the signs of chapters 4 and 5, God gives Ezekiel a message to speak, and He tells him to aim it at the land itself. "Set your face toward the mountains of Israel" (6:2). The hills and valleys of the promised land were covered with high places, altars and idols, the places where Israel had worshiped other gods for centuries. God would bring the sword against them, and the bodies of the worshipers would lie scattered among the idols they had trusted.

But chapter 6 also has a word of hope. A remnant would escape and be scattered among the nations, and there, far from home, they would finally remember the LORD. They would see how their unfaithful hearts had grieved Him, and they would loathe their own sin (6:9). The chapter repeats four times the refrain that runs through the whole book: "you shall know that I am the LORD."

Chapter 6 Study

6:1-3 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, and say, 'Mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys: Look, I, even I, am bringing a sword on you, and I will destroy your high places.*

"Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them." Ezekiel was hundreds of miles away in Babylon. He could not see the mountains of Israel. But to set his face toward them meant to turn in their direction with a fixed purpose, as God's spokesman against them.

Why the mountains? Because that is where Israel's idol worship happened. "Look, I, even I, am bringing a sword on you, and I will destroy your high places." A high place was a hilltop shrine, usually with an altar, a sacred pole or standing stone, and sometimes a small building. The Canaanites worshiped their gods on high places, and God had told Israel to tear them all down when they entered the land (Numbers 33:52; Deuteronomy 12:2-3). Israel did not do it. Instead, they adopted the high places for their own use, at first sometimes for worship of the LORD, and then more and more for Baal and other gods. Baal was the Canaanite storm god, believed to bring the rain and the harvest. Even good kings of Judah often failed to remove the high places (1 Kings 15:14; 2 Kings 12:3).

God speaks to "the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys." The whole land had been polluted, from top to bottom. The worship of idols had spread to every corner.

Is there a high place in your life? Not a hilltop altar, but something you turn to instead of God when you are afraid or need help? It may be money, a relationship, a habit, or your own strength. God tore down Israel's high places because they stole the worship that belonged to Him.

6:4-7 *And your altars shall be made desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken, and I will make your slain fall before your idols. And I will put the corpses of the sons of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars. In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate, so that your altars may be laid waste and be held guilty, and your idols shall be broken and cease, and your incense altars shall be cut down, and your works shall be wiped out. And the slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I* ***am*** *the LORD.*

"Your altars shall be made desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken, and I will make your slain fall before your idols." The incense altars were small stands where incense was burned to the sun god or other gods (2 Chronicles 34:4). God would smash them all.

Then comes a terrible irony. "I will put the corpses of the sons of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars." The people had gone to their idols for life and blessing. Now their dead bodies would lie in front of those same idols. The gods they trusted could not save them.

For an Israelite, a dead body was the most unclean thing there was. Contact with a corpse made a person unclean for seven days (Numbers 19:11-16). Good King Josiah had burned human bones on the altar at Bethel to defile it so it could never be used again (2 Kings 23:16). Now God would do the same to every idol altar in the land. The bones of the worshipers would make their own altars unclean forever.

"In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste." The high places would be "desolate," the altars "laid waste," the idols "broken," and their works "wiped out." Every bit of their false worship would come to nothing.

"And the slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I am the LORD." This is the first time the great refrain appears in a message of judgment, though it was already heard in 5:13. When the idols fell and could not save, Israel would learn the hard way who the true God is. God would rather His people learn it through blessing. But if they will not learn it any other way, He will teach them through judgment.

6:8-10 *And I will leave **a remnant**, in that you will have escapees of the sword among the nations, when you are scattered among the lands. And your escapees shall remember Me among the nations where they have been taken captive, how I have been broken **by** their heart that plays the prostitute, which has turned aside from Me, and **by** their eyes that play the prostitute after their idols; and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have done, for all their abominations. And they shall know that I **am** the LORD; not in vain did I speak of doing this evil to them.*

Now comes a turn. "And I will leave a remnant, in that you will have escapees of the sword among the nations, when you are scattered among the lands." Even in judgment, God keeps a remnant. Not everyone would die. Some would be carried into exile and survive.

And in exile, something would happen to them that had not happened in their own land: "And your escapees shall remember Me among the nations where they have been taken captive." In their homeland, surrounded by blessing, they forgot God. In captivity, stripped of everything, they would remember Him.

Then God tells us how their sin felt to Him: "how I have been broken by their heart that plays the prostitute, which has turned aside from Me, and by their eyes that play the prostitute after their idols." This is the language of a husband whose wife has been unfaithful, and we will see it at length in chapter 16. Idolatry was not just breaking a rule. It was betraying a love. And God says it broke His heart. Our sin does not just break God's law. It grieves Him (Ephesians 4:30).

"And they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have done, for all their abominations." This is what true repentance looks like. It is not just being sorry we got caught or sorry for the consequences. It is seeing our sin the way God sees it and hating it. Paul calls this "the grief according to God," the grief that leads to real change (2 Corinthians 7:10).

"And they shall know that I am the LORD; not in vain did I speak of doing this evil to them." God's warnings were not empty threats. What He said, He did. And because of that, His promises of restoration are not empty either.

6:11-12 *Thus says the Lord GOD: Strike with your palm and stamp with your foot, and say, "Alas, because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, who shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence!" The **one** far off shall die by the pestilence, and the **one** near shall fall by the sword, and the **one** who remains and the **one** who is preserved shall die by the famine; and I will spend My rage on them.*

"Strike with your palm and stamp with your foot, and say, Alas." Ezekiel was to clap his hands and stamp his feet. In this setting it was not a sign of joy. It was a gesture of strong feeling, perhaps grief, perhaps the anger of a man announcing a verdict (compare 21:14, 17). It drove the message home with his body as well as his voice.

"Because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, who shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence!" Once again we see the three judgments of chapter 5.

Verse 12 shows there would be no escape: "The one far off shall die by the pestilence, and the one near shall fall by the sword, and the one who remains and the one who is preserved shall die by the famine." Whether a person ran far away, stayed close by or hid inside the city, judgment would find him. Sin cannot outrun God (Psalm 139:7-12; Amos 9:1-4). The only safe place is under His mercy, and that comes only through repentance.

6:13-14 *And you shall know that I **am** the LORD, when their slain are in the midst of their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the tops of the mountains, and under every luxuriant tree, and under every leafy terebinth, the place where they gave a soothing aroma to all their idols. And I will stretch out My hand against them and make the land a desolation and a horror, more than the wilderness toward Diblah, in all their dwelling places; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD.'"*

"And you shall know that I am the LORD, when their slain are in the midst of their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the tops of the mountains, and under every luxuriant tree, and under every leafy terebinth." This is a list of all the favorite places of Canaanite worship. Leafy trees and terebinths, large oaks, gave shade and were thought to be sacred, and many pagan rites were done there (Hosea 4:13; Jeremiah 2:20). These were "the place where they gave a soothing aroma to all their idols."

A soothing aroma is the phrase the law uses for the offerings that pleased the LORD (Leviticus 1:9). Israel had taken the language of true worship and given it to idols. Now their bodies would lie on those same hills.

"I will stretch out My hand against them and make the land a desolation and a horror, more than the wilderness toward Diblah." Diblah is not known from anywhere else. Many scholars think it is another form of Riblah, a town in the far north of the land (the Hebrew letters for d and r look

very much alike), where Nebuchadnezzar later judged King Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:6-7). If so, the phrase means from the southern wilderness to Riblah in the north, the whole land, end to end.

"And they shall know that I am the LORD." The chapter ends where it began, with the LORD making Himself known.

What does this chapter teach us? First, idolatry is never harmless. What we put in God's place will fail us when we need it most. Second, God's heart is grieved by our unfaithfulness, not just His law. Third, God's judgments are meant to bring us back to Him. The exiles who remembered the LORD in Babylon and loathed their sin were the ones God would bring home. Hebrews says God disciplines those He loves, so that we may share His holiness (Hebrews 12:6, 10).

Chapter 6 Summary

God told Ezekiel to prophesy against the mountains, hills, ravines and valleys of Israel, where the people had worshiped idols on the high places for centuries. God would bring a sword against the land, destroy the high places, break the altars and incense stands, and scatter the bones of the worshipers around their own idols, defiling them forever. Yet God would leave a remnant scattered among the nations, and there they would remember Him, see how their unfaithful hearts had grieved Him, and loathe themselves for their sin. Ezekiel was to clap and stamp as he announced that sword, famine and plague would reach everyone, near or far. The land would be made desolate from the wilderness to Diblah, and again and again the chapter says the people would know that He is the LORD.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. Why did God tell Ezekiel to prophesy against the mountains of Israel? (6:2-3)

2. What was a high place, and what had God told Israel to do with them? (6:3; Deuteronomy 12:2-3)

3. What would happen to the bodies of the idol worshipers, and why was that so terrible for an Israelite? (6:4-5; Numbers 19:11-16)

4. What would the remnant do among the nations? (6:8-9)

5. How did God say Israel's unfaithfulness affected Him? (6:9)

6. What does it mean that they would "loathe themselves" for their evils? How is that different from just being sorry? (6:9; 2 Corinthians 7:10)

7. What did verse 12 show about trying to escape God's judgment? (6:12)

8. How did Israel misuse the phrase "a soothing aroma"? (6:13; Leviticus 1:9)

9. What are some modern high places, things people turn to in place of God? Is there one in your own life?

10. The exiles remembered God only after they lost everything. Has God ever used a hard time to bring you back to Him? What did you learn? (Hebrews 12:6, 10)

Chapter 7: The End Has Come

Scripture

7:1-13 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "And you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD to the soil of Israel: An end! The end has come on the four corners of the land. Now the end on you, and I will send My anger against you, and I will judge you according to your ways, and I will put on you all your abominations. And My eye shall not pity you, and I will not spare; for I will put your ways on you, and your abominations shall be in your midst; and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD: Evil, one evil! Look, an evil is coming! An end has come; the end has come; it has awakened against you; look, it is coming! The doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land; the time has come; the day ***is*** near, tumult, and not the joyful shout of the mountains. Now shortly I will pour out My rage on you and spend My anger on you, and I will judge you according to your ways, and I will put on you all your abominations. And My eye shall not pity, and I will not spare; according to your ways I will put on you, and your abominations shall be in your midst; and you shall know that I, the LORD, ***am*** striking. Look, the day! Look, it is coming! The doom has gone out; the rod has blossomed; arrogance has budded. Violence has risen up into a rod of wickedness; not of them, and not of their multitude, and not of their wealth, and no eminence ***is*** among them. The time has come; the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice, and let not the seller mourn, for burning anger ***is*** against all its multitude. For the seller shall not return to what was sold, though their life ***is*** still among the living; for the vision concerning all its multitude shall not turn back; and no man shall strengthen himself in his iniquity ***for*** his life.

7:14-27 They have blown the trumpet and prepared everything, and ***there is*** none going to the battle, for My burning anger ***is*** against all its multitude. The sword ***is*** outside, and the pestilence and the famine within; he who ***is*** in the field shall die by the sword, and he who ***is*** in the city, famine and pestilence shall devour him. And their escapees shall escape, and they shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them moaning, each man for his iniquity. All the hands shall go limp, and all knees shall run ***with*** water. And they shall gird themselves ***with*** sackcloth, and shuddering shall cover them; and on all faces ***shall be*** shame, and on all their heads baldness. Their silver they shall throw into the streets, and their gold shall become an unclean thing; their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the fury of the LORD; their soul they shall not satisfy, and their inward parts they shall not fill; for it has become the stumbling block of their iniquity. And the beauty of its ornament he set for pride, and they made the images of their abominations, their detestable things, with it; therefore I will make it an unclean thing to them. And I will give it into the hand of the strangers for spoil, and to the wicked of the earth for plunder, and they shall profane it. And I will turn My face from them, and they shall profane My treasured ***place***; and robbers shall enter it and profane it. Make the chain, for the land is full of judgment of bloodshed, and the city is full of violence. And I will bring the evil ***ones*** of the nations, and they shall possess their houses; and I will make the pride of the strong cease, and their sanctuaries shall be profaned. Anguish has come, and they shall seek peace, and ***there shall be*** none. Disaster on disaster shall come, and report shall be on report; and they shall seek a vision from a prophet, and the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders.

The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed ***with*** desolation, and the hands of the people of the land shall be terrified. According to their way I will do to them, and by their judgments I will judge them; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD."

Chapter 7 Preview

Chapter 7 is a poem of alarm. It is short, sharp and full of repetition, like a bell ringing in the night: "An end! The end has come" (7:2). The time for warning is running out. The day of judgment that the prophets had spoken of for centuries is about to arrive in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel describes what that day will look like. Business will stop. The army will not even march out to fight. People will throw their silver and gold into the streets because money cannot buy safety. Strangers will plunder the temple. Prophets, priests and elders will have no answers, and the king himself will mourn. Through it all, one sentence keeps returning: God will judge them "according to your ways" (7:3, 8, 27), and they will know that He is the LORD. This chapter reminds us that God's patience is real, but it is not endless.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1-4 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "And you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD to the soil of Israel: An end! The end has come on the four corners of the land. Now the end **is** on you, and I will send My anger against you, and I will judge you according to your ways, and I will put on you all your abominations. And My eye shall not pity you, and I will not spare; for I will put your ways on you, and your abominations shall be in your midst; and you shall know that I **am** the LORD.*

"Thus says the Lord GOD to the soil of Israel: An end! The end has come on the four corners of the land." The four corners means the whole land, every part of it. No region would be spared. The prophet Amos had used the same word about the northern kingdom more than a century before: "The end has come to My people Israel" (Amos 8:2). Samaria had fallen in 722 B.C., just as Amos said. Now it was Judah's turn.

"Now the end is on you, and I will send My anger against you, and I will judge you according to your ways." This phrase is the key to the chapter. God's judgment was not random. It fit what they had done. They had chosen their ways, and now they would receive the result. Paul says the same principle still holds: "whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

"And I will put on you all your abominations." Their idols and evils would come back on them like a heavy load.

"My eye shall not pity you, and I will not spare." We have heard this before (5:11). The time of patience was over. "And you shall know that I am the LORD."

7:5-9 *Thus says the Lord GOD: Evil, one evil! Look, an evil is coming! An end has come; the end has come; it has awakened against you; look, it is coming! The doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land; the time has come; the day **is** near, tumult, and not the joyful shout of the mountains. Now shortly I will pour out My rage on you and spend My anger on you, and I will judge you according to your ways, and I will put on you all your abominations. And My eye shall not pity, and I will not spare; according to your ways I will put on you, and your abominations shall be in your midst; and you shall know that I, the LORD, **am** striking.*

The language now speeds up, as if Ezekiel is out of breath: "Evil, one evil! Look, an evil is coming! An end has come; the end has come; it has awakened against you; look, it is coming!" The word "evil" here means disaster or calamity, not sin. A disaster like no other was on its way.

"It has awakened against you." The people thought judgment was asleep, that God had forgotten or did not care. Now it was wide awake.

"The doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land; the time has come; the day is near, tumult, and not the joyful shout of the mountains." On the hilltops there had been feasts and celebrations at the high places. Those happy shouts would be replaced by the noise of war.

Verses 8 and 9 repeat verses 3 and 4 almost word for word. That is the way Hebrew poetry often works, repeating a thought to make it stick. The key difference is the last line: "you shall know that I, the LORD, am striking." The people would not be able to blame Babylon, chance or bad luck. They would know who was behind it.

7:10-11 *Look, the day! Look, it is coming! The doom has gone out; the rod has blossomed; arrogance has budded. Violence has risen up into a rod of wickedness; not of them, and not of their multitude, and not of their wealth, and no eminence **is** among them.*

"Look, the day! Look, it is coming!" Here Ezekiel speaks of "the day." The prophets often speak of the day of the LORD. It means a time when God steps into history to judge sin and set things right. The prophets used it for near judgments, like the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., and also for the great day still to come at the end of this age, when Christ returns (Joel 2:31; Zephaniah 1:14-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:2). Each near day of the LORD is a preview of the final one.

"The doom has gone out; the rod has blossomed; arrogance has budded." A rod that blossoms brings to mind Aaron's rod, which budded to show God's choice (Numbers 17:8). But this rod is a rod of punishment. Some teachers think it pictures Nebuchadnezzar, God's rod against Judah (compare Isaiah 10:5 for Assyria). Others think it is Judah's own pride, which has grown up like a plant and is now ready for harvest. Either way, the thing has come to full growth.

"Violence has risen up into a rod of wickedness." The violence in Jerusalem had grown into a rod that would punish the city itself. Sin carries its own punishment inside it. "Not of them, and not of their multitude, and not of their wealth, and no eminence is among them." Nothing would remain: not the people, not their crowds, not their riches, not their importance.

7:12-13 *The time has come; the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice, and let not the seller mourn, for burning anger **is** against all its multitude. For the seller shall not return to what was sold, though their life **is** still among the living; for the vision concerning all its multitude shall not turn back; and no man shall strengthen himself in his iniquity **for** his life.*

"The time has come; the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice, and let not the seller mourn." In normal times, a man who bought land was glad and a man who had to sell it was sad. But when the city falls, it will not matter. The buyer will lose what he bought, and the seller will have nothing to lose.

"For the seller shall not return to what was sold, though their life is still among the living." The law had a special rule called the jubilee. Every fiftieth year, land that had been sold went back to the family that first owned it, so that no family would lose its inheritance forever (Leviticus 25:10-13, 23-28). A man who sold his field could count on getting it back. But God says the exile would cancel that hope. Even the seller who lived long enough would not go back to his land, because he would be in Babylon.

"For the vision concerning all its multitude shall not turn back." What God had shown would not be undone.

This speaks to us. People pour their lives into houses, land, businesses and savings. Those things are not wrong. But when God's day comes, none of them will matter. Jesus asked, "what is a man profited if he gains the whole world but suffers the loss of his life?" (Matthew 16:26). The only thing that lasts is what we have in Him.

7:14-16 *They have blown the trumpet and prepared everything, and **there is** none going to the battle, for My burning anger **is** against all its multitude. The sword **is** outside, and the pestilence and the famine within; he who **is** in the field shall die by the sword, and he who **is** in the city, famine and pestilence shall devour him. And their escapees shall escape, and they shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them moaning, each man for his iniquity.*

"They have blown the trumpet and prepared everything, and there is none going to the battle." The trumpet was the call to arms. Normally, when the trumpet sounded, the soldiers rushed to their places. But now no one goes. The army is ready on paper, but the men have lost heart. Why? "For My burning anger is against all its multitude." No army can stand against God.

"The sword is outside, and the pestilence and the famine within." Outside the walls, the Babylonian army waited. Inside the walls, disease and hunger did their work. "He who is in the field shall die by the sword, and he who is in the city, famine and pestilence shall devour him." There was no safe place.

"And their escapees shall escape, and they shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them moaning, each man for his iniquity." Doves make a low, sad cooing sound. The few who got away would hide in the hills, grieving. And notice what they grieve over: "each man for his iniquity." At last, people would be sorry for their own sin, not just for their losses.

7:17-18 *All the hands shall go limp, and all knees shall run **with** water. And they shall gird themselves **with** sackcloth, and shuddering shall cover them; and on all faces **shall be** shame, and on all their heads baldness.*

"All the hands shall go limp, and all knees shall run with water." This is a picture of fear so strong that a man's body fails him. His hands cannot hold a weapon. His legs give way. The courage of the city would melt.

"And they shall gird themselves with sackcloth, and shuddering shall cover them; and on all faces shall be shame, and on all their heads baldness." Sackcloth was rough cloth made from goat's hair, worn as a sign of mourning. Shaving the head was a sign of grief, as we saw in chapter 5. The whole city would be in mourning.

There is a kind of shame that comes too late. The people of Jerusalem would be ashamed when the judgment fell. How much better to be ashamed of our sin while there is still time to turn from it. Today, God invites us to come to Him while His mercy is offered (Isaiah 55:6-7; 2 Corinthians 6:2).

7:19-20 *Their silver they shall throw into the streets, and their gold shall become an unclean thing; their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the fury of the LORD; their soul they shall not satisfy, and their inward parts they shall not fill; for it has become the stumbling block of their iniquity. And the beauty of its ornament he set for pride, and they made the images of their abominations, their detestable things, with it; therefore I will make it an unclean thing to them.*

"Their silver they shall throw into the streets, and their gold shall become an unclean thing." In a city under siege, money loses its value. You cannot eat gold. People would throw their treasures away like garbage.

"Their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the fury of the LORD." Zephaniah, who preached just before Ezekiel's time, said the same thing in almost the same words (Zephaniah 1:18). Wealth cannot buy a way out of God's judgment.

"For it has become the stumbling block of their iniquity." Their money had not only failed to save them. It had tripped them up. Verse 20 explains how: "the beauty of its ornament he set for pride, and they made the images of their abominations, their detestable things, with it." They took the silver and gold God had given them and made idols out of it (Hosea 2:8). So God says, "therefore I will make it an unclean thing to them."

Paul warns that "the love of money is a root of all the evils" (1 Timothy 6:10). Money in itself is not evil. But when it becomes the thing we trust, or the thing we make our god, it will trip us up and fail us in the end.

7:21-22 *And I will give it into the hand of the strangers for spoil, and to the wicked of the earth for plunder, and they shall profane it. And I will turn My face from them, and they shall profane My treasured* ***place****; and robbers shall enter it and profane it.*

"And I will give it into the hand of the strangers for spoil, and to the wicked of the earth for plunder, and they shall profane it." The silver and gold the people had turned into idols would be carried off by foreign soldiers.

Then God says something that must have shocked the exiles: "And I will turn My face from them, and they shall profane My treasured place; and robbers shall enter it and profane it." The "treasured place" is the temple, God's own house. The people believed God would never let the temple be touched. But God Himself would turn His face away and let the Babylonians walk into His sanctuary. That is exactly what happened in 586 B.C., when Nebuzaradan burned the house of the LORD (2 Kings 25:8-9).

A building, even a holy one, cannot protect people who have turned from God. Jeremiah warned the people in Jerusalem not to trust in lying words that said, "The temple of the LORD" over and over, while they lived in sin (Jeremiah 7:4). God is not impressed with religious places when the hearts of the people are far from Him.

7:23-24 *Make the chain, for the land is full of judgment of bloodshed, and the city is full of violence. And I will bring the evil* ***ones*** *of the nations, and they shall possess their houses; and I will make the pride of the strong cease, and their sanctuaries shall be profaned.*

"Make the chain, for the land is full of judgment of bloodshed, and the city is full of violence." The chain was for prisoners being led into exile. The people had filled the land with injustice and murder. Now they would be led away in chains.

"And I will bring the evil ones of the nations, and they shall possess their houses." God calls the Babylonians "the evil ones of the nations." He was not approving of Babylon. He was using a wicked nation to judge His own people, and later He would judge Babylon too (Jeremiah 25:12; Habakkuk 1 and 2). God can use even evil people to carry out His purposes, without being the author of their evil.

"And I will make the pride of the strong cease, and their sanctuaries shall be profaned." Every place they counted as holy, and every source of their pride, would be brought low.

7:25-27 *Anguish has come, and they shall seek peace, and* ***there shall be*** *none. Disaster on disaster shall come, and report shall be on report; and they shall seek a vision from a prophet, and the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders. The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed* ***with*** *desolation, and the hands of the people of the land shall be terrified. According to their way I will do to them, and by their judgments I will judge them; and they shall know that I* ***am*** *the LORD."*

"Anguish has come, and they shall seek peace, and there shall be none." They would look for peace when it was too late. The false prophets had promised peace (13:10), but there would be none.

"Disaster on disaster shall come, and report shall be on report." Bad news would pile on bad news. "And they shall seek a vision from a prophet, and the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders." In a crisis, people turn to their spiritual leaders. But the prophets would have no vision, the priests would have no word of instruction from the law, and the elders would have no wise advice. Why? Because the leaders had turned from God, and God had gone silent. Amos warned of a famine, not of bread, but of hearing the words of the LORD (Amos 8:11).

"The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed with desolation, and the hands of the people of the land shall be terrified." From the king down to the common people, everyone would be in despair.

The last words of the chapter sum it up: "According to their way I will do to them, and by their judgments I will judge them; and they shall know that I am the LORD." God judged them by the very standards they had used to judge others. Jesus said, "with what judgment you judge, you will be judged" (Matthew 7:2).

What do we take from this chapter? The end came for Jerusalem, just as God said. A greater end is coming for this world, when Christ returns. That is not meant to frighten believers. It is meant to wake us up and send us to people who do not know Him. For those who belong to Christ, that day is not a day of terror but of hope (Titus 2:13).

Chapter 7 Summary

God told Ezekiel to announce that the end had come on the whole land of Israel. God would judge the people according to their ways and repay their abominations without pity. A disaster was awake and coming, the day was near, the rod had blossomed, and violence had grown into its own punishment. Buying and selling would mean nothing, since no one would return to his land, even in the jubilee. The trumpet would sound but no one would go to battle. The sword would be outside and famine and plague inside, and the few who escaped would moan like doves on the mountains. People would throw their silver and gold into the streets, because the wealth they had made into idols could not save them. Strangers would plunder and profane God's own temple. Prophets, priests and elders would have no answers, the king would mourn, and the people would know that He is the LORD.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. What did God announce had come on the land of Israel, and how much of the land would it reach? (7:2)

2. What phrase about how God would judge them is repeated in this chapter? (7:3, 8, 27)

3. What is the day of the LORD, and how is the fall of Jerusalem a preview of a greater day? (7:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:2)

4. Why would buying and selling not matter anymore? How does the law of jubilee help explain this? (7:12-13; Leviticus 25:10)

5. Why did no one go to battle when the trumpet sounded? (7:14)

6. What would the people do with their silver and gold, and why could it not save them? (7:19-20)

7. What would happen to the temple, God's "treasured place"? (7:22; 2 Kings 25:9)

8. Why would the prophets, priests and elders have no answers? (7:26; Amos 8:11)

9. Israel trusted in money and in the temple. What are some things people today trust in that cannot save them? (Matthew 16:26)

10. How should knowing that Christ is coming again shape the way you live this week? (Titus 2:13)

Chapter 8: Abominations in the Temple

Scripture

8:1-18 And it was in the sixth year, in the sixth ***month***, on the fifth ***day*** of the month, I ***was*** sitting in my house, and the elders of Judah ***were*** sitting before me, and the hand of the Lord GOD fell on me there. And I looked, and look, a likeness like the appearance of fire; from the appearance of His hips and downward, fire; and from His hips and upward, like the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of the shining substance. And He stretched out the form of a hand and took me by a lock of my head; and a spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heavens and brought me to Jerusalem in visions of God, to the entrance of the gate of the inner ***court*** that faces north, where the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, ***was***. And look, the glory of the God of Israel ***was*** there, like the appearance which I had seen in the plain. And He said to me, "Son of man, lift up your eyes, please, toward the north." And I lifted up my eyes toward the north, and look, north of the gate of the altar ***was*** this image of jealousy, in the entrance. And He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are doing here, to be far from My sanctuary? And yet you will again see great abominations." And He brought me to the entrance of the court, and I looked, and look, one hole in the wall. And He said to me, "Son of man, dig, please, in the wall." And I dug in the wall, and look, one entrance. And He said to me, "Go in and see the evil abominations which they are doing here." And I went in and looked, and look, every form of moving thing and beast, a detestable thing, and all the idols of the house of Israel, carved on the wall all around, all around. And seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing in their midst, ***were*** standing before them, each man ***with*** his censer in his hand, and the fragrance of the cloud of the incense ***was*** going up. And He said to me, "Have you seen, son of man, what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the darkness, each man in the rooms of his carved image? For they are saying, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.'" And He said to me, "You will again see great abominations which they are doing." And He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the house of the LORD which ***was*** toward the north; and look, there the women ***were*** sitting, weeping ***for*** the Tammuz. And He said to me, "Have you seen, son of man? You will again see great abominations, more than these." And He brought me to the inner court of the house of the LORD, and look, at the entrance of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, ***were*** about twenty-five men, their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces eastward; and they ***were*** bowing down eastward to the sun. And He said to me, "Have you seen, son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah to do the abominations which they have done here, that they have filled the land ***with*** violence and have turned back to provoke Me to anger? And look, they are putting the branch to their nose. And I also will act in rage; My eye shall not pity, and I will not spare; and they shall call in My ears ***with*** a loud voice, and I will not hear them."

Chapter 8 Preview

Fourteen months after his call, Ezekiel is sitting in his house with the elders of Judah when the hand of the Lord GOD falls on him. In a vision, the Spirit lifts him up by a lock of his hair and

carries him to Jerusalem, to the temple. Chapters 8 to 11 are one long vision. In chapter 8 God gives Ezekiel a tour of His own house and shows him what His people are doing there.

It gets worse at every stop. At the north gate stands an idol that provokes God to jealousy. Inside a hidden room, seventy elders burn incense to images of animals carved on the walls. At the north gate of the temple, women weep for a foreign god. And in the inner court, between the porch and the altar, twenty-five men turn their backs on the house of God and bow to the sun. Four times God says, in effect, you will see worse. This chapter answers the question every exile was asking: why would God let His own temple fall? Because His people had already driven Him out of it.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1 *And it was in the sixth year, in the sixth **month**, on the fifth **day** of the month, I **was** sitting in my house, and the elders of Judah **were** sitting before me, and the hand of the Lord GOD fell on me there.*

"In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month." Counting from Jehoiachin's exile, this is about 592 B.C., a little over a year after Ezekiel's call (1:2). If Ezekiel was still lying on his side for the 390 days and 40 days of chapter 4, this vision came during that time.

"I was sitting in my house, and the elders of Judah were sitting before me." The elders were the leaders of the exile community. They had come to Ezekiel's house, likely hoping for a word from God about Jerusalem and about when they would go home. They got a word, but not the one they wanted.

"And the hand of the Lord GOD fell on me there." As in 1:3, this means God's power took hold of Ezekiel to give him a vision.

8:2-4 *And I looked, and look, a likeness like the appearance of fire; from the appearance of His hips and downward, fire; and from His hips and upward, like the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of the shining substance. And He stretched out the form of a hand and took me by a lock of my head; and a spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heavens and brought me to Jerusalem in visions of God, to the entrance of the gate of the inner **court** that faces north, where the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, **was**. And look, the glory of the God of Israel **was** there, like the appearance which I had seen in the plain.*

Ezekiel saw "a likeness like the appearance of fire." From the waist down, fire, and from the waist up, brightness like "the shining substance." This is the same figure Ezekiel saw on the throne in 1:26-27. The One who sat on the throne by the Chebar now comes to Ezekiel in his own house.

"And He stretched out the form of a hand and took me by a lock of my head." The Spirit lifted him "between the earth and the heavens and brought me to Jerusalem in visions of God." Ezekiel's body likely stayed in his house with the elders watching. In 11:24-25 he comes back from the vision and tells the elders what he saw. He was carried to Jerusalem "in visions," the way Paul once said he did not know whether he was in the body or out of it (2 Corinthians 12:2-3). What Ezekiel saw, though, was real. He saw what was really happening in the temple at that time.

He was set down "to the entrance of the gate of the inner court that faces north, where the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was." We will see the idol in verse 5.

Then "look, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the appearance which I had seen in the plain" (8:4; compare 3:23). God's glory was still in His house. He had not left yet. But in chapters 9 to 11 we will watch Him leave, step by step.

8:5-6 *And He said to me, "Son of man, lift up your eyes, please, toward the north." And I lifted up my eyes toward the north, and look, north of the gate of the altar* ***was*** *this image of jealousy, in the entrance. And He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are doing here, to be far from My sanctuary? And yet you will again see great abominations."*

"Son of man, lift up your eyes, please, toward the north." Ezekiel looked, and "north of the gate of the altar was this image of jealousy, in the entrance."

What was this idol? Ezekiel does not name it. Many teachers think it was an image of Asherah. Asherah was a Canaanite mother goddess, the partner of Baal in some places, often worshiped with a carved wooden pole or image. King Manasseh had set up an Asherah image in the temple itself (2 Kings 21:7). Josiah removed it (2 Kings 23:6), but after Josiah's death the people may have brought back something like it. Whatever it was, it stood right at the gate where the people came in to worship. Every worshiper had to pass by it.

Why is it called "the image of jealousy"? Because it "provokes to jealousy." God is jealous for His people the way a faithful husband is jealous for his wife (Exodus 20:4-5). An idol in His own house was like another lover brought into the marriage home.

"Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are doing here, to be far from My sanctuary?" Their sin was driving God away from His own house. Then God adds, "And yet you will again see great abominations." This was only the beginning.

8:7-9 *And He brought me to the entrance of the court, and I looked, and look, one hole in the wall. And He said to me, "Son of man, dig, please, in the wall." And I dug in the wall, and look, one entrance. And He said to me, "Go in and see the evil abominations which they are doing here."*

God brought Ezekiel "to the entrance of the court," and he saw "one hole in the wall." God told him, "dig, please, in the wall." When he dug, he found a hidden door. "Go in and see the evil abominations which they are doing here."

The point of this little scene is that some sin is hidden. It does not stand in the open at the gate. It happens behind walls, in secret rooms, where people think no one is watching. God made Ezekiel dig through the wall to show that nothing is hidden from Him. "There is no creature hidden before Him, but all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him" (Hebrews 4:13).

What is behind your walls? Every one of us has places we would rather God not look. He already sees them. The good news is that He shows us our hidden sin, not to shame us, but so we can bring it into the light and be forgiven (1 John 1:7-9).

8:10-11 *And I went in and looked, and look, every form of moving thing and beast, a detestable thing, and all the idols of the house of Israel, carved on the wall all around, all around. And seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing in their midst,* ***were*** *standing before them, each man* ***with*** *his censer in his hand, and the fragrance of the cloud of the incense* ***was*** *going up.*

Inside, Ezekiel saw "every form of moving thing and beast, a detestable thing, and all the idols of the house of Israel, carved on the wall all around, all around." Creeping things and animals carved on the walls sounds very much like the gods of Egypt, which were often pictured with the heads or forms of animals. Judah's leaders had been looking to Egypt for help against Babylon (17:15), and it seems they had picked up Egypt's gods as well. Paul describes this same exchange in Romans 1:23: people traded the glory of the incorruptible God for images of men, birds, four-footed animals and creeping things.

"And seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel" stood before the carvings, "each man with his censer in his hand, and the fragrance of the cloud of the incense was going up." Seventy elders remind us of the seventy elders who went up Mount Sinai with Moses and saw the God of Israel (Exodus 24:9-11). The leaders who should have led Israel in worship of the true God were leading the way into idolatry.

One of them is named: "Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan." Shaphan was the scribe under good King Josiah who read the book of the law to the king when it was found in the temple (2 Kings 22:8-10). Shaphan's other sons and grandson stood with Jeremiah and protected him (Jeremiah 26:24; 36:10-12; 40:5). But this son of a godly father was standing in a secret room, burning incense to idols. A godly family does not guarantee godly children. Each generation has to choose to follow the LORD for itself.

8:12-13 *And He said to me, "Have you seen, son of man, what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the darkness, each man in the rooms of his carved image? For they are saying, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.'" And He said to me, "You will again see great abominations which they are doing."*

"Have you seen, son of man, what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the darkness, each man in the rooms of his carved image?" Each elder may have had his own private shrine or idol, as well as joining in the group worship.

Then God tells Ezekiel what they were saying to themselves: "The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land." They had two excuses. First, God does not see. Second, God has left us anyway. They thought that because Babylon had already taken the king and many of the people, God had abandoned them. So they turned to other gods for help.

Both excuses are lies people still tell themselves. One says God does not see what I do in private. The other says God has let me down, so I will look for help somewhere else. The psalmist answered the first one long ago: "He who forms the eye, does He not look?" (Psalm 94:9). And the second gets things backward. God had not forsaken the land. They had forsaken Him.

"You will again see great abominations which they are doing."

8:14-15 *And He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the house of the LORD which **was** toward the north; and look, there the women **were** sitting, weeping **for** the Tammuz. And He said to me, "Have you seen, son of man? You will again see great abominations, more than these."*

God brought Ezekiel "to the entrance of the gate of the house of the LORD which was toward the north; and look, there the women were sitting, weeping for the Tammuz."

Tammuz was a god of Mesopotamia, the land of Babylon. He was a god of crops and spring growth. In the myths, he died and went down to the underworld each year, and his worshipers wept and mourned for him in the hot summer when plants dried up. Later the Greeks had a similar god named Adonis. Ezekiel's vision came in the sixth month, in late summer, not long after the month that carried Tammuz's name, when his mourning rites were held.

The women of Jerusalem were weeping for a dead nature god at the gate of the house of the living God. The LORD gives the rain and the harvest (Deuteronomy 11:13-15; Hosea 2:8). But they wept for a god who could not even keep himself alive.

"Have you seen, son of man? You will again see great abominations, more than these."

8:16 *And He brought me to the inner court of the house of the LORD, and look, at the entrance of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, **were** about twenty-five men, their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces eastward; and they **were** bowing down eastward to the sun.*

Finally God brought Ezekiel "to the inner court of the house of the LORD." This was the holiest area outside the temple building itself, where only priests were supposed to serve. And there, "between the porch and the altar," were "about twenty-five men, their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces eastward; and they were bowing down eastward to the sun."

This is the worst of all, for several reasons. First, the place. Between the porch and the altar was where the priests stood to weep and pray for the people (Joel 2:17). Second, the posture. The temple faced east, so anyone facing east to worship the sun had to turn his back on the Most Holy Place, where God's presence dwelt. They turned their backs on God, in body as well as in heart. Third, the object. Worship of the sun, moon and stars was strictly forbidden (Deuteronomy 4:19). Josiah had removed the horses and chariots dedicated to the sun from the temple entrance (2 Kings 23:11). Now it was back.

Many teachers think these twenty-five men were priests, since they stood where priests stood. Twenty-four courses of priests plus the high priest would make twenty-five (1 Chronicles 24). If so, the very men who should have guarded God's house were leading the rebellion. Whether they were priests or not, the picture is the same: at the very heart of God's house, the leaders of the people had turned their backs on Him.

8:17-18 *And He said to me, "Have you seen, son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah to do the abominations which they have done here, that they have filled the land* ***with*** *violence and have turned back to provoke Me to anger? And look, they are putting the branch to their nose. And I also will act in rage; My eye shall not pity, and I will not spare; and they shall call in My ears* ***with*** *a loud voice, and I will not hear them."*

"Have you seen, son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah to do the abominations which they have done here, that they have filled the land with violence and have turned back to provoke Me to anger?" Notice how God links idolatry with violence. When people turn from God, they soon turn on each other. False worship and injustice always go together. The two great commandments are to love God and love our neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). Break the first and you will soon break the second.

"And look, they are putting the branch to their nose." No one is sure what this means. It may have been part of a pagan ritual, holding a sacred branch to the face during worship of the sun. Some think it was an insulting gesture toward God, something like thumbing their nose at Him. Either way, it was the final insult.

"And I also will act in rage; My eye shall not pity, and I will not spare; and they shall call in My ears with a loud voice, and I will not hear them." There comes a time when God stops listening to the cries of people who have refused to listen to Him (Proverbs 1:24-28; Jeremiah 11:11). That is not because God is cruel. It is because they waited until the judgment had already come. As long as we have breath, the door of mercy is open. But we should not wait until the last moment to walk through it.

Chapter 8 Summary

In the sixth year of the exile, about 592 B.C., as Ezekiel sat with the elders of Judah in his house, the hand of the Lord GOD fell on him, and in visions of God he was carried to the temple in Jerusalem, where the glory of the God of Israel still was. God showed him four scenes, each worse than the last: an image of jealousy at the north gate; seventy elders, led by Jaazaniah son of Shaphan, burning incense to images of beasts and creeping things in a hidden room, saying the LORD does not see; women at the north gate of the temple weeping for the Babylonian god Tammuz; and about twenty-five men in the inner court, between the porch and the altar, with their backs to the temple, bowing to the sun. They had also filled the land with violence. God said He would act in rage, without pity, and would not listen to their cries.

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. When did this vision come, and who was sitting with Ezekiel? (8:1)

2. Who appeared to Ezekiel, and how does this figure connect to chapter 1? (8:2; 1:26-27)

3. What was at the north gate, and why was it called the image of jealousy? (8:3-5)

4. What did Ezekiel find behind the wall, and who was worshiping there? (8:7-11)

5. What two things were the elders saying to themselves, and why were both lies? (8:12; Psalm 94:7-9)

6. Who was Tammuz, and why was weeping for him at God's house so wrong? (8:14)

7. Where were the twenty-five men, which way were they facing, and what were they worshiping? (8:16; Deuteronomy 4:19)

8. How did God connect idolatry and violence? Why do those two go together? (8:17; Matthew 22:37-40)

9. Jaazaniah's father was a godly man, but Jaazaniah went his own way. What does that say to parents, and to children of godly parents?

10. God made Ezekiel dig through a wall to see hidden sin. Is there something in your life you have been hiding from God? What would it look like to bring it into the light? (1 John 1:7-9)

Chapter 9: The Mark on the Foreheads

Scripture

9:1-11 And He called in my ears ***with*** a loud voice, saying, "Draw near, O punishments of the city, each man ***with*** his weapon of destruction in his hand." And look, six men ***were*** coming from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each man ***with*** his weapon of shattering in his hand; and one man in their midst ***was*** clothed ***in*** linen, and the writing case of the scribe ***was*** at his hips. And they came and stood beside the bronze altar. And the glory of the God of Israel was taken up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the house; and He called to the man clothed ***in*** linen, at whose hips ***was*** the writing case of the scribe. And the LORD said to him, "Pass through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and mark a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and who groan over all the abominations which are done in its midst." And to these He said in my ears, "Pass through the city after him, and strike; let not your eye pity, and do not spare. Old man, young man and virgin, and little ones and women, kill to destruction; and do not come near any man on whom ***is*** the mark; and begin at My sanctuary." And they began with the old men who ***were*** before the house. And He said to them, "Make the house unclean, and fill the courts ***with*** slain. Go out!" And they went out and struck in the city. And it was, as they were striking, and I was left, ***that*** I fell on my face and cried out and said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Are You destroying all the remnant of Israel in Your pouring out of Your rage on Jerusalem?" And He said to me, "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah ***is*** very, very great, and the land has been filled ***with*** bloodshed, and the city is full of perversity; for they have said, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see.' And I also, My eye shall not pity, and I will not spare; their way I will put on their head." And look, the man clothed ***in*** the linen, at whose hips ***was*** the writing case, ***was*** bringing back word, saying, "I have done according to all that You commanded me."

Chapter 9 Preview

The vision of chapter 8 continues. God has shown Ezekiel the abominations in His house. Now He calls for the executioners of the city. Six men come with weapons in their hands, and with them a seventh man dressed in linen, carrying a scribe's writing case. Before anyone is struck, God sends the man in linen through Jerusalem to put a mark on the foreheads of everyone who sighs and groans over the city's sin. Then the six follow him and strike everyone who does not have the mark, beginning at the sanctuary.

This is one of the hard chapters of Ezekiel. It is a vision of judgment, and it includes the old and the young. We will read it carefully and honestly. But it is also a chapter of mercy. God knows His own, and He marks them before the judgment falls. And it is a chapter of prayer, because when Ezekiel sees what is happening, he falls on his face and cries out for the remnant of Israel.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1-2 *And He called in my ears **with** a loud voice, saying, "Draw near, O punishments of the city, each man **with** his weapon of destruction in his hand." And look, six men **were** coming from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each man **with** his weapon of shattering in his hand; and one man in their midst **was** clothed **in** linen, and the writing case of the scribe **was** at his hips. And they came and stood beside the bronze altar.*

"Draw near, O punishments of the city, each man with his weapon of destruction in his hand." God called out with a loud voice in Ezekiel's hearing, the same loud voice the people would cry with and not be heard (8:18).

"And look, six men were coming from the direction of the upper gate which faces north." These are not ordinary men. In Ezekiel's visions, heavenly beings often look like men (40:3), and these are best understood as angels sent to carry out God's judgment, much like the destroyer at the Passover (Exodus 12:23) or the angel who struck the Assyrian army (2 Kings 19:35). In history, the judgment they pictured came through Babylon's army in 586 B.C. They came from the north, where the idol of jealousy stood, the same direction from which Babylon would come.

"And one man in their midst was clothed in linen, and the writing case of the scribe was at his hips." Linen was the clothing of priests (Leviticus 16:4). A writing case held pens and ink. This man was not there to destroy but to record and to mark. Who was he? Many teachers see him as a high-ranking angel, like the man in linen Daniel saw (Daniel 10:5-6; 12:6-7). Some believe he was the Son of God Himself, since he works alongside the glory of God and reports directly to Him. Scripture does not say, and I will not press it. What matters is his work: he marks God's people for protection.

"And they came and stood beside the bronze altar." The bronze altar was the great altar of burnt offering in the temple court. The place of sacrifice became the place where judgment began.

9:3-4 *And the glory of the God of Israel was taken up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the house; and He called to the man clothed **in** linen, at whose hips **was** the writing case of the scribe. And the LORD said to him, "Pass through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and mark a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and who groan over all the abominations which are done in its midst."*

"And the glory of the God of Israel was taken up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the house." This is the first step in the glory's departure. Until now, the glory had been above the cherubim in the Most Holy Place, over the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:22). Now it moves out to the threshold, the doorway of the temple. God is getting ready to leave. In chapter 10 He will move to the east gate, and in chapter 11 He will leave the city altogether.

From the threshold God spoke to the man in linen: "Pass through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and mark a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and who groan over all the abominations which are done in its midst."

The word for mark here is taw, the name of the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In the old Hebrew script of Ezekiel's day, the taw was written like an X or a small cross. Many Christians through the centuries have noticed that the sign which marked God's people for life was shaped like a cross. The text does not make anything of the shape, and we should not build doctrine on it. But it is a striking picture.

Who received the mark? Not the people who went to the temple. Not the people who said the right words. It was "the men who sigh and who groan over all the abominations." They were grieved by the sin around them. They did not join in, and they did not shrug it off. Their hearts were broken over it. God saw them, knew them, and marked them as His own.

This reminds us of the Passover, when the blood on the doorposts marked the houses the destroyer would pass over (Exodus 12:13, 23). It also looks ahead. In Revelation, before judgment falls on the earth, God seals His servants "on their foreheads" (Revelation 7:3), and the plagues are not allowed to harm anyone except "the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads" (Revelation 9:4). And Paul tells believers today that they have been "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). God has always known how to protect His own in the day of judgment (2 Peter 2:9).

Do you grieve over sin? Not just the sin of others, but the sin in your own heart? It is easy to get used to what is wrong around us, until it no longer bothers us. The people God marked were those who had not grown used to it.

9:5-6 *And to these He said in my ears, "Pass through the city after him, and strike; let not your eye pity, and do not spare. Old man, young man and virgin, and little ones and women, kill to destruction; and do not come near any man on whom **is** the mark; and begin at My sanctuary." And they began with the old men who **were** before the house.*

Then God spoke to the six: "Pass through the city after him, and strike; let not your eye pity, and do not spare. Old man, young man and virgin, and little ones and women, kill to destruction; and do not come near any man on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary."

This is very hard to read, and I do not want to rush past it. How do we understand it?

First, remember that this is a vision. Ezekiel saw it in Babylon while the city was still standing. It showed in a picture what would really happen when Jerusalem fell to Babylon six years later. In 586 B.C., the Babylonian army killed young and old in the city. 2 Chronicles 36:17 says the king of the Chaldeans had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. The vision shows that this was not an accident of war. It was God's judgment on a city that had rejected Him for centuries.

Second, God is not unjust. He had waited for hundreds of years. He had sent prophet after prophet. Jeremiah had stood in the temple courts and begged the people to turn back (Jeremiah 7:1-15). The judgment came only after every warning had been refused. Abraham asked long ago, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do justice?" (Genesis 18:25). The answer is yes. We may not understand every part of how God judges, but we can trust that He never does wrong.

Third, God knows His own. The ones with the mark were not touched. "Do not come near any man on whom is the mark." No one God had marked was lost in the judgment. And what about the little ones? Scripture does not answer every question we would like to ask. But I believe little children who die are safe with God, as David believed about his own child (2 Samuel 12:23). Children suffered in Jerusalem's fall because of the sins of the adults around them. That is one of the bitterest results of sin: it falls on the innocent too. But God's judgment of a nation in history is not the same as His final judgment of each soul, and the Judge of all the earth will do right by every child.

"And begin at My sanctuary." The judgment began at the temple, where the worst sins had been done. "And they began with the old men who were before the house," likely the very elders of 8:11-12 and the men of 8:16. The people with the most light and the most responsibility were judged first.

Peter writes, "For it is the time for the judgment to begin from the house of God; and if it begins first from us, what will be the end of those disobeying the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17). God takes the sins of His own people seriously. Those who lead in His church will give an account (James 3:1). That is not a reason for believers to fear losing our salvation. Christ has borne the condemnation for us (Romans 8:1). It is a reason to take holiness seriously, starting with ourselves.

9:7-8 *And He said to them, "Make the house unclean, and fill the courts **with** slain. Go out!" And they went out and struck in the city. And it was, as they were striking, and I was left, **that** I fell on my face and cried out and said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Are You destroying all the remnant of Israel in Your pouring out of Your rage on Jerusalem?"*

"Make the house unclean, and fill the courts with slain. Go out!" Under the law, a dead body made anything unclean (Numbers 19:11-16). God Himself told the executioners to defile His own house. The people had already made it unclean with their idols. Now God would let it be filled with the dead. The temple they trusted in would not protect them.

"And it was, as they were striking, and I was left, that I fell on my face." Ezekiel was the only one left standing in the vision, and he could not bear it. "Ah, Lord GOD! Are You destroying all the remnant of Israel in Your pouring out of Your rage on Jerusalem?"

Ezekiel was not a cold man announcing doom. He loved his people. He fell on his face and pleaded for them, the way Moses pleaded for Israel after the golden calf (Exodus 32:11-14) and Abraham pleaded for Sodom (Genesis 18:22-33). A true prophet hates the sin and loves the sinner. Anyone who speaks of God's judgment without tears has not understood it. Jesus Himself wept over Jerusalem before its later fall (Luke 19:41-44).

9:9-10 *And He said to me, "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah **is** very, very great, and the land has been filled **with** bloodshed, and the city is full of perversity; for they have said, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see.' And I also, My eye shall not pity, and I will not spare; their way I will put on their head."*

God answered Ezekiel's prayer honestly. "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is very, very great, and the land has been filled with bloodshed, and the city is full of perversity." The Hebrew doubles the word "very" for emphasis. Their sin was not small.

Notice again that God names violence and injustice alongside idolatry. "Bloodshed" and "perversity" are the sins of people against people: murder, corrupt courts, oppression of the poor (22:6-12).

And again God quotes their excuse. They have said, "The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see." It is the same lie we heard in 8:12. They had decided that God was gone and blind, so they could do whatever they wanted.

"And I also, My eye shall not pity, and I will not spare; their way I will put on their head." The judgment fit the crime. They had said God did not see. Now they would learn that He saw everything.

God did not change His verdict because of Ezekiel's prayer. But that does not mean the prayer was wasted. A remnant was spared, those with the mark, and in later chapters God will promise to gather and restore that remnant (11:16-20). Ezekiel's question, "Are You destroying all the remnant?" is answered in the rest of the book: No. God always keeps a remnant.

9:11 *And look, the man clothed **in** the linen, at whose hips **was** the writing case, **was** bringing back word, saying, "I have done according to all that You commanded me."*

"And look, the man clothed in the linen, at whose hips was the writing case, was bringing back word, saying, I have done according to all that You commanded me."

The chapter ends not with the executioners but with the man in linen. His report is simple: he did everything God commanded. He did not miss one of God's people. Every one who sighed and groaned over the city's sin had been marked.

That is the comfort of this hard chapter. In the worst day of Israel's history up to that point, God did not lose track of a single one of His own. "The Lord knew those who are His" (2 Timothy 2:19). Jesus said of His sheep that no one will snatch them out of His hand (John 10:28). If you belong to Christ, you have been marked, sealed with His Spirit, and He will not lose you.

Chapter 9 Summary

In the vision, God called six men with weapons to come and punish Jerusalem, along with a man dressed in linen with a scribe's writing case. The glory of God moved from the cherub to the threshold of the temple, the first step in its departure. God sent the man in linen through the city to put a mark on the foreheads of all who sighed and groaned over its abominations, and then told

the six to strike everyone without the mark, old and young, beginning at His sanctuary. They began with the elders before the house and filled the courts with the slain. Ezekiel fell on his face and asked if God would destroy the whole remnant, and God answered that the sin of Israel and Judah was very great, full of bloodshed and perversity, because they said the LORD does not see. The man in linen reported that he had done all that God commanded. The vision showed in a picture the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., and it showed that God knows and protects His own.

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. Who did God call to come to the city, and what did each one carry? (9:1-2)

2. Where did the glory of God move in this chapter, and why is that important? (9:3)

3. Who received the mark on their foreheads? (9:4)

4. How does the mark in Ezekiel compare to the Passover and to the seal in Revelation? (Exodus 12:13; Revelation 7:3; 9:4)

5. Where did the judgment begin, and who were the first to be struck? (9:6)

6. How did Ezekiel respond when he saw the judgment? (9:8)

7. What sins did God name when He answered Ezekiel? (9:9)

8. How does 1 Peter 4:17 help us understand why judgment began at God's sanctuary?

9. The ones God marked were those who grieved over sin. Have you grown used to things that should still grieve you? What would it look like to care again?

10. The man in linen did not miss a single one of God's people. How does that encourage you when the world around you seems to be falling apart? (2 Timothy 2:19; John 10:28)

Chapter 10: The Glory Leaves the Temple

Scripture

10:1-8 And I looked, and look, in the expanse which ***was*** over the head of the cherubim, like a sapphire stone, like the appearance of the likeness of a throne, it appeared above them. And He spoke to the man clothed ***in*** the linen, and He said, "Go in between the whirling wheels, under the cherub, and fill the hollows of your hands ***with*** coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter ***them*** over the city." And he went in before my eyes. And the cherubim ***were*** standing on the south of the house when the man went in, and the cloud filled the inner court. And the glory of the LORD rose from on the cherub to the threshold of the house; and the house was filled ***with*** the cloud, and the court was full of 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. And it was, when He commanded the man clothed ***in*** the linen, saying, "Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim," ***that*** he went in and stood beside the wheel. And the cherub stretched out his hand from between the cherubim to the fire which ***was*** between the cherubim, and lifted ***some*** and put ***it*** into the hollows of the hands of the ***one*** clothed ***in*** the linen; and he took ***it*** and went out. And there appeared on the cherubim the form of the hand of a man under their wings.

10:9-22 And I looked, and look, four wheels beside the cherubim, one wheel beside one cherub, and one wheel beside one cherub; and the appearance of the wheels ***was*** like the appearance of a chrysolite stone. And ***as for*** their appearance, the four of them had one likeness, as it would be, the wheel in the midst of the wheel. When they went, they went on their four sides; they did not turn when they went; for ***to*** the place where the head turned, they went after it; they did not turn when they went. And all their flesh, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels ***were*** full of eyes all around; the four of them had their wheels. As for the wheels, it was called to them in my ears, "The whirling wheel." And each one had four faces: the face of the one ***was*** the face of the cherub, and the face of the second ***was*** the face of a man, and the third ***was*** the face of a lion, and the fourth ***was*** the face of an eagle. And the cherubim rose up. That ***was*** the living creature which I had seen by the river Chebar. And when the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them; and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to rise from on the earth, the wheels also did not turn from beside them. When they stood still, they stood still; and when they rose up, they rose up with them; for the spirit of the living creature ***was*** in them. And the glory of the LORD went out from on the threshold of the house and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings and rose from the earth before my eyes when they went out, and the wheels ***were*** close beside them; and it 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, above. That ***was*** the living creature which I had seen under the God of Israel by the river Chebar; and I knew that they ***were*** cherubim. Each one had four faces apiece, and each one had four wings, and the likeness of the hands of a man ***was*** under their wings. And ***as for*** the likeness of their faces, they ***were*** the faces which I had seen by the river Chebar, their appearance and themselves; each one went in the direction of its face.

Chapter 10 Preview

The vision that began in chapter 8 goes on. The executioners have done their work in chapter 9. Now the man in linen is sent back, this time to take burning coals from between the cherubim and scatter them over Jerusalem. The city that would not repent will be burned.

At the same time, Ezekiel watches the most heartbreaking scene in the book. The glory of the LORD, which had filled the temple since the days of Solomon, rises from its place, moves to the threshold, and then goes out to the east gate, carried by the cherubim. Ezekiel realizes that these are the same living creatures he saw by the river Chebar. The throne-chariot that came to him in Babylon is now carrying God's presence away from Jerusalem. This chapter is sad, but it is not the end of the story. In chapter 43 Ezekiel will see the same glory come back through the same east gate.

Chapter 10 Study

10:1-2 *And I looked, and look, in the expanse which **was** over the head of the cherubim, like a sapphire stone, like the appearance of the likeness of a throne, it appeared above them. And He spoke to the man clothed **in** the linen, and He said, "Go in between the whirling wheels, under the cherub, and fill the hollows of your hands **with** coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter **them** over the city." And he went in before my eyes.*

"And I looked, and look, in the expanse which was over the head of the cherubim, like a sapphire stone, like the appearance of the likeness of a throne." Ezekiel sees again what he saw in 1:22-26: the crystal platform and the sapphire throne above the living creatures. Now he calls them by their right name, cherubim.

God spoke to the man in linen: "Go in between the whirling wheels, under the cherub, and fill the hollows of your hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city."

In chapter 9 this man marked the faithful. Now he carries out judgment. The same hands that marked God's people for mercy now scatter fire on those who refused Him. Fire from the altar can purify, as when an angel touched Isaiah's lips with a coal and his sin was taken away (Isaiah 6:6-7). But fire from God's presence can also consume, as it did with Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-2) and with Sodom (Genesis 19:24). Which it is depends on how we stand before Him.

These coals pictured the burning of Jerusalem. In 586 B.C. the Babylonians "burned the house of the LORD, and the house of the king, and all the houses of Jerusalem" (2 Kings 25:9). The fire that fell on the city came first from the presence of God.

"And he went in before my eyes."

10:3-5 *And the cherubim **were** standing on the south of the house when the man went in, and the cloud filled the inner court. And the glory of the LORD rose from on the cherub to the threshold of the house; and the house was filled **with** the cloud, and the court was full of 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.*

"And the cherubim were standing on the south of the house when the man went in, and the cloud filled the inner court." The cherubim with the throne-chariot had come to rest on the south side of the temple. The idols and the sun worshipers were on the north and east (8:3-16). God's presence stood apart from them.

"And the glory of the LORD rose from on the cherub to the threshold of the house." This repeats 9:3 and shows us where the glory was. It had left its place over the ark and stood at the door. "And the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the glory of the LORD."

This scene should remind us of the day Solomon dedicated the temple. Then too a cloud filled the house of the LORD, and the priests could not stand to minister "for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD" (1 Kings 8:10-11). Ezekiel sees the glory once more filling the house, but this time it is getting ready to go. The cloud that came at the dedication is now the cloud of departure.

"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." The roar of the wings, which Ezekiel heard in 1:24, was like God's own voice. Heaven was moving.

10:6-8 *And it was, when He commanded the man clothed **in** the linen, saying, "Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim," **that** he went in and stood beside the wheel. And the cherub stretched out his hand from between the cherubim to the fire which **was** between the cherubim, and lifted **some** and put **it** into the hollows of the hands of the **one** clothed **in** the linen; and he took **it** and went out. And there appeared on the cherubim the form of the hand of a man under their wings.*

God commanded the man in linen, "Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim," and he "went in and stood beside the wheel." Then one of the cherubim "stretched out his hand from between the cherubim to the fire" and put the coals into the hands of the man in linen, "and he took it and went out."

The cherub handed the fire to the man. Even the judgment came from the center of God's throne. It was not random violence. It came from His holy presence, in His time, by His command.

"And there appeared on the cherubim the form of the hand of a man under their wings." Ezekiel had seen these hands before (1:8). Now he sees why they are there. The cherubim are not just guardians. They are workers who carry out God's will with their hands.

10:9-13 *And I looked, and look, four wheels beside the cherubim, one wheel beside one cherub, and one wheel beside one cherub; and the appearance of the wheels* ***was*** *like the appearance of a chrysolite stone. And* ***as for*** *their appearance, the four of them had one likeness, as it would be, the wheel in the midst of the wheel. When they went, they went on their four sides; they did not turn when they went; for* ***to*** *the place where the head turned, they went after it; they did not turn when they went. And all their flesh, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels* ***were*** *full of eyes all around; the four of them had their wheels. As for the wheels, it was called to them in my ears, "The whirling wheel."*

Ezekiel now describes the wheels again, much as he did in 1:15-21. "Four wheels beside the cherubim, one wheel beside one cherub." Their appearance was "like the appearance of a chrysolite stone," and they were made as "the wheel in the midst of the wheel." They went in any of four directions without turning, following wherever "the head" went.

In verse 12 Ezekiel adds something new. Not only the rims of the wheels were full of eyes. "All their flesh, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels were full of eyes all around." Their whole bodies were covered with eyes. Nothing escapes the sight of God's throne. The leaders of Jerusalem had said, "The LORD does not see" (8:12; 9:9). The vision shouts the opposite. God sees everything.

"As for the wheels, it was called to them in my ears, The whirling wheel." The word can mean a whirlwind or something that rolls swiftly. It pictures the speed and power of God's throne in motion.

Why does Ezekiel repeat so much of chapter 1? Because he wants us to know that the throne leaving Jerusalem is the same throne that came to him in Babylon. The God who left the temple did not disappear. He went to be with His people in exile (11:16).

10:14-15 *And each one had four faces: the face of the one* ***was*** *the face of the cherub, and the face of the second* ***was*** *the face of a man, and the third* ***was*** *the face of a lion, and the fourth* ***was*** *the face of an eagle. And the cherubim rose up. That* ***was*** *the living creature which I had seen by the river Chebar.*

"And each one had four faces: the face of the one was the face of the cherub, and the face of the second was the face of a man, and the third was the face of a lion, and the fourth was the face of an eagle."

In chapter 1 the four faces were man, lion, ox and eagle (1:10). Here the ox is not named, and in its place is "the face of the cherub." Most teachers think this means the ox face is what Ezekiel thought of as the cherub's face, perhaps because the face of a bull calf was often seen on the great guardian figures of the ancient world, or because it was the face that turned toward Ezekiel. Either way, Ezekiel tells us plainly in the next verse that these were the same beings he saw before.

"And the cherubim rose up. That was the living creature which I had seen by the river Chebar." This is the moment of recognition. Ezekiel had not known what to call them in chapter 1. Now, in

the temple, beside the place where the golden cherubim stood over the ark, he understood. The living creatures were cherubim, the very beings pictured in gold in the Most Holy Place.

10:16-17 *And when the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them; and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to rise from on the earth, the wheels also did not turn from beside them. When they stood still, they stood still; and when they rose up, they rose up with them; for the spirit of the living creature **was** in them.*

"And when the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them." The wheels and the cherubim moved together as one, "for the spirit of the living creature was in them." This repeats 1:19-21. God's throne moves in perfect unity. Every part serves one will.

This is a good place to stop and think about what we are watching. The cherubim are lifting their wings to rise. The throne is about to move. The God of Israel is about to leave His house. Why does Ezekiel slow down and describe the wheels again in such detail? Maybe because he did not want to see what was coming next. Maybe because it was so terrible, he needed to fix every detail in his mind. Either way, the details tell us this: God was not being driven out by force. He was leaving by His own choice, on His own throne, in perfect control.

10:18-19 *And the glory of the LORD went out from on the threshold of the house and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings and rose from the earth before my eyes when they went out, and the wheels **were** close beside them; and it 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, above.*

"And the glory of the LORD went out from on the threshold of the house and stood over the cherubim." The glory left the doorway and mounted the throne-chariot. "And the cherubim lifted up their wings and rose from the earth before my eyes when they went out, and the wheels were close beside them; and it 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, above."

The glory moved step by step. First from the Most Holy Place to the threshold (9:3; 10:4). Then from the threshold to the cherubim (10:18). Then to the east gate of the temple court (10:19). Next it will leave the city and stand on the mountain to the east (11:23). It is almost as if God is leaving slowly, looking back, giving His people every last chance to call Him back. But no one called.

Can you imagine the grief of a priest watching this? Ezekiel was trained to serve in that house. The glory over the ark was the heart of Israel's faith. Now it was going away. Israel had pushed God out of His own house with their idols, and He let them have what they wanted.

Here is the hope, though. The glory left by the east gate. In chapter 43, Ezekiel will see "the glory of the God of Israel" coming back "from the direction of the east," and he will watch it enter the house "by the way of the gate" that faces east, until "the glory of the LORD filled the house" (43:2-5). God left by the east gate, and He will return by the east gate. His departure was not forever.

And between the leaving and the returning, the glory came to earth in another way. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory" (John 1:14). The glory of God walked

into the temple courts again in the person of Jesus. And when His own nation rejected Him, He too left the temple and went to the Mount of Olives, east of the city (Matthew 24:1-3), the same place the glory went in Ezekiel's vision (11:23). He told them, "Look, your house is left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:38). And from that same Mount of Olives He ascended, and the angels said He would come back in the same way (Acts 1:11-12; Zechariah 14:4).

10:20-22 *That **was** the living creature which I had seen under the God of Israel by the river Chebar; and I knew that they **were** cherubim. Each one had four faces apiece, and each one had four wings, and the likeness of the hands of a man **was** under their wings. And **as for** the likeness of their faces, they **were** the faces which I had seen by the river Chebar, their appearance and themselves; each one went in the direction of its face.*

Ezekiel ends the chapter by repeating what he had learned. "That was the living creature which I had seen under the God of Israel by the river Chebar; and I knew that they were cherubim." He saw again the four faces, the four wings and the hands of a man under their wings. "They were the faces which I had seen by the river Chebar, their appearance and themselves; each one went in the direction of its face."

Ezekiel's point is that there is one God and one throne. The God who met him in exile was the same God who had dwelt in the temple. That was both bad news and good news for the exiles. The bad news was that God was leaving Jerusalem, and the city would fall. The good news was that God had come to them. They were not forgotten in Babylon.

This chapter speaks to us too. It is possible for God's people to go on with religious activity long after God's presence has left. The temple still stood after the glory left. The priests may have gone on with their duties. But the house was empty. Jesus warned the church at Ephesus that if they did not repent, He would remove their lampstand (Revelation 2:5). The question for every church and every believer is not whether we have the building and the programs. It is whether God is welcome in our midst.

Chapter 10 Summary

In the vision, Ezekiel saw again the sapphire throne above the cherubim. God told the man in linen to take burning coals from between the cherubim and scatter them over Jerusalem, a picture of the city's coming destruction by fire, and a cherub put the coals into his hands. The glory of the LORD rose from the cherub to the threshold of the temple, and the cloud and brightness filled the house and court, while the wings of the cherubim roared like the voice of God Almighty. Ezekiel described the wheels and the cherubim, full of eyes, with four faces each, and he realized they were the same living creatures he had seen by the river Chebar. Then the glory went out from the threshold, mounted the cherubim, and stood at the east gate of the house of the LORD. God was leaving His temple because of His people's sin, but the same glory would return by the east gate in chapter 43.

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. What did God tell the man in linen to do with the coals of fire, and what did it picture? (10:2; 2 Kings 25:9)

2. How is the fire in this chapter different from the coal that touched Isaiah's lips? (10:2; Isaiah 6:6-7)

3. What filled the house and the court when the glory rose to the threshold? How does that compare to Solomon's day? (10:4; 1 Kings 8:10-11)

4. What new detail does Ezekiel give about the eyes in this chapter, and what does it teach? (10:12; 8:12)

5. What did Ezekiel realize about the living creatures? (10:15, 20)

6. Trace the steps of the glory as it left. Where did it go in 9:3, 10:4, 10:18-19 and 11:23?

7. Where will the glory return in chapter 43, and by which gate? (43:1-5)

8. How did the glory of God come back to the temple in the life of Jesus, and what did He say when He left it? (John 1:14; Matthew 23:38)

9. The temple went on standing after the glory left. How can a church or a person keep up religious activity after God's presence is no longer welcome?

10. Is there anything in your life that is pushing God out? What would it look like to welcome Him back fully? (Revelation 2:5)

Chapter 11: The Wicked Leaders and the Promise of a New Heart

Scripture

11:1-13 And a spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the house of the LORD, which faces eastward; and look, at the entrance of the gate ***were*** twenty-five men; and I saw in their midst Jaazaniah the son of Azzur and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, officials of the people. And He said to me, "Son of man, these ***are*** the men who devise mischief and who counsel evil counsel in this city, who say, '***It is*** not near, to build houses. It ***is*** the pot, and we ***are*** the flesh.' Therefore prophesy against them; prophesy, son of man." And the Spirit of the LORD fell on me, and He said to me, "Say, 'Thus says the LORD: So you have said, O house of Israel; and the things that come up in your spirit, I know them. You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled its streets ***with*** slain. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Your slain whom you have put in its midst, they ***are*** the flesh, and it ***is*** the pot; and you, ***I will*** bring out from its midst. You have feared a sword, and a sword I will bring on you, declares the Lord GOD. And I will bring you out from its midst and give you into the hand of strangers, and I will execute judgments on you. By the sword you shall fall; at the border of Israel I will judge you; and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. It shall not be a pot for you, and you ***shall not*** be flesh in its midst; at the border of Israel I will judge you. And you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, in whose statutes you have not walked, and whose judgments you have not done; and according to the judgments of the nations that ***are*** around you, you have done.'" And it was, when I prophesied, ***that*** Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. And I fell on my face and cried out ***with*** a loud voice and said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Are You making a complete end of the remnant of Israel?"

11:14-25 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, your brothers, your brothers, the men of your redemption, and all the house of Israel, all of it, ***are those*** to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'Be far from the LORD; to us it has been given, the land, for a possession.' Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Although I have removed them far off among the nations, and although I have dispersed them among the lands, yet I have become to them a sanctuary ***for*** a little ***while*** in the lands where they have gone.' Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: And I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you from the lands where you have been dispersed, and I will give you the soil of Israel.' And they shall come there and remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be a people to Me, and I will be God to them. And to the heart of their detestable things and their abominations their heart is going; their way I will put on their head, declares the Lord GOD." And the cherubim lifted up their wings, and the wheels ***were*** close beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel ***was*** over them, above. And the glory of the LORD went up from over the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which ***is*** on the east of the city. And a spirit lifted me up and brought me to ***the*** Chaldeans, to the exiles, in the vision by the Spirit of God; and the vision which I had seen went up from me. And I spoke to the exiles all the words of the LORD which He had shown me.

Chapter 11 Preview

The long vision of chapters 8 to 11 comes to its end. At the east gate of the temple, where the glory has just paused, Ezekiel sees twenty-five leaders of Jerusalem plotting evil and telling the people the city is safe. God tells him to prophesy against them, and as he does, one of the leaders falls dead. Ezekiel cries out again, afraid God will wipe out the whole remnant.

God's answer is the first great promise of hope in the book. The people left in Jerusalem looked down on the exiles and said the land now belonged to them. But God says the exiles are the ones He will keep. He has been a sanctuary to them in the foreign lands, He will gather them and bring them back, and He will give them one heart and a new spirit, taking out the heart of stone and giving them a heart of flesh (11:19). Then the glory of the LORD leaves the city and stands on the mountain to the east. The vision ends, and Ezekiel tells the exiles everything he saw.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1-3 *And a spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the house of the LORD, which faces eastward; and look, at the entrance of the gate **were** twenty-five men; and I saw in their midst Jaazaniah the son of Azzur and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, officials of the people. And He said to me, "Son of man, these **are** the men who devise mischief and who counsel evil counsel in this city, who say, '**It is** not near, to build houses. It **is** the pot, and we **are** the flesh.'*

"A spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the house of the LORD." This is where the glory had stopped (10:19). At the entrance of the gate were "twenty-five men," and Ezekiel names two of them: "Jaazaniah the son of Azzur and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, officials of the people." This Jaazaniah is a different man from the son of Shaphan in 8:11. These were the leaders who ran the city under King Zedekiah.

God tells Ezekiel who they are: "these are the men who devise mischief and who counsel evil counsel in this city." They were planning and advising in ways that led the people away from God. Jeremiah was in Jerusalem at the same time, warning the king to submit to Babylon as God had said (Jeremiah 27:12-15). These men were giving the opposite advice.

Their slogan was: "It is not near, to build houses. It is the pot, and we are the flesh." The first part is hard to translate, and teachers read it two ways. It may mean, There is no hurry to build houses, since the danger is not near. Or it may be a mocking reply to Jeremiah's letter, which told the exiles to build houses in Babylon because they would be there a long time (Jeremiah 29:5). Either way, they were saying Jerusalem was safe and the warnings were overblown.

The second part is clearer. A pot protects the meat inside from the fire. They saw Jerusalem's walls as the pot and themselves as the choice meat. The exiles were the scraps that had been thrown out. We are the good cuts, they were saying, and the city will keep us safe.

11:4-7 *Therefore prophesy against them; prophesy, son of man." And the Spirit of the LORD fell on me, and He said to me, "Say, 'Thus says the LORD: So you have said, O house of Israel; and the things that come up in your spirit, I know them. You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled its streets* ***with*** *slain. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Your slain whom you have put in its midst, they* ***are*** *the flesh, and it* ***is*** *the pot; and you,* ***I will*** *bring out from its midst.*

"Therefore prophesy against them; prophesy, son of man." God says it twice. Then "the Spirit of the LORD fell on me," and He gave Ezekiel the words.

"So you have said, O house of Israel; and the things that come up in your spirit, I know them." God knew not only what they said in public but what they thought in private. You cannot hide your thoughts from Him (Psalm 139:1-4).

"You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled its streets with slain." These leaders were murderers. They had killed people in Jerusalem, likely through corrupt courts and the oppression of the poor, and perhaps by silencing those who opposed them, as King Jehoiakim had killed the prophet Uriah (Jeremiah 26:20-23).

Then God turns their own saying against them. "Your slain whom you have put in its midst, they are the flesh, and it is the pot; and you, I will bring out from its midst." The only meat that would stay safely in the pot was the bodies of the people these leaders had killed. The leaders themselves would not be safe inside the walls. They would be dragged out.

11:8-12 *You have feared a sword, and a sword I will bring on you, declares the Lord GOD. And I will bring you out from its midst and give you into the hand of strangers, and I will execute judgments on you. By the sword you shall fall; at the border of Israel I will judge you; and you shall know that I* ***am*** *the LORD. It shall not be a pot for you, and you* ***shall not*** *be flesh in its midst; at the border of Israel I will judge you. And you shall know that I* ***am*** *the LORD, in whose statutes you have not walked, and whose judgments you have not done; and according to the judgments of the nations that* ***are*** *around you, you have done.'"*

"You have feared a sword, and a sword I will bring on you." What they feared most was exactly what would come. They thought they could avoid Babylon's sword by hiding behind the walls. Instead, God would bring them out "and give you into the hand of strangers."

"By the sword you shall fall; at the border of Israel I will judge you." This came true in a very specific way. When Jerusalem fell, the Babylonians took King Zedekiah, his sons and many leaders to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, in the land of Hamath at the far northern border of Israel, and there they were killed (2 Kings 25:6-7, 18-21; Jeremiah 52:9-10, 24-27). They died at the border of Israel, just as Ezekiel said years before.

"It shall not be a pot for you." Their slogan would fail them.

"And you shall know that I am the LORD, in whose statutes you have not walked, and whose judgments you have not done; and according to the judgments of the nations that are around you, you have done." Their problem was not just bad politics. They had thrown away God's law and

copied the ways of the pagans. They acted like the nations, so they would be judged like the nations.

11:13 *And it was, when I prophesied, **that** Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. And I fell on my face and cried out **with** a loud voice and said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Are You making a complete end of the remnant of Israel?"*

"And it was, when I prophesied, that Pelatiah" fell dead. Ezekiel saw it happen in the vision, while he was still speaking. It seems Pelatiah really died in Jerusalem at that moment, and the exiles would later hear the news and know that Ezekiel's word was from God.

Ezekiel's reaction is the same as in 9:8. "I fell on my face and cried out with a loud voice and said, Ah, Lord GOD! Are You making a complete end of the remnant of Israel?" Pelatiah's name means something like the LORD rescues, or the LORD delivers a remnant. Ezekiel may have seen his death as a sign that there would be no remnant at all. If even the man named the LORD rescues has died, who will be left?

God's answer in the rest of the chapter is no. There will be a remnant, but it will not be where Ezekiel or the leaders expected.

11:14-15 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, your brothers, your brothers, the men of your redemption, and all the house of Israel, all of it, **are those** to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'Be far from the LORD; to us it has been given, the land, for a possession.'*

"Son of man, your brothers, your brothers, the men of your redemption, and all the house of Israel, all of it." God reminds Ezekiel who his true family is. "The men of your redemption" points to the law of the kinsman-redeemer. A kinsman-redeemer was a close relative who had the right and duty to buy back the land of a family member who had lost it, or to rescue a relative from slavery (Leviticus 25:25, 47-49; Ruth 4:4-6). Ezekiel's fellow exiles were his kin. They were the ones he was responsible for.

Then God tells Ezekiel what the people still in Jerusalem were saying about the exiles: "Be far from the LORD; to us it has been given, the land, for a possession." In their minds, the exiles had been punished and thrown away. God was finished with them. The land now belonged to those who were left. The people in Jerusalem saw themselves as the blessed ones.

It is a dangerous thing to look at someone else's suffering and decide that God has rejected them and blessed us. Jesus warned against that kind of thinking (Luke 13:1-5). God's view of who is His was very different from theirs.

11:16 *Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Although I have removed them far off among the nations, and although I have dispersed them among the lands, yet I have become to them a sanctuary **for** a little **while** in the lands where they have gone.'*

"Thus says the Lord GOD: Although I have removed them far off among the nations, and although I have dispersed them among the lands, yet I have become to them a sanctuary for a little while in the lands where they have gone."

This is one of the most tender verses in Ezekiel. The exiles had lost the temple, the sanctuary where God's presence lived. But God says, I Myself have become their sanctuary. They did not have the building, but they had God. The glory that was leaving Jerusalem had already come to them by the river Chebar (chapter 1).

"For a little while" can also be read as in a small measure. Either way, it was real but not yet complete. It was not the full presence of the temple, and it was not forever. A greater restoration was coming.

For believers in Christ, this is a precious truth. We do not need a building in Jerusalem to meet with God. Jesus said the time would come when true worshipers would worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24). Believers are now God's temple, and His Spirit dwells in us (1 Corinthians 3:16). Wherever we are, even in our own exile, God is our sanctuary.

11:17-18 *Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: And I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you from the lands where you have been dispersed, and I will give you the soil of Israel.' And they shall come there and remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it.*

"I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you from the lands where you have been dispersed, and I will give you the soil of Israel." God made a direct promise. He would bring the exiles home and give them the land.

"And they shall come there and remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it." When they came back, they would clean out the idols.

This promise was fulfilled in part in 538 B.C., when Cyrus king of Persia let the Jews return to Judah and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). And it is true that after the exile, Israel never again fell into idol worship the way it had before. But the return under Cyrus was small, and most of the nation stayed scattered. The promise here reaches further. In chapters 36 and 37, Ezekiel will speak of God gathering Israel "from all the lands" (36:24), making them one nation under one king, "My servant David" (37:22-24), and putting His sanctuary in their midst forever (37:26-28). That has not happened yet. I believe God will keep this promise to the nation of Israel in the last days, when Christ returns to reign. Paul says that "so all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26), because God's gifts and calling are not taken back (Romans 11:29).

11:19-20 *And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be a people to Me, and I will be God to them.*

"And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh."

This is the heart of the chapter. The problem with Israel had never been a lack of laws, prophets or temples. It was their hearts. They were "hard of heart" (2:4; 3:7). A heart of stone is cold, dead and unable to respond to God. A heart of flesh is alive and soft, able to hear and obey.

God does not say, Try harder to change your heart. He says, I will give. I will put. I will remove. This is God's work, not man's. Ezekiel 18:31 will call on the people to "make for yourselves a new heart," and 36:26-27 will show how that happens: God Himself gives it, and He adds, "My Spirit I will put within you, and I will bring about that you walk in My statutes." Our part is to turn to Him. His part is to change us from the inside.

"One heart" means an undivided heart, a heart that is not split between God and idols, and also a people united together. "So that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them." Obedience follows the new heart. It does not produce it. God changes the heart first, and then the life changes.

"And they shall be a people to Me, and I will be God to them." This is the covenant promise God made again and again to Israel (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12). Jeremiah gives the same promise in the new covenant, when God will put His law in their inward part and write it on their heart (Jeremiah 31:33).

That new covenant was made with "the house of Israel" and the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:31), and God will keep it with Israel as a nation in the future. At the same time, Jesus said at the Last Supper that the cup is "the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20). Every person who comes to Christ, Jew or Gentile, shares in the blessings of that covenant now: forgiveness of sins and the indwelling Holy Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus that a person must be born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5), likely with Ezekiel's promise in mind (36:25-27). Paul says that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). The heart of stone is exactly what God takes away when He saves us.

Have you been given a new heart? Not a better version of the old one, but a new one? That is what God offers through Jesus Christ.

11:21 *And to the heart of their detestable things and their abominations their heart is going; their way I will put on their head, declares the Lord GOD."*

But the promise does not cover everyone. "And to the heart of their detestable things and their abominations their heart is going; their way I will put on their head." Those whose hearts kept running after idols would receive the result of their ways. The new heart is offered, but it is not forced on those who want to keep their idols.

This verse is a sober balance to the promise. God's grace is wide, but it does not mean everyone will be saved no matter what. Those who keep their hearts set on sin will face judgment. The invitation is real, and so is the warning.

11:22-23 *And the cherubim lifted up their wings, and the wheels **were** close beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel **was** over them, above. And the glory of the LORD went up from over the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which **is** on the east of the city.*

"And the cherubim lifted up their wings, and the wheels were close beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them, above." The throne-chariot rose from the east gate of the temple.

"And the glory of the LORD went up from over the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is on the east of the city." The mountain east of Jerusalem is the Mount of Olives. The glory left the temple, then left the city, and paused on the mountain, looking back. Then, it seems, it was gone. Ezekiel does not see the glory again until 43:1-5, when it comes back from the east.

Why the Mount of Olives? It is striking that this is the very place where, centuries later, Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:37-41), taught His disciples about His return (Matthew 24:3), and ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9-12). Zechariah says that when the LORD comes to fight for Jerusalem in the last day, "His feet will stand on that day on the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east" (Zechariah 14:4). The glory left by the east, it paused on the Mount of Olives, and from there it will return.

11:24-25 *And a spirit lifted me up and brought me to **the** Chaldeans, to the exiles, in the vision by the Spirit of God; and the vision which I had seen went up from me. And I spoke to the exiles all the words of the LORD which He had shown me.*

"And a spirit lifted me up and brought me to the Chaldeans, to the exiles, in the vision by the Spirit of God; and the vision which I had seen went up from me." The vision ended, and Ezekiel was back in his house in Babylon, with the elders still sitting in front of him (8:1).

"And I spoke to the exiles all the words of the LORD which He had shown me." He told them everything: the idols in the temple, the women weeping for Tammuz, the sun worshipers, the mark on the foreheads, the coals of fire, the glory leaving, Pelatiah's death, and the promise of a new heart. It was not what they wanted to hear. They wanted to hear that Jerusalem was safe and they were going home soon. Instead, Ezekiel told them the city was doomed and they were the ones God would keep and restore, but only after judgment had run its course.

That is still the shape of the gospel. Bad news first, then good news. Our sin is real, judgment is real, and we cannot save ourselves. But God gives a new heart and a new spirit to all who turn to Him.

Chapter 11 Summary

In the vision, the Spirit brought Ezekiel to the east gate of the temple, where twenty-five leaders, including Jaazaniah son of Azzur and Pelatiah son of Benaiah, were giving evil counsel and boasting that Jerusalem was a pot and they were the meat safe inside it. God told Ezekiel to

prophesy that the only meat left in the pot would be the people they had murdered, and that they would be taken out and judged by the sword at the border of Israel. As Ezekiel prophesied, Pelatiah died, and Ezekiel cried out for the remnant. God answered that the people in Jerusalem had written off the exiles, but He Himself had been a sanctuary to the exiles. He would gather them, give them the land, and give them one heart and a new spirit, removing the heart of stone and giving a heart of flesh, so that they would walk in His ways and be His people. Those who kept following their idols would be judged. The glory of the LORD left the city and stood on the mountain to the east, and the vision ended with Ezekiel back among the exiles, telling them all that God had shown him.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. Who were the twenty-five men at the east gate, and what was their slogan? (11:1-3)

2. How did God turn their saying about the pot and the flesh against them? (11:7-11)

3. How was the prophecy that they would be judged "at the border of Israel" fulfilled? (11:10; 2 Kings 25:6-7, 18-21)

4. What happened to Pelatiah, and how did Ezekiel respond? (11:13)

5. What were the people in Jerusalem saying about the exiles? (11:15)

6. What did God say He had become to the exiles? (11:16)

7. What did God promise to give His people in 11:19-20? How does 36:26-27 add to this?

8. How do we share in the promise of a new heart through Jesus? (Luke 22:20; John 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

9. The people in Jerusalem thought God had rejected the exiles and blessed them. Have you ever judged someone's standing with God by their circumstances? (Luke 13:1-5)

10. God said He would remove the heart of stone. Is there any area of your life where your heart has grown hard toward God? Ask Him to soften it.

Chapter 12: The Exile Acted Out

Scripture

12:1-16 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, you are dwelling in the midst of the house of rebellion, who have eyes to see and do not see, ears to hear and do not hear; for they ***are*** a house of rebellion. And you, son of man, make for yourself baggage of exile, and go into exile by day before their eyes; and you shall go into exile from your place to another place before their eyes. Perhaps they will see, for they ***are*** a house of rebellion. And you shall bring out your baggage like baggage of exile by day before their eyes; and you shall go out in the evening before their eyes like the goings out of exile. Before their eyes dig for yourself in the wall, and bring ***it*** out through it. Before their eyes you shall lift ***it*** up on ***your*** shoulder; in the dark you shall bring ***it*** out; you shall cover your face, and you shall not see the land; for I have made you a portent to the house of Israel." And I did so, as I was commanded: my baggage I brought out like baggage of exile by day, and in the evening I dug for myself in the wall with ***my*** hand; in the dark I brought ***it*** out; on ***my*** shoulder I lifted ***it*** up before their eyes. And the word of the LORD came to me in the morning, saying, "Son of man, have not the house of Israel, the house of rebellion, said to you, 'What are you doing?' Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: The prince ***is*** this burden in Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel who ***are*** in their midst.' Say, 'I ***am*** your portent; as I have done, so it shall be done to them; into exile, into captivity they shall go.' And the prince who ***is*** in their midst shall lift ***it*** up on ***his*** shoulder in the dark and go out; they shall dig in the wall to bring ***him*** out through it; he shall cover his face, because he shall not see the land with ***his*** eye, he himself. And I will spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare; and I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans; and he shall not see it, and he shall die there. And all who ***are*** around him, his help, and all his troops, I will scatter to every wind, and I will draw out a sword after them. And they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them among the lands. And I will leave of them men ***few in*** number from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence, so that they may recount all their abominations among the nations where they go; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD."

12:17-28 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, you shall eat your bread in quaking, and you shall drink your water in trembling and in anxiety. And you shall say to the people of the land, 'Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem on the soil of Israel: They shall eat their bread in anxiety and drink their water in horror, so that its land may be desolate from its fullness, because of the violence of all those dwelling in it. And the inhabited cities shall be laid waste, and the land shall become a desolation; and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD.'" And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, what ***is*** this proverb that you have about the soil of Israel, saying, 'The days are prolonged, and every vision perishes'? Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: I will make this proverb cease, and they shall not use it as a proverb again in Israel.' But speak to them, 'The days have drawn near, and the word of every vision.' For there shall no longer be any vision of worthlessness and divination of flattery in the midst of the house of Israel. For I, the LORD, will speak what I will speak, a word, and it shall be done; it shall not be delayed again; for in your days, O house of rebellion, I will speak a word and do it, declares the Lord GOD." And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man,

look, the house of Israel are saying, 'The vision that he sees ***is*** for many days, and for distant times he is prophesying.' Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: None of My words shall be delayed again; what I speak, a word, it shall be done, declares the Lord GOD.'"

Chapter 12 Preview

Back in Babylon after the great vision, Ezekiel is given another sign to act out. In broad daylight he packs a bag like a refugee. In the evening he digs a hole through the wall of his house, covers his face, and carries his bag out into the dark. The neighbors ask him what he is doing, and God gives him the answer: this is what will happen to the prince in Jerusalem and the people with him. The prince will try to escape by night through a hole in the wall, he will be caught, and he will be brought to Babylon, yet he will not see it (12:13). Five years later, every word came true for King Zedekiah.

The second half of the chapter deals with two sayings the people used to brush off the prophets. One said that the days go by and nothing ever happens. The other said that the prophet's visions were about the distant future, not about them. God answers both the same way: no more delay. What He says, He will do, and soon.

Chapter 12 Study

12:1-2 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, you are dwelling in the midst of the house of rebellion, who have eyes to see and do not see, ears to hear and do not hear; for they **are** a house of rebellion.*

"Son of man, you are dwelling in the midst of the house of rebellion, who have eyes to see and do not see, ears to hear and do not hear." The exiles were not blind or deaf in their bodies. They were blind and deaf in their hearts. They could see Ezekiel's signs and hear his words, but they would not take them in. Moses said the same about Israel in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 29:4), Isaiah was told the same at his call (Isaiah 6:9-10), and Jesus quoted Isaiah about the crowds who heard His parables (Matthew 13:13-15).

Why does this happen? "For they are a house of rebellion." The problem was not that the message was unclear. It was that they did not want to obey it. People often say they do not understand the Bible when the truth is that they understand it well enough and do not like what it says.

12:3-6 *And you, son of man, make for yourself baggage of exile, and go into exile by day before their eyes; and you shall go into exile from your place to another place before their eyes. Perhaps they will see, for they **are** a house of rebellion. And you shall bring out your baggage like baggage of exile by day before their eyes; and you shall go out in the evening before their eyes like the goings out of exile. Before their eyes dig for yourself in the wall, and bring **it** out through it. Before their eyes you shall lift **it** up on **your** shoulder; in the dark you shall bring **it** out; you shall cover your face, and you shall not see the land; for I have made you a portent to the house of Israel."*

God gives Ezekiel his instructions. "Make for yourself baggage of exile, and go into exile by day before their eyes." Baggage of exile was the small bundle a captive could carry on his back: a bowl, a blanket, a bit of food. Ezekiel was to pack one and carry it out in daylight, so everyone would see.

"Perhaps they will see, for they are a house of rebellion." Here is God's patience. Even though He had just said they would not see, He still says perhaps. God never stops reaching out to rebels. He keeps giving signs and warnings, hoping some will turn. Peter says God is patient "not wishing any to perish" (2 Peter 3:9).

In the evening, Ezekiel was to go out "like the goings out of exile." He was to "dig for yourself in the wall, and bring it out through it." Houses in Babylon were built of mud brick, so a man could dig through a wall with his hands. Then, "in the dark you shall bring it out; you shall cover your face, and you shall not see the land."

"For I have made you a portent to the house of Israel." A portent is a sign that points ahead to something that is going to happen. Ezekiel's own actions were the message.

12:7 *And I did so, as I was commanded: my baggage I brought out like baggage of exile by day, and in the evening I dug for myself in the wall with **my** hand; in the dark I brought **it** out; on **my** shoulder I lifted **it** up before their eyes.*

"And I did so, as I was commanded." Ezekiel obeyed exactly. By day he brought out his bag. In the evening he dug through the wall "with my hand." In the dark he lifted the bag onto his shoulder and went out, all "before their eyes."

Think about what this cost him. His neighbors would have thought he was out of his mind. He was a priest, a respected man, and here he was digging a hole in his own house and sneaking out at night with a bundle on his back. But he did it anyway, because God told him to.

Obedience to God sometimes makes us look foolish to the people around us. Paul said the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (1 Corinthians 1:18). Are we willing to look foolish for God?

12:8-11 *And the word of the LORD came to me in the morning, saying, "Son of man, have not the house of Israel, the house of rebellion, said to you, 'What are you doing?' Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: The prince **is** this burden in Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel who **are** in their midst.' Say, 'I **am** your portent; as I have done, so it shall be done to them; into exile, into captivity they shall go.'*

"And the word of the LORD came to me in the morning." The next day, God told Ezekiel what to say when the people asked, "What are you doing?" At least they were asking. The sign had gotten their attention.

"The prince is this burden in Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel who are in their midst." The word burden can also mean an oracle, a weighty message. It is a play on words. Ezekiel had carried a burden on his shoulder, and the burden, the message, was about the prince in Jerusalem. The prince was Zedekiah, the king Nebuchadnezzar had put on the throne in 597 B.C. Ezekiel calls him "the prince" rather than king, perhaps because the exiles still saw Jehoiachin as the true king.

"I am your portent; as I have done, so it shall be done to them; into exile, into captivity they shall go." Everything Ezekiel did was a preview. The people of Jerusalem would pack their bags and walk into exile, just as he had.

12:12-13 *And the prince who **is** in their midst shall lift **it** up on **his** shoulder in the dark and go out; they shall dig in the wall to bring **him** out through it; he shall cover his face, because he shall not see the land with **his** eye, he himself. And I will spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare; and I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans; and he shall not see it, and he shall die there.*

Now God gives details that are so specific they could only come from Him. "And the prince who is in their midst shall lift it up on his shoulder in the dark and go out; they shall dig in the wall to bring him out through it; he shall cover his face, because he shall not see the land with his eye, he himself."

"And I will spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare; and I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans; and he shall not see it, and he shall die there."

Here is what happened, about five years later. When the Babylonians broke into Jerusalem in 586 B.C., Zedekiah and his soldiers fled by night through a gate between the two walls near the king's garden (2 Kings 25:4; Jeremiah 39:4). The Babylonians chased him and caught him on the plains of Jericho. They brought him to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, killed his sons before his eyes, and then put out his eyes. Then they bound him in bronze chains and took him to Babylon (2 Kings 25:5-7). He died there (Jeremiah 52:11).

So Zedekiah went to Babylon, but he never saw it. He was blind when he got there. Ezekiel's words, "he shall not see it, and he shall die there," must have sounded like a riddle when he first said them. After 586 B.C., everyone knew exactly what they meant.

Notice whose net it was: "My net," "My snare." Babylon's army was the instrument, but God was the One who caught Zedekiah. Zedekiah had broken his oath to Nebuchadnezzar, which he had sworn in God's name (17:13-19; 2 Chronicles 36:13). He could not outrun God.

12:14-16 *And all who **are** around him, his help, and all his troops, I will scatter to every wind, and I will draw out a sword after them. And they shall know that I **am** the LORD, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them among the lands. And I will leave of them men **few in** number from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence, so that they may recount all their abominations among the nations where they go; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD."*

"And all who are around him, his help, and all his troops, I will scatter to every wind, and I will draw out a sword after them." When Zedekiah fled, his army scattered (2 Kings 25:5). Those who escaped would still be pursued.

"And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them among the lands." The scattering was God's doing, and it would teach them who He is.

But again there is a remnant. "And I will leave of them men few in number from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence, so that they may recount all their abominations among the nations where they go." Why would God spare a few? So they could tell the nations why this had happened. Their testimony would be: we sinned, and the LORD judged us justly. The nations would learn that Jerusalem did not fall because the LORD was weak, but because His people were wicked. Even in exile, Israel would bear witness to God's holiness.

12:17-20 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, you shall eat your bread in quaking, and you shall drink your water in trembling and in anxiety. And you shall say to the people of the land, 'Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem on the soil of Israel: They shall eat their bread in anxiety and drink their water in horror, so that its land may be desolate from its fullness, because of the violence of all those dwelling in it. And the inhabited cities shall be laid waste, and the land shall become a desolation; and you shall know that I **am** the LORD.'"*

God gives Ezekiel another sign. "You shall eat your bread in quaking, and you shall drink your water in trembling and in anxiety." Ezekiel was to eat with his hands shaking, like a man terrified that an enemy could burst in at any moment.

Then he was to explain it "to the people of the land," concerning "the inhabitants of Jerusalem." "They shall eat their bread in anxiety and drink their water in horror." This is what life would be like in the city under siege, when every meal might be the last.

"So that its land may be desolate from its fullness, because of the violence of all those dwelling in it." Notice the reason again: violence. The land would be stripped bare because the people had filled it with injustice and bloodshed. "And the inhabited cities shall be laid waste, and the land shall become a desolation."

Fear is one of the fruits of sin. Adam hid from God in fear after he sinned (Genesis 3:10). John says that perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). Those who are at peace with God through Christ do not need to live in terror, even when the world shakes.

12:21-25 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, what **is** this proverb that you have about the soil of Israel, saying, 'The days are prolonged, and every vision perishes'? Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: I will make this proverb cease, and they shall not use it as a proverb again in Israel.' But speak to them, 'The days have drawn near, and the word of every vision.' For there shall no longer be any vision of worthlessness and divination of flattery in the midst of the house of Israel. For I, the LORD, will speak what I will speak, a word, and it shall be done; it shall not be delayed again; for in your days, O house of rebellion, I will speak a word and do it, declares the Lord GOD."*

Now God deals with a saying that was going around: "The days are prolonged, and every vision perishes." In other words, the prophets have been warning us for years, and nothing has happened. Their visions come to nothing. Why worry?

It is easy to see how people got there. Isaiah, Micah, Habakkuk and Jeremiah had all warned of judgment, and for years life had gone on. Some of the warnings had come true, but Jerusalem was still standing. The delay made people careless.

God says, "I will make this proverb cease." He gives them a new one: "The days have drawn near, and the word of every vision." The time was close, and every vision would come true.

"For there shall no longer be any vision of worthlessness and divination of flattery in the midst of the house of Israel." Divination was trying to find out the future by magic or omens, like reading the livers of animals or the flight of birds, which the law forbade (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). The false prophets had been giving the people pleasant, flattering messages. That was about to end, because the events would prove them wrong.

"For I, the LORD, will speak what I will speak, a word, and it shall be done; it shall not be delayed again; for in your days, O house of rebellion, I will speak a word and do it." Not in some distant generation. In their own lifetime.

Peter tells us people would say the same thing about the return of Christ: "Where is the promise of His coming?" Everything goes on as it has since the beginning (2 Peter 3:3-4). Peter's answer is the same as Ezekiel's. God is not slow. He is patient. And the day will come (2 Peter 3:9-10).

12:26-28 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, look, the house of Israel are saying, 'The vision that he sees **is** for many days, and for distant times he is prophesying.' Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: None of My words shall be delayed again; what I speak, a word, it shall be done, declares the Lord GOD.'"*

There was a second saying, a little different from the first. "The vision that he sees is for many days, and for distant times he is prophesying." This group did not deny that Ezekiel's words would come true. They just thought it would be far in the future, long after they were gone. So, they reasoned, it does not apply to us.

God's answer: "None of My words shall be delayed again; what I speak, a word, it shall be done, declares the Lord GOD." Within about five years, Jerusalem fell. The exiles who heard these words lived to hear the news (33:21).

These two sayings are still with us. One says that nothing ever happens, so God's warnings are empty. The other says it may happen someday, but not to me. Both lead to the same place: doing nothing. The answer to both is the same. God's word will come true, and the right time to respond is now. "Look, now is a well-accepted time; look, now is a day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Chapter 12 Summary

God told Ezekiel that he lived among a rebellious people who had eyes but did not see. As a sign, Ezekiel packed a bag of exile by day, dug through the wall of his house in the evening, covered his face, and carried the bag out in the dark while the people watched. The next morning God explained that this pictured the prince in Jerusalem, Zedekiah, who would flee by night through a hole in the wall, be caught in God's net, and be taken to Babylon without seeing it, and die there. This came true when Zedekiah was captured, blinded, and taken to Babylon. His troops would be scattered, but a few would survive to tell the nations of Israel's sins. Ezekiel ate his bread with trembling as a sign of the fear in the siege. God then answered two sayings the people used to dismiss the prophets, that the visions never come true and that they are only about the distant future, by declaring that none of His words would be delayed any longer.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. How does God describe the people Ezekiel lived among? (12:2)

2. What did Ezekiel do by day, and what did he do in the evening? (12:3-7)

3. What question did the people ask, and what was God's answer? (12:9-11)

4. What details did God give about what would happen to the prince? (12:12-13)

5. How were those details fulfilled in Zedekiah's life? (2 Kings 25:4-7; Jeremiah 52:11)

6. Why did God leave a few survivors? (12:16)

7. What were the two sayings the people used to dismiss the prophets, and how did God answer them? (12:22, 27-28)

8. How does Peter warn that people will say the same kind of thing about the return of Christ? (2 Peter 3:3-10)

9. Ezekiel looked foolish to his neighbors when he obeyed God. Has obeying God ever made you look foolish to others? How did you handle it?

10. Have you ever put off responding to God because you thought there was plenty of time? What does "now is a day of salvation" mean for you? (2 Corinthians 6:2)

Chapter 13: Against the False Prophets

Scripture

13:1-16 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are prophesying, and say to the prophets from their heart, 'Hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the foolish prophets who walk after their spirit and have not seen! Like foxes among ruins your prophets have been, O Israel. You have not gone up into the breaches, and ***have not*** built up a wall around the house of Israel, to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD. They have seen worthlessness and divination of a lie, who say, "Declares the LORD," and the LORD has not sent them; and they have hoped to confirm a word. Have you not seen a vision of worthlessness, and spoken a divination of a lie, and ***you are*** saying, "Declares the LORD," and I have not spoken? Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have spoken worthlessness and seen a lie, therefore, look, I ***am*** against you, declares the Lord GOD. And My hand shall be against the prophets who see worthlessness and who divine a lie; they shall not be in the council of My people, and in the register of the house of Israel they shall not be written, and into the soil of Israel they shall not enter; and you shall know that I ***am*** the Lord GOD. Because, even because they have led My people astray, saying, "Peace," and ***there is*** no peace; and he ***is*** building a wall, and look, they are plastering it ***with*** whitewash; say to those who plaster ***with*** whitewash that it shall fall: a flooding rain will come, and you, O stones of hail, shall fall, and a wind of tempests shall burst ***it***. And look, the wall has fallen; will it not be said to you, "Where ***is*** the coating with which you plastered ***it***?" Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I will cause a wind of tempests to burst forth in My rage, and there shall be a flooding rain in My anger, and stones of hail in rage for a complete end. And I will tear down the wall which you plastered ***with*** whitewash, and bring it down to the ground, and its foundation shall be laid bare; and it shall fall, and you shall be consumed in its midst; and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. And I will spend My rage on the wall and on those who plastered it ***with*** whitewash; and I will say to you, "The wall ***is*** no more, and those who plastered it ***are*** no more, the prophets of Israel who prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and who see for it a vision of peace, and ***there is*** no peace," declares the Lord GOD.'

13:17-23 And you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who prophesy from their heart, and prophesy against them, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the ***women*** who sew bands on all the joints of ***the*** hands, and who make the veils on the head of every stature, to hunt souls! Will you hunt the souls of My people, and keep souls alive for yourselves? And you have profaned Me among My people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to put to death souls that should not die and to keep alive souls that should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to a lie. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** against your bands with which you are hunting there the souls as flying ***things***, and I will tear them from your arms, and I will set free the souls, the souls that you are hunting as flying ***things***. And I will tear off your veils and deliver My people from your hand, and they shall no longer be in your hand as prey; and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. Because you have disheartened the heart of the righteous ***with*** falsehood, and I have not caused him pain, and ***have*** strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does not turn back from his evil way, to keep him alive, therefore you shall not see

worthlessness, and you shall not divine divination again; and I will deliver My people from your hand; and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD.'"

Chapter 13 Preview

In chapter 12 God answered the sayings people used to brush off His warnings. In chapter 13 He goes after the people who were telling them what they wanted to hear: the false prophets. These men claimed to speak for God, saying "Declares the LORD," but the LORD had not sent them. They told the people all would be well, "Peace," when there was no peace (13:10). God compares their message to a flimsy wall covered with whitewash. It looks fine until the storm comes.

The second half of the chapter turns to women who were also prophesying from their own hearts. They used magic charms and veils to "hunt souls" and sold their services for handfuls of barley and pieces of bread. They encouraged the wicked and discouraged the righteous. God says He will tear off their charms and set His people free. This chapter is a strong warning for anyone who speaks in God's name, and a call for every believer to test what they hear by God's Word.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1-3 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are prophesying, and say to the prophets from their heart, 'Hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the foolish prophets who walk after their spirit and have not seen!*

"Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are prophesying." There were many prophets in Israel in Ezekiel's day, both in Jerusalem and among the exiles. Jeremiah wrote a letter to the exiles naming some of them, Ahab and Zedekiah (not the king) and Shemaiah, men who were prophesying a lie in God's name (Jeremiah 29:8-9, 21-32).

God calls them "the prophets from their heart." That was their problem. Their messages came out of their own minds, not from God. "Woe to the foolish prophets who walk after their spirit and have not seen!" A true prophet speaks what he has seen and heard from God. These men followed their own spirit, their own ideas and feelings, and they had seen nothing.

The word foolish in the Bible does not mean unintelligent. It means a person who lives as if God does not matter (Psalm 14:1). These prophets may have been clever and persuasive, but they were fools, because they spoke without God.

13:4-5 *Like foxes among ruins your prophets have been, O Israel. You have not gone up into the breaches, and* ***have not*** *built up a wall around the house of Israel, to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD.*

"Like foxes among ruins your prophets have been, O Israel." Foxes, or jackals, live among ruined buildings. They do not build anything. They dig holes in the rubble and make the damage worse, and they look out for themselves. The false prophets were living off the ruins of Israel instead of helping to rebuild.

"You have not gone up into the breaches, and have not built up a wall around the house of Israel, to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD." When an enemy broke a hole in a city wall, brave men rushed into the gap to hold it and repair it. A true prophet would have stood in the gap by calling the people to repentance and praying for them. Moses did this when he stood in the breach before God to turn away His wrath (Psalm 106:23). In 22:30 God will say He looked for a man to stand in the gap and found none.

The false prophets did not do that. They did not confront sin. They did not call for repentance. They did not pray. They left the walls broken and told everyone the city was safe.

13:6-7 *They have seen worthlessness and divination of a lie, who say, "Declares the LORD," and the LORD has not sent them; and they have hoped to confirm a word. Have you not seen a vision of worthlessness, and spoken a divination of a lie, and **you are** saying, "Declares the LORD," and I have not spoken?*

"They have seen worthlessness and divination of a lie, who say, Declares the LORD, and the LORD has not sent them." They used God's name to sound official. They said the right words, "Declares the LORD," just like real prophets. But God had never spoken to them.

"And they have hoped to confirm a word." They actually expected their own predictions to come true. Some of them may have believed their own lies. That is a frightening thing. A person can be sincere and still be sincerely wrong.

God puts it to them directly: "Have you not seen a vision of worthlessness, and spoken a divination of a lie, and you are saying, Declares the LORD, and I have not spoken?"

The law gave a clear test for a prophet. If what he said in the LORD's name did not happen, the LORD had not spoken it (Deuteronomy 18:21-22). And if he led people to other gods, he was false even if his signs came true (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). The false prophets of Ezekiel's day failed both tests.

13:8-9 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have spoken worthlessness and seen a lie, therefore, look, I **am** against you, declares the Lord GOD. And My hand shall be against the prophets who see worthlessness and who divine a lie; they shall not be in the council of My people, and in the register of the house of Israel they shall not be written, and into the soil of Israel they shall not enter; and you shall know that I **am** the Lord GOD.*

"Therefore, look, I am against you, declares the Lord GOD." Again we hear the most frightening words God can say (5:8).

"And My hand shall be against the prophets who see worthlessness and who divine a lie." God names three penalties.

First, "they shall not be in the council of My people." They would lose their place among the leaders of God's people.

Second, "in the register of the house of Israel they shall not be written." Israel kept family records of who belonged to the community. After the exile, when the people came home, those whose names could not be found in the records were left out (Ezra 2:59-62). The false prophets would be cut off from God's people.

Third, "into the soil of Israel they shall not enter." When God brought the exiles home, these men would not be among them. They had promised others a quick return, and they themselves would never return at all.

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

13:10-12 *Because, even because they have led My people astray, saying, "Peace," and* ***there is*** *no peace; and he* ***is*** *building a wall, and look, they are plastering it* ***with*** *whitewash; say to those who plaster* ***with*** *whitewash that it shall fall: a flooding rain will come, and you, O stones of hail, shall fall, and a wind of tempests shall burst* ***it****. And look, the wall has fallen; will it not be said to you, "Where* ***is*** *the coating with which you plastered* ***it****?"*

"Because, even because they have led My people astray, saying, Peace, and there is no peace." This is the heart of the charge. The false prophets told the people everything would be fine. No need to repent. No need to fear Babylon. God is on our side. Jeremiah faced the same men in Jerusalem, who healed the wound of God's people lightly, saying peace when there was no peace (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11).

Then God gives a picture. "And he is building a wall, and look, they are plastering it with whitewash." Someone was building a weak wall, maybe a wall of loose stones without mortar, and the prophets came along and painted it white so it looked solid. The people were building their hopes on lies, and the prophets made those hopes look strong and safe.

"Say to those who plaster with whitewash that it shall fall: a flooding rain will come, and you, O stones of hail, shall fall, and a wind of tempests shall burst it." The storm of God's judgment would come, and the wall would collapse.

"And look, the wall has fallen; will it not be said to you, Where is the coating with which you plastered it?" When it was all over, people would look at the rubble and ask the prophets, What happened to all your promises?

Jesus told a similar story about two builders. The one who built on the rock stood firm when the storm came. The one who built on sand saw his house fall, and great was its fall (Matthew 7:24-27). What makes the difference is whether we hear His words and do them.

13:13-16 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I will cause a wind of tempests to burst forth in My rage, and there shall be a flooding rain in My anger, and stones of hail in rage for a complete end. And I will tear down the wall which you plastered* ***with*** *whitewash, and bring it down to the ground, and its foundation shall be laid bare; and it shall fall, and you shall be consumed in its midst; and you shall know that I* ***am*** *the LORD. And I will spend My rage on the wall and on those who plastered it* ***with*** *whitewash; and I will say to you, "The wall* ***is*** *no more, and those who plastered it* ***are*** *no more, the prophets of Israel who prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and who see for it a vision of peace, and* ***there is*** *no peace," declares the Lord GOD.'*

God says the storm is His. "I will cause a wind of tempests to burst forth in My rage, and there shall be a flooding rain in My anger, and stones of hail in rage for a complete end."

"And I will tear down the wall which you plastered with whitewash, and bring it down to the ground, and its foundation shall be laid bare; and it shall fall, and you shall be consumed in its midst." When the wall fell, it would fall on the very men who had painted it. The false prophets would be crushed under their own lies.

"The wall is no more, and those who plastered it are no more, the prophets of Israel who prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and who see for it a vision of peace, and there is no peace."

This is a serious warning for anyone who teaches God's Word today. It is tempting to tell people only what makes them feel good. Paul warned Timothy that a time would come when people would not put up with sound teaching, but would gather teachers who tell them what their itching ears want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3-4). A message that leaves out sin, repentance and judgment may draw a crowd, but it is a whitewashed wall. It will not stand on the day of the LORD.

For those of us who listen to teaching, the lesson is the same. We are not to believe every spirit, but to test the spirits to see if they are from God (1 John 4:1). The Bereans checked even Paul's teaching against the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). If someone tells you what you want to hear, check it twice.

13:17-19 *And you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who prophesy from their heart, and prophesy against them, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the* ***women*** *who sew bands on all the joints of* ***the*** *hands, and who make the veils on the head of every stature, to hunt souls! Will you hunt the souls of My people, and keep souls alive for yourselves? And you have profaned Me among My people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to put to death souls that should not die and to keep alive souls that should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to a lie.*

Now God turns to a second group. "Set your face against the daughters of your people who prophesy from their heart." These were women who claimed to speak for God, but like the men, they spoke "from their heart."

God is not condemning them for being women. The Bible names faithful prophetesses, such as Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4) and Huldah, who gave God's true word to King

Josiah (2 Kings 22:14-20). These women were condemned for the same reason as the men: they were false.

"Woe to the women who sew bands on all the joints of the hands, and who make the veils on the head of every stature, to hunt souls!" We do not know exactly what these bands and veils were. Most teachers believe they were magic charms, cords tied around the wrist, and coverings put on the head, used in fortune telling and spells, much like the magic practices of Babylon. They claimed to control life and death with them. The word "hunt" pictures a trapper catching birds. These women were trapping people.

"Will you hunt the souls of My people, and keep souls alive for yourselves?" They were using people for their own gain. And they did it cheap: "for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread." They sold out God's people for a meal.

"To put to death souls that should not die and to keep alive souls that should not live." Their words had the opposite effect of the truth. They frightened people who were right with God and promised safety to people who were not.

13:20-21 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** against your bands with which you are hunting there the souls as flying **things**, and I will tear them from your arms, and I will set free the souls, the souls that you are hunting as flying **things**. And I will tear off your veils and deliver My people from your hand, and they shall no longer be in your hand as prey; and you shall know that I **am** the LORD.*

"Look, I am against your bands with which you are hunting there the souls as flying things." God speaks as the rescuer of the trapped birds. "I will tear them from your arms, and I will set free the souls, the souls that you are hunting as flying things."

"And I will tear off your veils and deliver My people from your hand, and they shall no longer be in your hand as prey." God calls them "My people." Even when they were caught in false teaching and superstition, God still claimed them. He would come and set them free.

There are still people who use spiritual-sounding practices to control and frighten others, whether it is fortune telling, so-called curses, or teachers who make people afraid that only they can give God's blessing. God is against all of it. In Christ we are free (John 8:36; Galatians 5:1). No charm or spell has power over a person who belongs to Jesus (Colossians 2:15).

13:22-23 *Because you have disheartened the heart of the righteous **with** falsehood, and I have not caused him pain, and **have** strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does not turn back from his evil way, to keep him alive, therefore you shall not see worthlessness, and you shall not divine divination again; and I will deliver My people from your hand; and you shall know that I **am** the LORD.'"*

God names the deepest harm these false prophetesses did: "Because you have disheartened the heart of the righteous with falsehood, and I have not caused him pain, and have strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does not turn back from his evil way, to keep him alive."

They did two terrible things. They discouraged people who were right with God, making them feel condemned when God had not condemned them. And they encouraged wicked people, making them feel safe when they should have turned from their sin. That is exactly backwards. True teaching comforts the repentant and warns the unrepentant. False teaching does the reverse.

"Therefore you shall not see worthlessness, and you shall not divine divination again." Their false visions and magic would come to an end. "And I will deliver My people from your hand; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

How can we tell true teaching from false? Here is a simple test from this verse. Does it call the wicked to turn from their sin? Does it encourage the humble and repentant with God's grace? If a message tells people they can keep sinning and be safe, or tells repentant people that God will never forgive them, it is not from God.

Chapter 13 Summary

God told Ezekiel to prophesy against the false prophets of Israel, who spoke from their own hearts and had seen nothing. Like foxes in ruins, they did not stand in the breach or repair the wall by calling the people to repentance. They said "Declares the LORD," though the LORD had not sent them, and they promised peace when there was no peace. God compared their message to a flimsy wall covered in whitewash, which His storm of hail, rain and wind would knock down on top of them. They would be cut off from the council of God's people, left out of Israel's records, and never return to the land. God also condemned women who prophesied from their own hearts and used magic bands and veils to hunt souls for handfuls of barley and bread, discouraging the righteous and encouraging the wicked. God promised to tear off their charms and free His people from their hand.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. Where did the false prophets' messages come from? (13:2-3)

2. What does it mean that they were "like foxes among ruins"? (13:4)

3. What should a true prophet have done in the breaches? (13:5; Psalm 106:23)

4. What did the false prophets say that made them sound like real prophets? (13:6-7)

5. What three penalties did God name for them? (13:9)

6. What is the meaning of the whitewashed wall, and what would happen to it? (13:10-14)

7. What were the false prophetesses doing, and what did they get paid? (13:18-19)

8. What two things did the false prophetesses do that were exactly backward? (13:22)

9. How can you test what you hear from preachers, teachers, books or online? (1 John 4:1; Acts 17:11)

10. Have you ever wanted someone to tell you what you wanted to hear instead of the truth? How can you welcome the truth even when it is hard? (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

Chapter 14: Idols in the Heart, and Noah, Daniel and Job

Scripture

14:1-11 And men from the elders of Israel came to me, and they sat before me. And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, these men have brought up their idols on their heart, and the stumbling block of their iniquity they have put before their faces. Should I indeed let Myself be consulted by them? Therefore speak with them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Any man of the house of Israel who brings up his idols to his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet, I, the LORD, will let Myself answer him, ***as he*** comes with the multitude of his idols, so as to seize the house of Israel by their heart, who have become estranged from Me by their idols, all of them.' Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Turn back, and turn ***yourselves*** away from your idols, and from all your abominations turn away your faces. For any man of the house of Israel and of the sojourner who sojourns in Israel, who separates himself from after Me and brings up his idols to his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet to consult him about Me, I, the LORD, will let Myself answer him by Myself. And I will set My face against that man, and I will make him a sign and bywords, and I will cut him off from the midst of My people; and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. And the prophet, if he is deceived and speaks a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet; and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from the midst of My people Israel. And they shall bear their iniquity; like the iniquity of the one consulting, like the iniquity of the prophet it shall be, so that the house of Israel may no longer wander from after Me, and may no longer make themselves unclean with all their transgressions; and they shall be a people to Me, and I will be God to them, declares the Lord GOD.'"

14:12-23 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, a land, if it sins against Me by acting unfaithfully ***with*** unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, and I break the staff of bread for it, and I send famine on it, and I cut off from it man and animal, and these three men are in its midst, Noah, Daniel, and Job, they by their righteousness will deliver their ***own*** life, declares the Lord GOD. If I cause evil beasts to pass through the land, and they bereave it, and it becomes a desolation, without ***anyone*** passing through because of the beasts, ***and*** these three men ***are*** in its midst, ***as*** I live, declares the Lord GOD, they will deliver neither sons nor daughters; they alone will be delivered, and the land will be a desolation. Or ***if*** I bring a sword on that land, and I say, 'Let a sword pass through the land,' and I cut off from it man and animal, and these three men ***are*** in its midst, ***as*** I live, declares the Lord GOD, they will not deliver sons and daughters, for they alone will be delivered. Or ***if*** I send pestilence into that land, and I pour out My rage on it in blood, to cut off from it man and animal, and Noah, Daniel, and Job ***are*** in its midst, ***as*** I live, declares the Lord GOD, they will deliver neither son nor daughter; they by their righteousness will deliver their ***own*** life. For thus says the Lord GOD: 'How much more when I send My four evil judgments, sword and famine and evil beasts and pestilence, against Jerusalem, to cut off from it man and animal! And look, an escaped remnant shall be left in it, those being brought out, sons and daughters; look, they are coming out to you, and you shall see their way and their deeds, and you shall be comforted concerning the calamity which I have brought on

Jerusalem, all that I have brought on it. And they shall comfort you when you see their way and their deeds, and you shall know that not without cause have I done all that I have done in it, declares the Lord GOD.'"

Chapter 14 Preview

Some of the elders of Israel come to sit before Ezekiel, the way people might come to a pastor's office for counsel. They look respectful. But God tells Ezekiel what is really going on: "these men have brought up their idols on their heart" (14:3). They want a word from God while their hearts belong to other gods. God says He will answer them, but not in the way they hope. He calls them to repent, and He warns that a prophet who goes along with them will share their judgment.

The second half of the chapter gives one of the most famous lines in Ezekiel. If a land sins so badly that God sends judgment on it, even if Noah, Daniel and Job were living there, those three righteous men would save only themselves (14:14, 20). No one can ride into heaven on someone else's faith. Yet God also promises that a remnant will come out of Jerusalem, and when the exiles see them, they will understand that God did nothing without cause.

Chapter 14 Study

14:1-3 *And men from the elders of Israel came to me, and they sat before me. And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, these men have brought up their idols on their heart, and the stumbling block of their iniquity they have put before their faces. Should I indeed let Myself be consulted by them?*

"And men from the elders of Israel came to me, and they sat before me." These were leaders of the exile community, like the elders in 8:1. They came to Ezekiel's house to hear from God. On the outside, it looked like a good thing.

But God saw what Ezekiel could not. "Son of man, these men have brought up their idols on their heart, and the stumbling block of their iniquity they have put before their faces." These elders may not have had any idols on a shelf in their houses. In Babylon, surrounded by its gods, perhaps they did. But the deeper problem was in their hearts. Their loyalty, their trust and their hope were set on something other than God.

"The stumbling block of their iniquity" is something a person trips over and falls. They had put their sin right in front of their faces, where they would keep looking at it and stumbling over it.

Then God asks a pointed question: "Should I indeed let Myself be consulted by them?" Why would God answer people who come to Him for advice while their hearts are given to other gods?

This is a very modern problem. A person can go to church, read the Bible, even ask for prayer, while something else holds first place in his heart. An idol of the heart is anything we love, trust or serve more than God. John ends his first letter with a simple command: "Little children, guard yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

14:4-5 *Therefore speak with them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Any man of the house of Israel who brings up his idols to his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet, I, the LORD, will let Myself answer him, **as he** comes with the multitude of his idols, so as to seize the house of Israel by their heart, who have become estranged from Me by their idols, all of them.'*

"Any man of the house of Israel who brings up his idols to his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet, I, the LORD, will let Myself answer him, as he comes with the multitude of his idols."

God says He will answer. But the answer will not be the word of comfort the man wants. It will be an answer that fits his idols. God will deal with him directly, as the next verses show.

Why? "So as to seize the house of Israel by their heart, who have become estranged from Me by their idols, all of them." God's goal was to grab hold of their hearts and bring them back. Their idols had made them strangers to Him. He wanted them home. Even God's hard answers are meant to win back hearts.

14:6-8 *Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Turn back, and turn **yourselves** away from your idols, and from all your abominations turn away your faces. For any man of the house of Israel and of the sojourner who sojourns in Israel, who separates himself from after Me and brings up his idols to his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet to consult him about Me, I, the LORD, will let Myself answer him by Myself. And I will set My face against that man, and I will make him a sign and bywords, and I will cut him off from the midst of My people; and you shall know that I **am** the LORD.*

"Therefore say to the house of Israel," God says. "Turn back, and turn yourselves away from your idols, and from all your abominations turn away your faces."

Here is the call to repentance. The Hebrew word for repent means to turn. You cannot face two directions at once. To turn toward God means to turn away from idols. They had their sin "before their faces" (14:3). God says, turn your faces away from it.

Verse 7 widens the warning to "any man of the house of Israel and of the sojourner who sojourns in Israel." A sojourner was a foreigner living among God's people. The same rule applied to everyone. Anyone who "separates himself from after Me and brings up his idols to his heart" and then "comes to the prophet to consult him about Me," God says, "I, the LORD, will let Myself answer him by Myself." God Himself would answer, not through the prophet.

And His answer would be judgment: "I will set My face against that man, and I will make him a sign and bywords, and I will cut him off from the midst of My people." His punishment would be so clear that people would point to him as a warning and make him the subject of sayings. "And you shall know that I am the LORD."

14:9-11 *And the prophet, if he is deceived and speaks a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet; and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from the midst of My people Israel. And they shall bear their iniquity; like the iniquity of the one consulting, like the iniquity of the prophet it shall be, so that the house of Israel may no longer wander from after Me, and may no longer make themselves unclean with all their transgressions; and they shall be a people to Me, and I will be God to them, declares the Lord GOD.'"*

"And the prophet, if he is deceived and speaks a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet." This is a hard verse. Does God lie or trick people into sin? No. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), and He tempts no one to evil (James 1:13).

So what does it mean? The setting is a prophet who is willing to give a pleasing word to a man with idols in his heart. That prophet has already chosen to go along with sin. God says He will let that prophet be deceived. He will give him over to the lie he has chosen. We see this same principle in 1 Kings 22:19-23, where God allowed a lying spirit to speak through Ahab's prophets because Ahab wanted to hear lies. And Paul says that in the last days, because people did not receive the love of the truth, God will send them a working of error so that they will believe the lie (2 Thessalonians 2:10-11). When people keep refusing the truth, God at last gives them what they want, and that is itself a judgment (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

"And I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from the midst of My people Israel." The prophet would not escape.

"And they shall bear their iniquity; like the iniquity of the one consulting, like the iniquity of the prophet it shall be." Both the one who asked and the one who answered would be judged alike. The man with idols could not blame the prophet, and the prophet could not blame the man who asked.

Why would God do this? "So that the house of Israel may no longer wander from after Me, and may no longer make themselves unclean with all their transgressions; and they shall be a people to Me, and I will be God to them." The judgment had a purpose: to bring His people back and restore the covenant relationship. God's goal is always that His people would be His and He would be their God.

14:12-14 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, a land, if it sins against Me by acting unfaithfully **with** unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, and I break the staff of bread for it, and I send famine on it, and I cut off from it man and animal, and these three men are in its midst, Noah, Daniel, and Job, they by their righteousness will deliver their **own** life, declares the Lord GOD.*

Now God gives a new message. "Son of man, a land, if it sins against Me by acting unfaithfully with unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, and I break the staff of bread for it, and I send famine on it, and I cut off from it man and animal."

God speaks of "a land," any land. The principle is general. Then He names three men: "and these three men are in its midst, Noah, Daniel, and Job, they by their righteousness will deliver their own life, declares the Lord GOD."

Why these three? Each one was a righteous man who stood firm in a wicked or hard time, and each one's righteousness was connected to others.

Noah was "a righteous man; blameless he was in his generations; with God Noah walked" (Genesis 6:9). He lived in a world so wicked that God destroyed it with a flood, yet God saved Noah and his family.

Daniel was Ezekiel's own contemporary. He was taken to Babylon in 605 B.C., about eight years before Ezekiel. By the time of this message, about 592 B.C., Daniel had already become famous in Babylon for his faithfulness and wisdom (Daniel 1:8-20; 2:46-49). Ezekiel mentions his wisdom again in 28:3. He had refused to defile himself with the king's food, and God had raised him up. He was a living example the exiles would have known.

Job was "blameless and upright, and fearing God and turning aside from evil" (Job 1:1), and he stayed faithful through terrible suffering. He prayed and offered sacrifices for his children (Job 1:5) and later for his friends (Job 42:8-10).

Here is the point. Noah could save his family. Job could pray for his friends. Daniel could stand for his nation. But if a land had gone as far as Judah had, even men like these "will deliver their own life" and no one else's. Their righteousness could not cover others.

The people of Jerusalem may have been counting on the faithful few among them, or on their godly ancestors, to protect them. Genesis 18 tells how God would have spared Sodom for ten righteous people. But God says Jerusalem had gone past that point. Jeremiah heard the same thing: even if Moses and Samuel stood before God, His heart would not turn toward this people (Jeremiah 15:1).

14:15-18 *If I cause evil beasts to pass through the land, and they bereave it, and it becomes a desolation, without **anyone** passing through because of the beasts, **and** these three men **are** in its midst, **as** I live, declares the Lord GOD, they will deliver neither sons nor daughters; they alone will be delivered, and the land will be a desolation. Or **if** I bring a sword on that land, and I say, 'Let a sword pass through the land,' and I cut off from it man and animal, and these three men **are** in its midst, **as** I live, declares the Lord GOD, they will not deliver sons and daughters, for they alone will be delivered.*

God gives a second and third case. If He sends "evil beasts" through the land so that no one can travel through it, "and these three men are in its midst, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, they will deliver neither sons nor daughters; they alone will be delivered."

And if He brings "a sword on that land," the answer is the same: "they will not deliver sons and daughters, for they alone will be delivered."

The repetition hammers the point home. It does not matter which judgment God sends. It does not matter how righteous the person is. No one can save his children by his own righteousness when the judgment comes on a land that has rejected God.

That is a hard word for parents. We want to protect our children, and we should pray for them, teach them and live before them faithfully (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Ephesians 6:4). But each person must come to God for himself. Our children cannot be saved by our faith. They need their own. God has no grandchildren, only children, and each of us must come to Him personally through faith in Jesus (John 1:12-13).

14:19-20 *Or **if** I send pestilence into that land, and I pour out My rage on it in blood, to cut off from it man and animal, and Noah, Daniel, and Job **are** in its midst, **as** I live, declares the Lord GOD, they will deliver neither son nor daughter; they by their righteousness will deliver their **own** life.*

The fourth case is pestilence: "Or if I send pestilence into that land, and I pour out My rage on it in blood, to cut off from it man and animal, and Noah, Daniel, and Job are in its midst, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, they will deliver neither son nor daughter; they by their righteousness will deliver their own life."

Four judgments in all: famine, wild beasts, sword and plague. These were the judgments the law warned would come on a land that broke the covenant (Leviticus 26:22-26).

Notice the phrase "by their righteousness." In Ezekiel's setting, this means their faithful lives before God. It does not teach that these men earned salvation by being good. Noah "found favor in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8), and Hebrews 11:7 says he became an heir of the righteousness that is according to faith. Righteousness in every age comes by grace through faith, and real faith shows itself in a righteous life. The point here is that no one else's faith can be counted for you. Only Christ's righteousness can be given to others, and it is given to everyone who believes (Romans 3:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

14:21-23 *For thus says the Lord GOD: 'How much more when I send My four evil judgments, sword and famine and evil beasts and pestilence, against Jerusalem, to cut off from it man and animal! And look, an escaped remnant shall be left in it, those being brought out, sons and daughters; look, they are coming out to you, and you shall see their way and their deeds, and you shall be comforted concerning the calamity which I have brought on Jerusalem, all that I have brought on it. And they shall comfort you when you see their way and their deeds, and you shall know that not without cause have I done all that I have done in it, declares the Lord GOD.'"*

"How much more when I send My four evil judgments, sword and famine and evil beasts and pestilence, against Jerusalem, to cut off from it man and animal!" If one of these judgments was enough to show that even the most righteous men could only save themselves, how much worse would it be when all four came on Jerusalem at once?

But then comes a surprise. "And look, an escaped remnant shall be left in it, those being brought out, sons and daughters; look, they are coming out to you." Some would survive and be brought to

Babylon as captives. Even the sons and daughters, whom Noah, Daniel and Job could not save, would in some cases be spared. Not because they deserved it, but by God's choice.

"And you shall see their way and their deeds, and you shall be comforted concerning the calamity which I have brought on Jerusalem." When those survivors arrived in Babylon, the exiles would see how wicked they were. Then they would understand. Their grief over Jerusalem would be eased, because they would see that God's judgment was just.

"And they shall comfort you when you see their way and their deeds, and you shall know that not without cause have I done all that I have done in it, declares the Lord GOD."

That last line is worth holding on to. "Not without cause." God never does anything without a reason. When we see His judgments, we may not understand everything at first. But one day we will see that He was right in all He did. Revelation says the same: "True and righteous are Your judgments" (Revelation 16:7).

Chapter 14 Summary

Some elders of Israel came to sit before Ezekiel, but God said they had set up idols in their hearts and put their sin before their faces. God would answer such people Himself with judgment, to win back their hearts, and He called them to turn away from their idols. A prophet who gave them a pleasing word would be given over to his own deception and judged along with them, so that Israel would stop wandering and be God's people again. Then God said that if a land sinned so badly that He sent famine, wild beasts, sword or plague on it, even if Noah, Daniel and Job lived there, they would save only themselves, not their sons or daughters. How much more when all four judgments came on Jerusalem. Yet a remnant would come out to the exiles, and when the exiles saw their ways, they would be comforted and know that God had done nothing without cause.

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. What did God say about the elders who came to sit before Ezekiel? (14:1-3)

2. What is an idol of the heart? Give some examples from today. (14:3; 1 John 5:21)

3. What did God call the people to do? (14:6)

4. What would happen to a prophet who gave a pleasing word to a man with idols in his heart? (14:9-10)

5. What was God's purpose in these judgments? (14:11)

6. Why do you think God named Noah, Daniel and Job? (14:14; Genesis 6:9; Daniel 1:8; Job 1:1)

7. What could these three righteous men not do, no matter how righteous they were? (14:16, 18, 20)

8. How would the remnant that came out of Jerusalem comfort the exiles? (14:22-23)

9. Is there anything in your life that competes with God for first place in your heart? What would it mean to turn your face away from it?

10. Each person must come to God for himself. If you are a parent or grandparent, how can you pray for and point your children to their own faith in Christ? (John 1:12-13)

Chapter 15: The Useless Vine

Scripture

15:1-8 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, what is the wood of the vine more than any tree, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? Is wood taken from it to make ***anything*** for work? Or do they take from it a peg to hang any vessel on it? Look, it is given to the fire for fuel; the fire consumes its two ends, and its middle is charred. Is it useful for work? Look, when it was whole, it was not made for work; how much less, when fire has consumed it and it is charred, will it still be made for work! Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'As the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I have given the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will set My face against them; from the fire they have come out, and the fire shall consume them; and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, when I set My face against them. And I will make the land a desolation, because they have acted unfaithfully ***with*** unfaithfulness, declares the Lord GOD.'"

Chapter 15 Preview

Chapter 15 is short, only eight verses, but it is sharp. God asks Ezekiel a simple question about wood. What good is the wood of a grapevine? You cannot build anything with it. You cannot even make a peg out of it to hang a pot on. Its only use is as firewood. And if it has already been burned at both ends and charred in the middle, it is good for even less.

Then God makes the point. Jerusalem is that vine. Israel was often pictured as God's vine, planted to bear fruit for Him. But a vine that bears no fruit has no other purpose. The people of Jerusalem were proud of being God's chosen vine, but they had become useless, and they were headed for the fire. This little chapter makes us ask what God planted us for, and whether we are bearing the fruit He is looking for.

Chapter 15 Study

15:1-3 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, what is the wood of the vine more than any tree, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? Is wood taken from it to make* ***anything*** *for work? Or do they take from it a peg to hang any vessel on it?*

"Son of man, what is the wood of the vine more than any tree, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest?"

The picture of Israel as a vine runs all through the Old Testament. The psalmist says God brought a vine out of Egypt, drove out the nations and planted it, and it filled the land (Psalm 80:8-11). Isaiah sang a song about God's vineyard, which He planted with choice vines and cared for, but which produced only worthless grapes (Isaiah 5:1-7). Jeremiah said God had planted Israel as a choice vine, a seed of truth, but it had turned into a degenerate foreign vine (Jeremiah 2:21). Every Israelite knew this picture. It was a source of pride: we are God's vine.

But God asks Ezekiel to think about the vine not as a plant but as wood. Compared to the trees of the forest, the oak, the cedar, the cypress, what is a grapevine worth? Nothing.

"Is wood taken from it to make anything for work? Or do they take from it a peg to hang any vessel on it?" The wood of a grapevine is twisted, soft and thin. No carpenter would use it for a beam, a table or a tool handle. You could not even whittle a peg from it strong enough to hang a cooking pot on the wall.

A vine has one purpose: to bear fruit. When it bears grapes, it is precious. When it does not, it is the most worthless plant in the field.

That is the point for Israel. God did not choose Israel because they were great or strong. Moses told them God set His love on them not because they were more in number than other peoples, for they were the fewest of all (Deuteronomy 7:7). God chose them to bear fruit for Him: to show the nations who He is, to worship Him, and to live by His justice and mercy. When they stopped doing that, they had nothing else to boast in.

15:4-5 *Look, it is given to the fire for fuel; the fire consumes its two ends, and its middle is charred. Is it useful for work? Look, when it was whole, it was not made for work; how much less, when fire has consumed it and it is charred, will it still be made for work!*

"Look, it is given to the fire for fuel; the fire consumes its two ends, and its middle is charred. Is it useful for work?"

The vine's only other use is as fuel. Picture a stick thrown into a campfire, burned at both ends and blackened in the middle, then pulled out. If it was useless before, it is even more useless now.

"Look, when it was whole, it was not made for work; how much less, when fire has consumed it and it is charred, will it still be made for work!"

Many teachers see the two burned ends and the charred middle as a picture of what had already happened to God's people. The northern kingdom had been burned up by Assyria in 722 B.C. Judah had already been scorched by Babylon in 605 and 597 B.C., when the first captives were taken, including Daniel and Ezekiel himself. Jerusalem was what was left, the blackened middle of the stick. The people there thought they had survived the fire because they were special. God says no. You have been burned, and you are about to go back into the fire.

15:6-7 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'As the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I have given the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will set My face against them; from the fire they have come out, and the fire shall consume them; and you shall know that I **am** the LORD, when I set My face against them.*

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD." Then He says, "As the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I have given the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

Here is God's own explanation. The people of Jerusalem are the vine wood, and God has given them to the fire.

"And I will set My face against them; from the fire they have come out, and the fire shall consume them." They had come through one fire, the siege and deportation of 597 B.C., and they had come out thinking they were safe. But another fire was coming, and this one would finish the job. In 586 B.C., the city was burned (2 Kings 25:9).

"And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I set My face against them."

What does this mean for us? Jesus used the same picture with His disciples on the night before He died: "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one remaining in Me and I in him, this one bears much fruit; for apart from Me you are not able to do anything" (John 15:5). Then He added, "Unless someone remains in Me, he is thrown out as the branch and is dried up; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:6).

Jesus calls Himself "the true vine" (John 15:1). Israel was meant to be God's vine and failed. Jesus is the vine who never failed, who bore every fruit God desired. And we, as branches, bear fruit only by staying connected to Him.

What is the fruit God is looking for? Paul names the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). It also includes good works (Colossians 1:10), praise to God (Hebrews 13:15), and people won to Christ (Romans 1:13). Fruit is not something we make by trying harder. It grows naturally when we remain in Christ, the way grapes grow on a healthy vine.

15:8 *And I will make the land a desolation, because they have acted unfaithfully* ***with*** *unfaithfulness, declares the Lord GOD.'"*

"And I will make the land a desolation, because they have acted unfaithfully with unfaithfulness, declares the Lord GOD."

The chapter ends with the reason: unfaithfulness. The Hebrew phrase doubles the word, "acted unfaithfully with unfaithfulness," to show how deep it went. It is the word used for breaking trust, like a husband or wife who betrays a marriage. In chapter 16, God will paint that picture in full.

Israel's problem was not that they were a small or weak nation. God never asked them to be the mightiest tree in the forest. He asked them to be faithful and fruitful. They were neither.

That is all God asks of us. Not to be impressive, but to be faithful and to bear fruit that remains (John 15:16). A plain vine full of grapes is worth more than the tallest cedar. A life that stays connected to Jesus and bears His fruit is more precious to God than any worldly success.

Ask yourself: if someone looked at my life, would they see fruit? Not perfection, but the growing fruit of a life connected to Christ? If not, the answer is not to try harder on your own. It is to come back to the vine.

Chapter 15 Summary

God asked Ezekiel what the wood of a grapevine is good for compared to the trees of the forest. It cannot be used to build anything, not even a peg to hang a pot on, and its only use apart from bearing fruit is as fuel for the fire. If it is burned at both ends and charred in the middle, it is good for even less. God said the people of Jerusalem were that vine wood. They had come out of one fire, but He had set His face against them, and the fire would consume them. He would make the land desolate because they had been deeply unfaithful. Jesus later used the same picture, calling Himself the true vine and His followers the branches, who bear fruit only by remaining in Him.

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. What question did God ask Ezekiel about the wood of the vine? (15:2-3)

2. Where else in the Old Testament is Israel pictured as a vine? (Psalm 80:8-11; Isaiah 5:1-7)

3. What is the only real purpose of a vine? Why is its wood worth so little? (15:3-5)

4. What happens to the vine wood that has been burned at both ends? (15:4-5)

5. Who did God say the vine wood represented, and what would happen to them? (15:6-7)

6. What reason did God give for making the land desolate? (15:8)

7. How does Jesus use the picture of the vine in John 15? (John 15:1, 5)

8. What kinds of fruit does God look for in the life of a believer? (Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 1:10)

9. Israel was proud of being God's vine but bore no fruit. Is there any way you have been proud of your faith without the fruit to show for it?

10. What does it look like for you to "remain" in Christ day to day? What is one step you can take this week? (John 15:5)

Chapter 16: Jerusalem the Unfaithful Wife

Scripture

16:1-14 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, make Jerusalem know her abominations, and you shall say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: Your origins and your births ***were*** from the land of the Canaanite; your father ***was*** the Amorite, and your mother a Hittite. And ***as for*** your births, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, and you were not washed with water for cleansing, and you were not rubbed with salt at all, and you were not wrapped at all. No eye looked with pity on you, to do for you one of these ***things***, in compassion for you; and you were thrown out on the face of the field, in the loathing of your soul, on the day you were born. And I passed by you and saw you kicking about in your blood, and I said to you in your blood, "Live!" And I said to you in your blood, "Live!" I made you a myriad like the growth of the field, and you grew and became great, and you came to ***the*** ornament of ornaments; ***your*** breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; and you ***were*** naked and bare. And I passed by you and saw you, and look, your time ***was*** a time of love; and I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness; and I swore to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became Mine. And I washed you with water, and washed off your blood from you, and anointed you with oil. And I clothed you ***with*** embroidered cloth, and shod you ***with*** leather, and wrapped you ***with*** fine linen, and covered you ***with*** silk. And I adorned you ***with*** ornaments, and I put bracelets on your hands and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring on your nose, and earrings on your ears, and a crown of splendor on your head. And you adorned yourself ***with*** gold and silver, and your clothing ***was*** fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth; fine flour and honey and oil you ate. And you were exceedingly, exceedingly beautiful, and you prospered into kingship. And your name went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it ***was*** perfect because of My majesty which I had put on you, declares the Lord GOD.

16:15-34 And you trusted in your beauty, and you acted as a prostitute because of your name, and you poured out your prostitutions on everyone who passed by; let it be his. And you took some of your clothes and made for yourself high places of many colors, and you acted as a prostitute on them; ***such things*** have not come, and it shall not be. And you took the articles of your splendor, from My gold and from My silver which I had given you, and made for yourself images of a male, and you acted as a prostitute with them. And you took your embroidered clothes and covered them, and My oil and My incense you set before them. And My food which I had given you, fine flour and oil and honey ***with which*** I fed you, you set it before them for a soothing aroma; and it happened, declares the Lord GOD. And you took your sons and your daughters whom you had borne to Me, and you sacrificed them to them to be devoured. ***Were*** your prostitutions too little? And you slaughtered My sons, and gave them, by making them pass over to them. And in all your abominations and your prostitutions you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare; kicking about in your blood you were. And it came about after all your wickedness, woe, woe to you, declares the Lord GOD, that you built for yourself a mound, and made for yourself a lofty place in every square. At every head of a road you built your lofty place, and you made your beauty abominable, and you spread your feet to everyone who passed by, and you multiplied your prostitutions. And you acted as a prostitute with the sons of Egypt, your

neighbors, great of flesh; and you multiplied your prostitution to provoke Me to anger. And look, I stretched out My hand against you, and I diminished your allotted portion, and I gave you to the desire of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd way. And you acted as a prostitute with the sons of Assyria, because you were not satisfied; and you acted as a prostitute with them, and still you were not satisfied. And you multiplied your prostitution to the land of merchants, to ***the*** Chaldeans, and even with this you were not satisfied. How weak is your heart, declares the Lord GOD, when you do all these, the deeds of a woman, an imperious prostitute, when you built your mound at the head of every road, and made your lofty place in every square! And you were not like the prostitute, in scorning hire. O wife who commits adultery, ***who*** instead of her husband takes strangers! To all prostitutes they give a gift, and you, you have given your gifts to all your lovers, and you have bribed them to come to you from all around in your prostitutions. And in you there was the opposite from the women in your prostitutions, in that after you ***there*** was no prostituting, and in your giving hire, while hire was not given to you; and you became the opposite.

16:35-52 Therefore, O prostitute, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD: Because your lust was poured out and your nakedness was uncovered in your prostitutions with your lovers, and because of all the idols of your abominations, and according to the blood of your sons whom you gave to them, therefore look, I am gathering all your lovers to whom you were pleasing, and all whom you loved, along with all whom you hated; and I will gather them against you from all around, and I will uncover your nakedness to them, and they shall see all your nakedness. And I will judge you ***with*** the judgments of adulteresses and of those who shed blood, and I will make you blood of rage and jealousy. And I will give you into their hand, and they shall tear down your mound, and your lofty places shall be broken down, and they shall strip you of your clothes, and they shall take the articles of your splendor, and they shall leave you naked and bare. And they shall bring up an assembly against you, and they shall stone you with stones, and they shall cut you to pieces with their swords. And they shall burn your houses with fire, and they shall execute judgments on you before the eyes of many women; and I will make you cease from ***being*** a prostitute, and also you shall no longer give hire. And I will cause My rage to rest on you, and My jealousy shall turn away from you, and I will be quiet and will no longer be angry. Because you did not remember the days of your youth, and you raged against Me in all these ***things***, so also I, look, I have put your way on ***your*** head, declares the Lord GOD; and did you not do the lewdness on top of all your abominations? Look, everyone who speaks a proverb shall speak a proverb about you, saying, "Like her mother, her daughter." You ***are*** the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and her sons; and you ***are*** the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their sons. Your mother ***was*** a Hittite, and your father an Amorite. And your older sister ***is*** Samaria, she and her daughters, who dwell at your left; and your sister who is younger than you, who dwells at your right, ***is*** Sodom and her daughters. And you did not walk in their ways, and ***not*** according to their abominations did you do, as ***if that were*** a very little ***thing***; and you acted more corruptly than they in all your ways. ***As*** I live, declares the Lord GOD, Sodom your sister, she and her daughters, has not done as you have done, you and your daughters. Look, this was the iniquity of Sodom your sister: pride, fullness of bread, and the ease of quietness were hers and her daughters'; and the hand of the poor and the needy she did not strengthen. And they were haughty, and they did abomination before Me; and I removed them

when I saw ***it***. And Samaria has not sinned half of your sins; and you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and you have justified your sisters by all your abominations which you have done. You also, bear your disgrace, you who have mediated for your sisters by your sins in which you have acted more abominably than they; they are more righteous than you. And you also, be ashamed and bear your disgrace, in your justifying your sisters.

16:53-63 And I will turn back their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and the captivity of your captivities in their midst, so that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all that you have done, in your comforting them. And your sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former state, and you and your daughters shall return to your former state. And Sodom your sister was not a report in your mouth in the day of your pride, before your wickedness was uncovered, as ***at*** the time of the reproach of the daughters of Syria and all ***those*** around her, the daughters of the Philistines, who despise you from all around. Your lewdness and your abominations, you, you bear them, declares the LORD. For thus says the Lord GOD: And I will do with you as you have done, you who have despised an oath by breaking a covenant. And I Myself will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. And you shall remember your ways and be ashamed, when you receive your sisters, those older than you along with those younger than you; and I will give them to you for daughters, and not by your covenant. And I Myself will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, so that you may remember and be ashamed, and there may no longer be to you an opening of ***the*** mouth because of your disgrace, when I make atonement for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD.'"

Chapter 16 Preview

Chapter 16 is the longest chapter in Ezekiel, and one of the hardest in the Bible. God tells the story of Jerusalem as the story of a baby girl abandoned at birth, left to die in a field. God passes by, saves her life, raises her, and when she is grown He marries her in a covenant and makes her a queen. But she uses all His gifts to chase other lovers, until she is worse than a prostitute. The "lovers" are the idols and the foreign nations Jerusalem trusted in instead of God. Her husband's judgment is that those same lovers will turn on her and strip her of everything.

The language of this chapter is strong, because the sin was ugly. I will explain the picture plainly and modestly, without dwelling on details, as fits a study for a church group. Leaders may want to read it ahead of time and decide how much of the Scripture to read aloud. But do not stop before the end. The last verses of the chapter are some of the most beautiful words of grace in the Old Testament. After all of it, God says, "I Myself will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant" (16:60), and He promises to make atonement for all she has done.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1-3 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, make Jerusalem know her abominations, and you shall say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: Your origins and your births **were** from the land of the Canaanite; your father **was** the Amorite, and your mother a Hittite.*

"Son of man, make Jerusalem know her abominations." This is a message of judgment, and it is meant to make the people see their sin as God sees it.

"Your origins and your births were from the land of the Canaanite; your father was the Amorite, and your mother a Hittite." This was a shocking way to begin. Israel was proud of being the children of Abraham. But Jerusalem itself was a Canaanite city long before Israel took it. It was a Jebusite town until David captured it (2 Samuel 5:6-9). The Amorites and Hittites were among the peoples of Canaan whose wickedness had filled up the measure of judgment (Genesis 15:16). God is saying that Jerusalem's character was no better than the pagans she came from. Her sin was in her blood.

This is a statement about spiritual family, not race. Jesus said the same kind of thing to leaders who boasted of being Abraham's children but did not do his works (John 8:39-44).

16:4-5 *And **as for** your births, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, and you were not washed with water for cleansing, and you were not rubbed with salt at all, and you were not wrapped at all. No eye looked with pity on you, to do for you one of these **things**, in compassion for you; and you were thrown out on the face of the field, in the loathing of your soul, on the day you were born.*

"On the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, and you were not washed with water for cleansing, and you were not rubbed with salt at all, and you were not wrapped at all." When a baby was born in that part of the world, the midwife cut the cord, washed the baby, rubbed the skin with salt (which people believed cleaned and toughened it), and wrapped the baby snugly in cloths. Jerusalem received none of this care.

"No eye looked with pity on you, to do for you one of these things, in compassion for you; and you were thrown out on the face of the field, in the loathing of your soul, on the day you were born." In the ancient world, unwanted babies, especially girls, were sometimes left out in the open to die. It was a cruel and common practice. Jerusalem is pictured as such a baby, unwanted and left alone.

The point is that Jerusalem had nothing to offer. She did not earn God's love. She was helpless and dying when God found her.

16:6-7 *And I passed by you and saw you kicking about in your blood, and I said to you in your blood, "Live!" And I said to you in your blood, "Live!" I made you a myriad like the growth of the field, and you grew and became great, and you came to **the** ornament of ornaments; **your** breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; and you **were** naked and bare.*

"And I passed by you and saw you kicking about in your blood, and I said to you in your blood, Live! And I said to you in your blood, Live!" God says it twice. This is the voice of grace. No one else cared. God saw the dying child and gave her life with a word.

That is how God saves every one of us. Paul says we were dead in our trespasses and sins, but God, being rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ (Ephesians 2:1-5). We did not find God. He found us, helpless, and said, Live.

"I made you a myriad like the growth of the field, and you grew and became great." God caused her to grow and flourish. Ezekiel then describes her growing up into a young woman. Under God's care the abandoned baby became a beautiful young woman, but she was still "naked and bare," with nothing of her own.

16:8 *And I passed by you and saw you, and look, your time **was** a time of love; and I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness; and I swore to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became Mine.*

"And I passed by you and saw you, and look, your time was a time of love; and I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness." When she was old enough to marry, God took her as His bride. Spreading the corner of a garment over someone was a sign of marriage and protection. Ruth asked Boaz to do this when she asked him to be her kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 3:9).

"And I swore to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became Mine." A covenant is a binding agreement sealed with an oath. Marriage is a covenant (Malachi 2:14). This points to the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai, when He said they would be His treasured possession among all the peoples (Exodus 19:5-6). Jeremiah also remembered those days, the love of Israel's betrothal, when she followed God in the wilderness (Jeremiah 2:2).

The Bible often pictures God's relationship with His people as a marriage (Isaiah 54:5; Hosea 2:19-20), and in the New Testament Christ is the bridegroom of the church (Ephesians 5:25-27). God's love is personal, faithful and committed.

16:9-14 *And I washed you with water, and washed off your blood from you, and anointed you with oil. And I clothed you **with** embroidered cloth, and shod you **with** leather, and wrapped you **with** fine linen, and covered you **with** silk. And I adorned you **with** ornaments, and I put bracelets on your hands and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring on your nose, and earrings on your ears, and a crown of splendor on your head. And you adorned yourself **with** gold and silver, and your clothing **was** fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth; fine flour and honey and oil you ate. And you were exceedingly, exceedingly beautiful, and you prospered into kingship. And your name went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it **was** perfect because of My majesty which I had put on you, declares the Lord GOD.*

God then describes how He cared for His bride. "I washed you with water, and washed off your blood from you, and anointed you with oil." He clothed her in "embroidered cloth," fine leather sandals, fine linen and silk. He gave her bracelets, a necklace, a nose ring, earrings "and a crown of splendor on your head." Her food was "fine flour and honey and oil."

"And you were exceedingly, exceedingly beautiful, and you prospered into kingship." This pictures Israel at the height of her glory under David and Solomon, when Jerusalem was a royal city, the temple was built, and wealth poured in (1 Kings 10:14-27).

"And your name went out among the nations because of your beauty." The Queen of Sheba came to see it (1 Kings 10:1-9). But notice why she was beautiful: "for it was perfect because of My majesty which I had put on you." Everything she had came from God. Her beauty was borrowed. Paul asks, "what do you have which you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

16:15-19 *And you trusted in your beauty, and you acted as a prostitute because of your name, and you poured out your prostitutions on everyone who passed by; let it be his. And you took some of your clothes and made for yourself high places of many colors, and you acted as a prostitute on them; **such things** have not come, and it shall not be. And you took the articles of your splendor, from My gold and from My silver which I had given you, and made for yourself images of a male, and you acted as a prostitute with them. And you took your embroidered clothes and covered them, and My oil and My incense you set before them. And My food which I had given you, fine flour and oil and honey **with which** I fed you, you set it before them for a soothing aroma; and it happened, declares the Lord GOD.*

Here the story turns. "And you trusted in your beauty, and you acted as a prostitute because of your name." Jerusalem began to trust in the gifts instead of the Giver. Pride came first, then unfaithfulness.

The Bible uses prostitution and adultery as a picture of idolatry because idolatry is unfaithfulness to God, who is like a husband to His people. Giving your worship to another god is like a wife giving herself to another man. The picture is meant to shock us into seeing how deeply idolatry wounds God's heart.

God shows how she took His gifts and gave them to idols. She took her fine clothes and made decorated shrines on the high places. She took "My gold and from My silver which I had given you" and made idols. She dressed them in her embroidered clothes, and "My oil and My incense

you set before them." Even the food God gave her, "fine flour and oil and honey," she offered to the idols "for a soothing aroma."

Notice the repeated word "My." Everything she used in her idolatry belonged to God. Every gift we have, our time, money, talents and bodies, comes from God. When we use His gifts to serve something else, we are doing what Jerusalem did.

16:20-22 *And you took your sons and your daughters whom you had borne to Me, and you sacrificed them to them to be devoured.* ***Were*** *your prostitutions too little? And you slaughtered My sons, and gave them, by making them pass over to them. And in all your abominations and your prostitutions you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare; kicking about in your blood you were.*

Now comes the worst of all. "And you took your sons and your daughters whom you had borne to Me, and you sacrificed them to them to be devoured." "And you slaughtered My sons, and gave them, by making them pass over to them."

This is child sacrifice. Some of the idols of Canaan, especially the god Molech, were worshiped by burning children in the fire. God had strictly forbidden it (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 18:10). Yet King Ahaz and King Manasseh had both made their own sons pass through the fire (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6), and Jeremiah says the people did it in the Valley of Hinnom just outside Jerusalem (Jeremiah 7:31). God calls these children "My sons." They belonged to Him. And He says of their slaughter in another place that it never even entered His mind to command such a thing (Jeremiah 7:31).

I will not say more about the details. It is enough to say that when people turn from the true God, the weakest and most innocent suffer the most. And I believe little children who die are safe with God (2 Samuel 12:23).

"And in all your abominations and your prostitutions you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare." She forgot where she came from. She forgot that she had been a dying baby and that God had saved her. Forgetting God's grace is often the first step into sin. Moses warned Israel, when you have eaten and are satisfied, beware lest you forget the LORD (Deuteronomy 8:11-14).

16:23-29 *And it came about after all your wickedness, woe, woe to you, declares the Lord GOD, that you built for yourself a mound, and made for yourself a lofty place in every square. At every head of a road you built your lofty place, and you made your beauty abominable, and you spread your feet to everyone who passed by, and you multiplied your prostitutions. And you acted as a prostitute with the sons of Egypt, your neighbors, great of flesh; and you multiplied your prostitution to provoke Me to anger. And look, I stretched out My hand against you, and I diminished your allotted portion, and I gave you to the desire of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd way. And you acted as a prostitute with the sons of Assyria, because you were not satisfied; and you acted as a prostitute with them, and still you were not satisfied. And you multiplied your prostitution to the land of merchants, to* ***the*** *Chaldeans, and even with this you were not satisfied.*

"Woe, woe to you, declares the Lord GOD." Jerusalem built shrines everywhere: "a mound" and "a lofty place in every square," and "at every head of a road." Idolatry was no longer hidden. It was on every street corner.

Then God names her lovers. "And you acted as a prostitute with the sons of Egypt, your neighbors." Judah's kings kept running to Egypt for help instead of trusting God (Isaiah 30:1-3; 31:1). "And you acted as a prostitute with the sons of Assyria, because you were not satisfied." King Ahaz had sent silver and gold to the king of Assyria to buy his help and copied an Assyrian altar for the temple (2 Kings 16:7-18). "And you multiplied your prostitution to the land of merchants, to the Chaldeans, and even with this you were not satisfied." Later kings courted Babylon too (2 Kings 20:12-19).

Here the prostitution also means political alliances. When Judah made treaties with Egypt, Assyria and Babylon, they took on those nations' gods and trusted in their armies instead of in the LORD.

In verse 27, God says He had already disciplined her. "I stretched out My hand against you, and I diminished your allotted portion, and I gave you to the desire of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd way." Even the Philistines, Israel's old pagan enemies, were embarrassed by how Jerusalem behaved. That is a terrible thing, when unbelievers are ashamed of the conduct of God's people.

And three times God says she was "not satisfied." That is the nature of sin. It always promises satisfaction and never gives it. Only God satisfies the soul (Psalm 107:9; John 4:13-14).

16:30-34 *How weak is your heart, declares the Lord GOD, when you do all these, the deeds of a woman, an imperious prostitute, when you built your mound at the head of every road, and made your lofty place in every square! And you were not like the prostitute, in scorning hire. O wife who commits adultery,* ***who*** *instead of her husband takes strangers! To all prostitutes they give a gift, and you, you have given your gifts to all your lovers, and you have bribed them to come to you from all around in your prostitutions. And in you there was the opposite from the women in your prostitutions, in that after you* ***there*** *was no prostituting, and in your giving hire, while hire was not given to you; and you became the opposite.*

"How weak is your heart, declares the Lord GOD." Jerusalem's sin was not strength but weakness, a heart that could not stay faithful.

Then God points out something strange. "O wife who commits adultery, who instead of her husband takes strangers!" A prostitute is paid. But Jerusalem did the opposite. "To all prostitutes they give a gift, and you, you have given your gifts to all your lovers, and you have bribed them to come to you from all around." Jerusalem paid her lovers. She sent tribute to Assyria, Egypt and Babylon, buying their friendship with her own wealth. "And you became the opposite."

We pay a high price to serve things that give us nothing back. Isaiah asked, "Why do you weigh out money for what is not bread" (Isaiah 55:2).

16:35-38 *Therefore, O prostitute, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD: Because your lust was poured out and your nakedness was uncovered in your prostitutions with your lovers, and because of all the idols of your abominations, and according to the blood of your sons whom you gave to them, therefore look, I am gathering all your lovers to whom you were pleasing, and all whom you loved, along with all whom you hated; and I will gather them against you from all around, and I will uncover your nakedness to them, and they shall see all your nakedness. And I will judge you* ***with*** *the judgments of adulteresses and of those who shed blood, and I will make you blood of rage and jealousy.*

"Therefore, O prostitute, hear the word of the LORD." Now comes the sentence.

God names her sins again: her unfaithfulness with her lovers, "all the idols of your abominations," and "the blood of your sons whom you gave to them." Then He says, "look, I am gathering all your lovers to whom you were pleasing, and all whom you loved, along with all whom you hated; and I will gather them against you from all around." The very nations she had courted would come against her. Babylon, whom Judah had tried to please, would besiege Jerusalem. Her shame would be exposed before them all.

"And I will judge you with the judgments of adulteresses and of those who shed blood." Under the law of Moses, both adultery and murder carried the death penalty (Leviticus 20:10; Numbers 35:16-21). Jerusalem was guilty of both: spiritual adultery through idolatry and real bloodshed through child sacrifice and violence. Her sentence would be death as a city.

"And I will make you blood of rage and jealousy." God's jealousy is the burning love of a faithful husband who has been betrayed (Exodus 34:14). It is not petty. It is holy.

16:39-43 *And I will give you into their hand, and they shall tear down your mound, and your lofty places shall be broken down, and they shall strip you of your clothes, and they shall take the articles of your splendor, and they shall leave you naked and bare. And they shall bring up an assembly against you, and they shall stone you with stones, and they shall cut you to pieces with their swords. And they shall burn your houses with fire, and they shall execute judgments on you before the eyes of many women; and I will make you cease from* ***being*** *a prostitute, and also you shall no longer give hire. And I will cause My rage to rest on you, and My jealousy shall turn away from you, and I will be quiet and will no longer be angry. Because you did not remember the days of your youth, and you raged against Me in all these* ***things****, so also I, look, I have put your way on* ***your*** *head, declares the Lord GOD; and did you not do the lewdness on top of all your abominations?*

"And I will give you into their hand, and they shall tear down your mound, and your lofty places shall be broken down." The Babylonians would destroy the shrines. They would strip her of her clothes and her jewels and "leave you naked and bare." That is, the city would be stripped of all its wealth and glory and left with nothing, as she was at the beginning (16:7, 22).

"And they shall bring up an assembly against you, and they shall stone you with stones, and they shall cut you to pieces with their swords. And they shall burn your houses with fire." The language of stoning comes from the law's penalty for adultery. The swords and the burning houses describe what Babylon's army actually did to Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:8-10). "And they shall execute judgments on you before the eyes of many women." The other nations, pictured as women, would see what happened to her and take warning (compare 23:48).

I want to say plainly what this picture is and what it is not. It is a picture of the fall of a city, told in the terms of a marriage covenant broken by the wife. It shows how serious idolatry is to God. It is not a pattern for how any man may treat his wife. Scripture commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25), and to live with them in an understanding way and honor them (1 Peter 3:7). No one may use this chapter to excuse abuse. In this picture, God is the faithful one. He did everything for His bride, and even after all her betrayal, the chapter ends with Him taking her back.

"And I will make you cease from being a prostitute." The judgment would put an end to her idolatry. History shows that after the exile, the Jews never again fell into idol worship as they had before.

"And I will cause My rage to rest on you, and My jealousy shall turn away from you, and I will be quiet and will no longer be angry." God's anger has an end. When justice is done, His anger is satisfied.

"Because you did not remember the days of your youth." Once again God names the root of it all. She forgot His grace.

16:44-47 *Look, everyone who speaks a proverb shall speak a proverb about you, saying, "Like her mother, her daughter." You **are** the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and her sons; and you **are** the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their sons. Your mother **was** a Hittite, and your father an Amorite. And your older sister **is** Samaria, she and her daughters, who dwell at your left; and your sister who is younger than you, who dwells at your right, **is** Sodom and her daughters. And you did not walk in their ways, and **not** according to their abominations did you do, as **if that were** a very little **thing**; and you acted more corruptly than they in all your ways.*

People would say of Jerusalem, "Like her mother, her daughter." She had become just like the pagan family she came from, who "loathed her husband and her sons," despising God and sacrificing children.

"And your older sister is Samaria, she and her daughters, who dwell at your left; and your sister who is younger than you, who dwells at your right, is Sodom and her daughters." Facing east, left is north and right is south. Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, was to the north. Sodom, near the Dead Sea, was to the south. Samaria is called older because she was the larger city and kingdom. The "daughters" are the towns around each city.

Then God says something that would have stunned Ezekiel's hearers: "and you acted more corruptly than they in all your ways." Jerusalem was worse than Samaria, whom Judah had always looked down on, and worse than Sodom, the very symbol of wickedness.

16:48-52 ***As** I live, declares the Lord GOD, Sodom your sister, she and her daughters, has not done as you have done, you and your daughters. Look, this was the iniquity of Sodom your sister: pride, fullness of bread, and the ease of quietness were hers and her daughters'; and the hand of the poor and the needy she did not strengthen. And they were haughty, and they did abomination before Me; and I removed them when I saw **it**. And Samaria has not sinned half of your sins; and you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and you have justified your sisters by all your abominations which you have done. You also, bear your disgrace, you who have mediated for your sisters by your sins in which you have acted more abominably than they; they are more righteous than you. And you also, be ashamed and bear your disgrace, in your justifying your sisters.*

"As I live, declares the Lord GOD, Sodom your sister, she and her daughters, has not done as you have done, you and your daughters."

"Look, this was the iniquity of Sodom your sister: pride, fullness of bread, and the ease of quietness were hers and her daughters'; and the hand of the poor and the needy she did not strengthen." Many people think only of one sin when they think of Sodom. Ezekiel names the roots: pride, too much food, careless ease, and no care for the poor. Comfort and wealth made Sodom proud and hard-hearted.

"And they were haughty, and they did abomination before Me; and I removed them when I saw it." The abomination points back to the sins Genesis 19 describes, and Jude 7 says Sodom and the cities around it gave themselves over to sexual immorality and went after strange flesh. Ezekiel shows us that those sins grew out of pride and self-indulgence. The two belong together.

Pride, excess, laziness and neglect of the poor do not seem like great sins to many of us, but God names them in the same breath as Sodom's abominations (compare James 5:1-5; 1 John 3:17).

"And Samaria has not sinned half of your sins." Jerusalem had made her sisters look righteous by comparison. "They are more righteous than you." Why? Because Jerusalem had more light. She had the temple, the priests, the prophets and the law. Jesus said, "everyone to whom much was given, much will be required from him" (Luke 12:48). Jerusalem had been given the most, and so her guilt was the greatest.

"Be ashamed and bear your disgrace, in your justifying your sisters."

16:53-58 *And I will turn back their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and the captivity of your captivities in their midst, so that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all that you have done, in your comforting them. And your sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former state, and you and your daughters shall return to your former state. And Sodom your sister was not a report in your mouth in the day of your pride, before your wickedness was uncovered, as* ***at*** *the time of the reproach of the daughters of Syria and all* ***those*** *around her, the daughters of the Philistines, who despise you from all around. Your lewdness and your abominations, you, you bear them, declares the LORD.*

Now, surprisingly, God speaks of restoration, and He includes Sodom and Samaria. "And I will turn back their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and the captivity of your captivities in their midst." To "turn back their captivity" means to restore someone's fortunes, to bring them back to a good state.

What does it mean that God would restore Sodom? Sodom was destroyed long ago and never rebuilt. Good teachers read this in different ways. Some think God is saying that Jerusalem would be restored only when the unthinkable happened, when even Sodom was restored, so it is a way of humbling her. Others believe it points to the future kingdom, when the land around the Dead Sea will be healed (47:8-11) and people from the nations will share in God's blessing. What is clear is the purpose: "so that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all that you have done, in your comforting them." Jerusalem would be restored alongside the very cities she had looked down on, and that would humble her pride.

"And Sodom your sister was not a report in your mouth in the day of your pride." In her proud days, Jerusalem would not even mention Sodom. She thought she was far above her. But "before your wickedness was uncovered," she had become a reproach among her neighbors, "the daughters of Syria and all those around her, the daughters of the Philistines, who despise you from all around."

"Your lewdness and your abominations, you, you bear them, declares the LORD." She had to carry the weight of what she had done.

16:59-63 *For thus says the Lord GOD: And I will do with you as you have done, you who have despised an oath by breaking a covenant. And I Myself will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. And you shall remember your ways and be ashamed, when you receive your sisters, those older than you along with those younger than you; and I will give them to you for daughters, and not by your covenant. And I Myself will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I **am** the LORD, so that you may remember and be ashamed, and there may no longer be to you an opening of **the** mouth because of your disgrace, when I make atonement for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD.'"*

"For thus says the Lord GOD." The judgment is just: "And I will do with you as you have done, you who have despised an oath by breaking a covenant." Jerusalem had broken the covenant made at Sinai, and she would bear the penalty.

But then, after sixty verses of sin and judgment, comes one of the most beautiful turns in Scripture. "And I Myself will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant."

She did not remember (16:22, 43). But God remembers. Her faithlessness did not cancel His faithfulness. Paul says, "if we are faithless, He remains faithful; He is not able to deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).

What is this "everlasting covenant"? It is the new covenant God promised through Jeremiah, when He would forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Ezekiel will describe it again as a covenant of peace and an everlasting covenant (37:26), with a new heart and God's own Spirit (36:26-27). Jesus established that covenant in His blood (Luke 22:20). It was promised to Israel, and I believe God will keep it with the nation of Israel in the days to come, when they turn to the Messiah (Romans 11:26-27). Every believer in Christ, Jew or Gentile, already shares in its blessings now.

"And you shall remember your ways and be ashamed, when you receive your sisters, those older than you along with those younger than you; and I will give them to you for daughters, and not by your covenant." When Jerusalem is restored, Samaria and Sodom will be given to her as daughters. Notice the words "not by your covenant." This would not happen because Jerusalem kept the old covenant. She broke it. It would happen by God's grace alone, through His new covenant.

"And I Myself will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD." God does it Himself. Twice in these verses He says "I Myself."

"So that you may remember and be ashamed, and there may no longer be to you an opening of the mouth because of your disgrace, when I make atonement for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD."

Atonement means the covering or removing of sin so that a sinner can be brought back to God. In the law, atonement was made through the blood of sacrifices (Leviticus 17:11). Here God says He Himself will make atonement "for all that you have done." Not some of it. All of it. Every idol,

every betrayal, every child lost in the fire. This is grace beyond measure. And it was fully accomplished by Jesus, who gave Himself as the sacrifice for sins once for all (Hebrews 10:10-14).

Why will Jerusalem "be ashamed" and never open her mouth again? Not because God keeps shaming her. It is the shame of a forgiven sinner who is overwhelmed by grace. When we truly understand what God has forgiven us, we stop making excuses and stop boasting. We have nothing left to say but thank You. Paul says no one may boast before God (1 Corinthians 1:29-31). All we can do is boast in Him.

The chapter that began with an abandoned baby ends with a forgiven bride. That is the story of every person God saves. We were helpless, and He said, Live. We were unfaithful, and He remained faithful.

Chapter 16 Summary

God told Ezekiel to make Jerusalem know her abominations. He described her as a baby girl of Canaanite origins, abandoned in a field at birth, whom He saw and told to live. When she grew up, He married her in a covenant, washed her, clothed her in fine garments and jewels, and made her a beautiful queen known among the nations, all by His own majesty. But she trusted in her beauty and used all His gifts for idols, built shrines on every street, sacrificed her children, and made alliances with Egypt, Assyria and Babylon, even paying her lovers. God would gather those same nations against her, strip her of everything, and judge her as an adulteress and murderer, until His anger was satisfied. She was worse than her sisters Samaria and Sodom, whose sins included pride, excess, ease and neglect of the poor. Yet God would restore all three, to humble her, and He would remember His covenant, establish an everlasting covenant with her by grace and not by her covenant, and make atonement for all she had done.

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. How does God describe Jerusalem's birth, and what does that say about what she had to offer Him? (16:3-5)

2. What did God say to the abandoned baby, and how is that like what He does for us in salvation? (16:6; Ephesians 2:1-5)

3. What did God do for Jerusalem when she grew up, and where did her beauty come from? (16:8-14)

4. How did Jerusalem use God's gifts once she trusted in her beauty? (16:15-19)

5. Why does the Bible use the picture of adultery for idolatry? (16:15, 32)

6. Who were Jerusalem's "lovers," and how did she do the opposite of a prostitute? (16:26-34)

7. What does 16:49 say was the iniquity of Sodom? Why do you think God named those sins?

8. What did God promise in 16:60-63, and how does Jesus fulfill it? (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 10:10-14)

9. Jerusalem did not remember "the days of your youth," when God saved her. What helps you remember what God has done for you?

10. God made atonement "for all that you have done." Is there something in your past you find hard to believe God has fully forgiven? What does this chapter say to you about it?

Chapter 17: The Two Eagles and the Cedar

Scripture

17:1-10 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, pose a riddle and speak a parable to the house of Israel, and you shall say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: The great eagle, great of wings, long of pinion, full of plumage, which had many colors, came to Lebanon and took the top of the cedar. It plucked off the top of its young shoots and brought it to a land of merchants; in a city of traders it set it. And it took some of the seed of the land and put it in a field of seed; it took beside many waters; ***as*** a willow it set it. And it sprouted and became a spreading vine, low of stature, its branches turning toward it, and its roots were under it; and it became a vine, and produced shoots, and sent out boughs. And there was one great eagle, great of wings and abundant of plumage; and look, this vine bent its roots toward it, and sent out its branches toward it, for it to water it, from the beds of its planting. In a good field, by many waters, it was planted, to produce limbs and to bear fruit, to become a majestic vine.' Say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Will it prosper? Will he not pull up its roots and strip off its fruit, and it withers? All the fresh ***leaves*** of its sprouting will wither; and not by a great arm and by many people, to lift it up from its roots. And look, ***it is*** planted; will it prosper? Will it not utterly wither when the east wind touches it? On the beds of its sprouting it will wither.'"

17:11-21 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Say now to the house of rebellion, 'Do you not know what these ***are***?' Say, 'Look, the king of Babylon came ***to*** Jerusalem, and took its king and its princes, and brought them to himself to Babylon. And he took ***one*** of the royal seed, and made a covenant with him, and brought him into an oath; and the mighty of the land he took, that it might be a lowly kingdom, not lifting itself up, to keep his covenant, that it might stand. And he rebelled against him by sending his messengers to Egypt, to give him horses and many people. Will he prosper? Will he who does these ***things*** escape? And will he break a covenant and escape? ***As*** I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely in the place of the king who made him king, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke, with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. And not with a great army and with a large assembly will Pharaoh deal with him in the battle, when ***they*** pour out a mound and build a siege wall to cut off many lives. And he despised the oath by breaking the covenant; and look, he had given his hand, and all these ***things*** he did; he shall not escape. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: ***As*** I live, surely My oath which he despised and My covenant which he broke, and I will put it on his head. And I will spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and I will enter into judgment with him there ***for*** his unfaithfulness with which he has acted unfaithfully against Me. And all his fugitives among all his troops shall fall by the sword, and those who remain shall be scattered to every wind; and you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken.

17:22-24 Thus says the Lord GOD: And I Myself will take from the top of the high cedar and set ***it***; from the top of its young shoots I will pluck off a tender ***one***, and I Myself will plant ***it*** on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain of the height of Israel I will plant it, and it shall bear limbs and produce fruit, and become a majestic cedar; and under it shall dwell every bird ***of*** every wing; in the shadow of its branches they shall dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the

LORD, bring low a high tree, raise up a low tree, dry up a moist tree, and make a dry tree sprout. I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do ***it***.'"

Chapter 17 Preview

God tells Ezekiel to "pose a riddle and speak a parable" (17:2). A great eagle flies to Lebanon, snaps off the top of a cedar, and carries it to a city of traders. Then it plants a seed in a good field, and the seed grows into a low, spreading vine. But the vine turns its roots toward a second great eagle. Will it prosper? God answers His own question: no. Then He explains the riddle. The first eagle is the king of Babylon, the cedar top is King Jehoiachin, and the vine is Zedekiah, who swore an oath to Babylon and then broke it by running to Egypt for help.

This message is undated, but it falls between the dated messages of 8:1 (about 592 B.C.) and 20:1 (about 591 B.C.), while Zedekiah still sat on the throne in Jerusalem. The chapter teaches that God holds men to their promises, even promises made to a pagan king. And it ends with one of the clearest promises of the Messiah in Ezekiel. God Himself will take a tender shoot from the top of the cedar and plant it on the high mountain of Israel, and it will become a majestic cedar where every kind of bird finds shelter. The kings of Judah failed. The King God plants will not.

Chapter 17 Study

17:1-2 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, pose a riddle and speak a parable to the house of Israel,*

"Son of man, pose a riddle and speak a parable to the house of Israel." A riddle is a saying with a hidden meaning that makes the hearer think. A parable is a story or picture that stands for something else. The word for parable here is mashal, the same word used for a proverb (18:2). The exiles loved to argue about what was going to happen in Jerusalem. God gave them a story to chew on, and then He explained it Himself in verses 11 to 21.

Jesus taught the same way. He told parables so that those with ears to hear would understand, and then He explained them to His disciples (Matthew 13:10-17). When God gives a picture in Scripture, the best explanation is the one He gives with it. That is the rule we will follow in this chapter.

17:3-4 *and you shall say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: The great eagle, great of wings, long of pinion, full of plumage, which had many colors, came to Lebanon and took the top of the cedar. It plucked off the top of its young shoots and brought it to a land of merchants; in a city of traders it set it.*

"The great eagle, great of wings, long of pinion, full of plumage, which had many colors, came to Lebanon and took the top of the cedar." The eagle was the king of the birds, strong, swift and proud, and its wide wings picture a king whose empire reached far. God tells us who it is in verse 12: the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar. The "many colors" may picture the many peoples gathered under his rule.

Lebanon was famous for its great cedars, and cedar was the wood of palaces. Solomon's palace was even called the House of the Forest of Lebanon (1 Kings 7:2). Here Lebanon stands for the land of Israel and the royal house in Jerusalem. The cedar is the line of David.

"It plucked off the top of its young shoots and brought it to a land of merchants; in a city of traders it set it." This is King Jehoiachin, the young king who reigned only three months before Nebuchadnezzar carried him off to Babylon in 597 B.C. (2 Kings 24:8-15). Ezekiel went into exile with him. The "land of merchants" is Babylonia, and the "city of traders" is Babylon itself, the great trading city of the age (16:29 calls Chaldea "the land of merchants" too).

17:5-6 *And it took some of the seed of the land and put it in a field of seed; it took* ***it*** *beside many waters;* ***as*** *a willow it set it. And it sprouted and became a spreading vine, low of stature, its branches turning toward it, and its roots were under it; and it became a vine, and produced shoots, and sent out boughs.*

"And it took some of the seed of the land and put it in a field of seed." The eagle did not plant a foreign tree. He took a seed from the land itself, a man of the royal family, and set him up to grow there. This is Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, whom Nebuchadnezzar made king in Jerusalem and whose name he changed from Mattaniah (2 Kings 24:17).

The eagle took care of the seed. It planted it "beside many waters," like a willow, which grows quickly by streams. "And it sprouted and became a spreading vine, low of stature, its branches turning toward it." Notice the change. The cedar top had been tall and royal. The new plant was a vine, low to the ground. Nebuchadnezzar wanted Judah to live and even prosper, but as a small kingdom that leaned toward Babylon, "its branches turning toward it." That was not a bad deal. Judah could have lived in peace that way. Jeremiah told Zedekiah again and again to submit to Babylon and live (Jeremiah 27:12-17).

17:7-8 *And there was one great eagle, great of wings and abundant of plumage; and look, this vine bent its roots toward it, and sent out its branches toward it, for it to water it, from the beds of its planting. In a good field, by many waters, it was planted, to produce limbs and to bear fruit, to become a majestic vine.'*

"And there was one great eagle, great of wings and abundant of plumage." A second eagle appears. It is grand, but notice it is not described quite as richly as the first. Verse 15 tells us who it stands for: Egypt, under its Pharaoh. Most teachers think of Pharaoh Hophra (Jeremiah 44:30 names him), who reigned from about 589 B.C., though Zedekiah's dealings with Egypt may have begun under the Pharaoh before him.

"And look, this vine bent its roots toward it, and sent out its branches toward it, for it to water it." The vine had been planted in good soil by many waters. It had everything it needed. Yet it stretched its roots toward another eagle, hoping to get more. Verse 8 says it again so we cannot miss it: "In a good field, by many waters, it was planted." The vine did not lack anything. Its problem was not need but discontent and pride.

How often do we do the same? God has planted us where He wants us, with what we need, and we keep stretching our roots toward something else we think will make us stronger. Paul learned to be content in whatever state he was in (Philippians 4:11-13).

17:9-10 *Say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Will it prosper? Will he not pull up its roots and strip off its fruit, and it withers? All the fresh **leaves** of its sprouting will wither; and not by a great arm and by many people, to lift it up from its roots. And look, **it is** planted; will it prosper? Will it not utterly wither when the east wind touches it? On the beds of its sprouting it will wither.'"*

"Thus says the Lord GOD: Will it prosper?" God asks the question the exiles were asking. Many of them hoped that Egypt would save Jerusalem and that they would soon go home. God's answer is no. The first eagle will "pull up its roots and strip off its fruit, and it withers." It will not take "a great arm and by many people" to do it. Uprooting the vine would be easy for Babylon.

"Will it not utterly wither when the east wind touches it?" The east wind was the hot, dry wind off the desert that could wither crops in a day. Babylon was the great power of the east, and it would blow over Judah like that wind. The vine would wither "on the beds of its sprouting," right in the place where it had been planted to grow.

17:11-14 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Say now to the house of rebellion, 'Do you not know what these **are**?' Say, 'Look, the king of Babylon came **to** Jerusalem, and took its king and its princes, and brought them to himself to Babylon. And he took **one** of the royal seed, and made a covenant with him, and brought him into an oath; and the mighty of the land he took, that it might be a lowly kingdom, not lifting itself up, to keep his covenant, that it might stand.*

Now God explains the riddle. "Say now to the house of rebellion." "Do you not know what these are?" He calls the exiles "the house of rebellion" because they kept thinking like Zedekiah, trusting in politics instead of in God's word.

"Look, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, and took its king and its princes, and brought them to himself to Babylon." That is the first eagle and the cedar top, the events of 597 B.C. "And he took one of the royal seed, and made a covenant with him, and brought him into an oath." That is Zedekiah. A covenant between kings was a treaty. The greater king promised protection and the lesser king promised loyalty, and both swore by their gods. Zedekiah swore his oath in the name of the LORD. 2 Chronicles 36:13 says Nebuchadnezzar "had made him swear by God."

"And the mighty of the land he took, that it might be a lowly kingdom, not lifting itself up, to keep his covenant, that it might stand." Nebuchadnezzar took the strong leaders away so Judah would be weak, but he did not destroy it. If Zedekiah kept the treaty, the kingdom would stand.

17:15-16 *And he rebelled against him by sending his messengers to Egypt, to give him horses and many people. Will he prosper? Will he who does these* ***things*** *escape? And will he break a covenant and escape?* ***As*** *I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely in the place of the king who made him king, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke, with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die.*

"And he rebelled against him by sending his messengers to Egypt, to give him horses and many people." Zedekiah sent to Egypt for cavalry and troops. Egypt was famous for its horses, and God had warned Israel's kings long before not to go back to Egypt for horses (Deuteronomy 17:16). Isaiah said the same in his day: woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and trust in horses, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 31:1).

"Will he prosper? Will he who does these things escape? And will he break a covenant and escape?" Three questions, and the answer to each is no.

"As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely in the place of the king who made him king, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke, with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die." That is exactly what happened. When Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C., Zedekiah fled by night, was caught near Jericho, saw his sons killed, was blinded, and was taken in chains to Babylon, where he died (2 Kings 25:4-7; Jeremiah 52:11). Ezekiel had already said he would go to Babylon and not see it (12:13).

17:17-18 *And not with a great army and with a large assembly will Pharaoh deal with him in the battle, when* ***they*** *pour out a mound and build a siege wall to cut off many lives. And he despised the oath by breaking the covenant; and look, he had given his hand, and all these* ***things*** *he did; he shall not escape.*

"And not with a great army and with a large assembly will Pharaoh deal with him in the battle." Egypt would not save him. Jeremiah 37:5-8 tells us that Pharaoh's army did march out during the siege, and the Babylonians lifted the siege for a short time. The people of Jerusalem must have thought Ezekiel was wrong. But the Egyptians went home, and the Babylonians came back to finish the job. The siege mound and the siege wall went up, "to cut off many lives."

"And he despised the oath by breaking the covenant; and look, he had given his hand, and all these things he did; he shall not escape." To give your hand was to shake on it, to pledge yourself. Zedekiah had given his word and his hand, and then he went back on both.

Why does God care so much about a promise made to a pagan king? Because the promise was made in God's name, and because God is a God who keeps His word. Psalm 15:4 praises the man who keeps his oath even when it hurts. A believer's yes should mean yes (Matthew 5:37). Breaking your word, even to someone who is not a believer, is a sin against God.

17:19-21 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: **As** I live, surely My oath which he despised and My covenant which he broke, and I will put it on his head. And I will spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and I will enter into judgment with him there **for** his unfaithfulness with which he has acted unfaithfully against Me. And all his fugitives among all his troops shall fall by the sword, and those who remain shall be scattered to every wind; and you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken.*

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: As I live, surely My oath which he despised and My covenant which he broke, and I will put it on his head." Notice the word "My." Zedekiah thought he was breaking a treaty with Nebuchadnezzar. God says it was His oath and His covenant, because it was sworn in His name. When we break a promise made before God, whether a business agreement, a vow or a marriage covenant, we are not only wronging a person. We are despising God's name.

"And I will spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare." Babylon's army would catch Zedekiah, but it was God's net. Behind the armies of men is the hand of God (12:13 uses the same words).

"And all his fugitives among all his troops shall fall by the sword, and those who remain shall be scattered to every wind." When Zedekiah fled, his army scattered from him (2 Kings 25:5). "And you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken." When it happened just as God said, the exiles would know that this was not Ezekiel's opinion but the word of the LORD.

17:22-24 *Thus says the Lord GOD: And I Myself will take from the top of the high cedar and set **it**; from the top of its young shoots I will pluck off a tender **one**, and I Myself will plant **it** on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain of the height of Israel I will plant it, and it shall bear limbs and produce fruit, and become a majestic cedar; and under it shall dwell every bird **of** every wing; in the shadow of its branches they shall dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the LORD, bring low a high tree, raise up a low tree, dry up a moist tree, and make a dry tree sprout. I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do **it**.'"*

Now the chapter turns from judgment to hope, and it changes the speaker's action. Before, the eagles did the planting. Now God says, "And I Myself will take from the top of the high cedar and set it." The kings of the earth had broken off the top of David's tree and planted a weak vine. But God Himself will act.

"From the top of its young shoots I will pluck off a tender one, and I Myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain." The tender shoot comes from the same cedar, the royal line of David. It is young and tender, like a small new growth, not a mighty tree at first.

Who is this tender shoot? I believe it is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophets use this same picture of a shoot or branch from David's line again and again. Isaiah says, "And a shoot will come forth from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit" (Isaiah 11:1). Jeremiah says God will raise up for David "a righteous Branch" who will reign as king (Jeremiah 23:5). Zechariah calls Him "Branch" (Zechariah 6:12). Isaiah also says the Servant of the LORD would grow up "like the sapling before Him, and like the root from dry ground"

(Isaiah 53:2). Jesus came from David's line when it looked like nothing more than a stump. He was born in a stable to a poor family, a tender shoot. But God planted Him, and He will become the greatest tree of all.

"On the mountain of the height of Israel I will plant it." This is Mount Zion, Jerusalem. Ezekiel calls it "the mountain of the height of Israel" again in 20:40 as the place where all Israel will serve God in the land. The Messiah's kingdom is not only a spiritual idea. It is planted in a real place, the land God promised to Israel. I believe this will be fulfilled in full when Christ returns to reign from Jerusalem in His thousand-year kingdom (Isaiah 2:2-4; Zechariah 14:4, 9; Revelation 20:4-6).

"And it shall bear limbs and produce fruit, and become a majestic cedar; and under it shall dwell every bird of every wing; in the shadow of its branches they shall dwell." The vine of Zedekiah was low and withered. The cedar God plants is majestic and fruitful. The birds of every kind picture the nations finding shelter under the Messiah's rule. Daniel uses the picture of birds nesting in a great tree for a great kingdom (Daniel 4:12), and Jesus used it in His parable of the mustard seed, which grows from the smallest of seeds into a tree "so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches" (Matthew 13:32). The kingdom of Christ starts small and ends filling the earth.

"And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the LORD, bring low a high tree, raise up a low tree, dry up a moist tree, and make a dry tree sprout." The trees of the field are the kings and nations of the earth. God brings down the proud and lifts up the humble. He brought down Babylon, the high tree, and Zedekiah, the green vine. He raises up the low tree, the line of David that seemed cut off. Hannah sang it (1 Samuel 2:7-8). Mary sang it when she carried the tender shoot in her womb: "He has brought down rulers from thrones and has exalted the lowly" (Luke 1:52).

"I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do it." The kings of Judah failed. Their promises were broken. But God's promise to David cannot be broken (2 Samuel 7:16; Psalm 89:34-37). The angel told Mary that God would give her Son "the throne of David His father" (Luke 1:32). What God says, He does.

Chapter 17 Summary

God told Ezekiel to give a riddle. A great eagle took the top of a cedar in Lebanon to a city of traders and planted a seed of the land, which grew into a low vine. The vine turned its roots toward a second eagle, and God asked if it would prosper and said it would wither. Then He explained: the king of Babylon took King Jehoiachin to Babylon in 597 B.C. and made Zedekiah king under an oath and a covenant, so Judah would be a lowly kingdom that could stand. But Zedekiah broke his oath and sent to Egypt for horses and troops. Pharaoh would not save him. Because he despised an oath sworn in God's name, God would catch him in His net, bring him to Babylon, and he would die there, as he did after Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C. Then God promised that He Himself would take a tender shoot from the top of the cedar and plant it on the high mountain of Israel, where it would become a majestic cedar sheltering every kind of bird. That shoot is the Messiah, Jesus, the Son of David, whose kingdom will fill the earth.

Chapter 17 Study Questions

1. Who do the first eagle, the top of the cedar, and the vine stand for? (17:3-6, 12-13)

2. Who does the second eagle stand for, and what did the vine do toward it? (17:7, 15)

3. The vine was planted "in a good field, by many waters." What does that say about why it turned to the other eagle? (17:8)

4. What happened to Zedekiah, and how did it fulfill this prophecy? (17:16, 20; 2 Kings 25:4-7)

5. Why does God call the oath Zedekiah broke "My oath" and "My covenant"? (17:19)

6. Who plants the tender shoot in 17:22, and where is it planted?

7. How do Isaiah 11:1, Jeremiah 23:5 and Luke 1:32 help us see who the tender shoot is?

8. What does God say He does to high trees and low trees, and where else do we see that in Scripture? (17:24; Luke 1:52)

9. Is there a promise you have made, to God or to someone else, that you have been tempted to break because it became hard? What would keeping it look like? (Psalm 15:4; Matthew 5:37)

10. Like the vine, do you find yourself stretching toward something else to make you strong instead of trusting God where He has planted you? What would it take to be content? (Philippians 4:11-13)

Chapter 18: The Soul Who Sins Shall Die

Scripture

18:1-9 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "What ***is it*** to you, you who speak this proverb concerning the soil of Israel, saying, 'Fathers eat sour grapes, and the teeth of the sons are blunted'? ***As*** I live, declares the Lord GOD, you shall no longer have ***occasion*** to speak this proverb in Israel. Look, all the souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son, they are Mine. The soul that sins, it shall die. And a man, if he is righteous and does justice and righteousness, ***and*** he has not eaten on the mountains, and has not lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, and has not defiled the wife of his neighbor, and does not draw near to a woman in ***her*** menstruation, and does not oppress anyone, returns his pledge ***for*** a debt, does not commit robbery, gives his bread to the hungry, and covers the naked ***with*** clothing, does not lend at interest, and does not take increase, turns his hand back from injustice, does true justice between man and man, walks in My statutes, and has kept My judgments so as to deal truly, he ***is*** righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord GOD.

18:10-20 And ***if*** he fathers a son who is violent, a shedder of blood, and he does, alas, any one of these ***things***, and he did not do all these ***things***, but he has even eaten on the mountains, and has defiled the wife of his neighbor, has oppressed the poor and the needy, has committed robberies, does not return a pledge, and has lifted up his eyes to the idols, has done abomination, has lent at interest, and has taken increase; shall he then live? He shall not live. He has done all these abominations; he shall surely be put to death; his blood shall be on him. And look, ***if*** he fathers a son, and he sees all the sins of his father which he did, and he sees and does not do like them, he has not eaten on the mountains, and has not lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, has not defiled the wife of his neighbor, and has not oppressed anyone, has not taken a pledge, and has not committed robbery, has given his bread to the hungry, and has covered the naked ***with*** clothing, has turned his hand back from the poor, has not taken interest and increase, has done My judgments, has walked in My statutes, he shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall surely live. His father, because he practiced extortion, committed robbery against a brother, and did what ***is*** not good among his people, look, he shall die for his iniquity. And you say, 'Why does the son not bear the iniquity of the father?' And the son has done justice and righteousness, has kept all My statutes and done them; he shall surely live. The soul that sins, it shall die. A son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, and a father shall not bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be on him.

18:21-32 And the wicked, if he turns away from all his sins which he has done, and keeps all My statutes, and does justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All his transgressions which he has done shall not be remembered against him; by his righteousness which he has done he shall live. Do I indeed take pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD? ***Is it*** not in his turning back from his ways, that he may live? And when a righteous ***one*** turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, according to all the abominations which the wicked ***one*** does, he does, shall he live? All his ***acts of*** righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; for his unfaithfulness with which he has acted unfaithfully, and for his sin which he has sinned, for them he shall die. And you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Hear

now, O house of Israel: Is My way not right? Is it not your ways ***that*** are not right? When a righteous ***one*** turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, and dies for them, for his injustice which he has done he shall die. And when a wicked ***one*** turns away from his wickedness which he has done, and does justice and righteousness, he shall keep his soul alive. And he sees and turns away from all his transgressions which he has done; he shall surely live; he shall not die. And the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways ***that*** are not right? Therefore, each man according to his ways, I will judge you, O house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD. Turn back, and turn ***yourselves*** away from all your transgressions, and it shall not be a stumbling block of iniquity to you. Throw away from you all your transgressions by which you have transgressed, and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit; and why will you die, O house of Israel? For I do not take pleasure in the death of the one who dies, declares the Lord GOD; and turn ***yourselves*** away, and live!"

Chapter 18 Preview

The exiles had a saying: "Fathers eat sour grapes, and the teeth of the sons are blunted" (18:2). They meant that they were suffering for their fathers' sins, not their own. Manasseh and the kings before them had done the evil, and now this generation was paying the bill. It was a way of blaming God, and a way of saying there was no use in changing. God answers it with one of the clearest chapters in the Bible on personal responsibility. "The soul that sins, it shall die" (18:4). Each person stands before God for his own life.

God makes His point with three generations: a righteous man, his violent son, and that son's son who sees his father's sins and turns from them. Then He speaks of a wicked man who turns and lives, and a righteous man who turns and dies. Twice the people say, "The way of the Lord is not right," and twice God answers that it is their ways that are not right. The chapter ends with God's heart laid bare: "For I do not take pleasure in the death of the one who dies, declares the Lord GOD; and turn yourselves away, and live!" (18:32). This chapter is not teaching that we are saved by our good works. It is calling a nation that blamed others to own its sin and turn back to God, who wants them to live.

Chapter 18 Study

18:1-3 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "What **is it** to you, you who speak this proverb concerning the soil of Israel, saying, 'Fathers eat sour grapes, and the teeth of the sons are blunted'? **As** I live, declares the Lord GOD, you shall no longer have **occasion** to speak this proverb in Israel.*

"Fathers eat sour grapes, and the teeth of the sons are blunted." Unripe grapes are so sour they set your teeth on edge. The saying meant: the fathers sinned, and the children feel it. Jeremiah heard the same proverb in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 31:29). It was popular on both ends of the exile.

Was there some truth in it? Yes. Judah's kings had piled up sin for generations, and God had said the judgment would come because of Manasseh's sins (2 Kings 23:26; 24:3-4). But the people used

that truth to hide behind. If our fathers caused this, then it is not our fault, and God is unfair to punish us. And if our fate is already sealed by what our fathers did, why should we repent?

"As I live, declares the Lord GOD, you shall no longer have occasion to speak this proverb in Israel." God swears by His own life that He will put an end to this excuse. The rest of the chapter shows why it does not hold up.

18:4 *Look, all the souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son, they are Mine. The soul that sins, it shall die.*

"Look, all the souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son, they are Mine." This is the foundation. Every person belongs to God, the father and the son alike. God made each one, and He deals with each one directly. No one is just a link in a family chain. You are not your father's property, and you are not your father's copy. You belong to God.

"The soul that sins, it shall die." The word soul here, nephesh, means the whole living person. The verse means the person who sins is the one who will die. In Ezekiel's setting, the death in view was first of all the death that was coming in the judgment on Jerusalem by sword, famine and plague (5:12). But the principle goes deeper than one judgment. Sin brings death. Paul says it plainly: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Death came into the world through sin (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12), and every person who sins is under its sentence.

That is a hard word, because "all sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). If the soul that sins shall die, then every soul is in trouble. Ezekiel 18 does not stop there, and neither does the gospel. But we have to hear the bad news first. We cannot blame our parents, our upbringing or our culture for our own sin. Each of us will give an account of himself to God (Romans 14:12).

18:5-9 *And a man, if he is righteous and does justice and righteousness, **and** he has not eaten on the mountains, and has not lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, and has not defiled the wife of his neighbor, and does not draw near to a woman in **her** menstruation, and does not oppress anyone, returns his pledge **for** a debt, does not commit robbery, gives his bread to the hungry, and covers the naked **with** clothing, does not lend at interest, and does not take increase, turns his hand back from injustice, does true justice between man and man, walks in My statutes, and has kept My judgments so as to deal truly, he **is** righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord GOD.*

God now describes a righteous man. "And a man, if he is righteous and does justice and righteousness." Notice what kind of life this is. It covers worship, sexual purity and the way a man treats his neighbor.

"He has not eaten on the mountains." That means he did not join in the feasts at the hill shrines where idols were worshiped (6:13). "And has not lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel." He did not look to idols for help or hope. "And has not defiled the wife of his neighbor." He was faithful in marriage. He also kept the law's rules of purity within marriage (Leviticus 18:19).

"And does not oppress anyone, returns his pledge for a debt." A pledge was something a poor man gave as security for a loan, sometimes his only cloak, which the law said had to be returned by sundown so he could sleep in it (Exodus 22:26-27). The righteous man "gives his bread to the hungry, and covers the naked with clothing." He "does not lend at interest" to a poor brother (Leviticus 25:35-37), stays away from injustice, and judges fairly "between man and man."

"Walks in My statutes, and has kept My judgments so as to deal truly, he is righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord GOD."

Does this mean a man earns life by doing good works? No. Look at the list again. It begins with turning from idols to the true God. That is a heart that has turned to the LORD in faith. The rest of the list shows what that faith looks like in daily life: purity, honesty, mercy to the poor. God is describing a man whose life shows that he belongs to God. Abraham was counted righteous because he believed the LORD (Genesis 15:6), and his faith then showed itself in obedience (James 2:21-23). Habakkuk, a prophet of the same years, said "the righteous will live by his faithfulness" (Habakkuk 2:4), and Paul uses that verse to show that the righteous live by faith (Romans 1:17).

For us, Paul says we are saved "by grace" and "through faith," and "not from works" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Then he adds that we were "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:10). Good works are not the root of salvation. They are the fruit of it. A life like the one in 18:5-9 is what a forgiven heart grows into.

18:10-13 *And **if** he fathers a son who is violent, a shedder of blood, and he does, alas, any one of these **things**, and he did not do all these **things**, but he has even eaten on the mountains, and has defiled the wife of his neighbor, has oppressed the poor and the needy, has committed robberies, does not return a pledge, and has lifted up his eyes to the idols, has done abomination, has lent at interest, and has taken increase; shall he then live? He shall not live. He has done all these abominations; he shall surely be put to death; his blood shall be on him.*

Now the second generation. The righteous man "fathers a son who is violent, a shedder of blood." This son does the opposite of everything his father did. He eats at the idol shrines, commits adultery, oppresses the poor, robs, keeps the pledge, worships idols, and lends at interest. "Shall he then live? He shall not live." His father's goodness cannot cover him. "He has done all these abominations; he shall surely be put to death; his blood shall be on him."

"His blood shall be on him" means the guilt for his death rests on him alone. No one else is to blame.

This was a lesson for Judah. Good King Hezekiah was followed by wicked Manasseh. Good King Josiah was followed by sons who did evil in the sight of the LORD (2 Kings 23:32, 37). A godly father does not make a godly son. Every generation must turn to God for itself. A Christian home is a great gift, but no one is saved because his parents are believers. God has children, but He has no grandchildren. Each person must believe for himself (John 1:12-13).

18:14-18 *And look, **if** he fathers a son, and he sees all the sins of his father which he did, and he sees and does not do like them, he has not eaten on the mountains, and has not lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, has not defiled the wife of his neighbor, and has not oppressed anyone, has not taken a pledge, and has not committed robbery, has given his bread to the hungry, and has covered the naked **with** clothing, has turned his hand back from the poor, has not taken interest and increase, has done My judgments, has walked in My statutes, he shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall surely live. His father, because he practiced extortion, committed robbery against a brother, and did what **is** not good among his people, look, he shall die for his iniquity.*

And the third generation. The wicked son "fathers a son, and he sees all the sins of his father which he did, and he sees and does not do like them." This young man looks at his father's life with open eyes and chooses a different road. The list of his good deeds repeats the first one. He worships God alone, keeps his marriage pure, treats the poor with mercy, and walks in God's statutes. "He shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall surely live."

"His father, because he practiced extortion, committed robbery against a brother, and did what is not good among his people, look, he shall die for his iniquity."

This is very good news for anyone who grew up in a home marked by sin. Your father's sins do not have to become your sins. You can see them, name them, and turn from them. King Josiah was the grandson of Manasseh and the son of wicked Amon, and he became the most godly king Judah ever had (2 Kings 22:1-2; 23:25). The chain can be broken. God is not bound by your family history, and by His grace you are not either.

18:19-20 *And you say, 'Why does the son not bear the iniquity of the father?' And the son has done justice and righteousness, has kept all My statutes and done them; he shall surely live. The soul that sins, it shall die. A son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, and a father shall not bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be on him.*

The people ask, "Why does the son not bear the iniquity of the father?" This is a surprising question. You would think the people would be glad. But they had built their whole complaint on the idea that they were suffering for their fathers. If God said each one bore his own sin, then they had to face their own guilt. It is easier to blame someone else.

God's answer: "the son has done justice and righteousness, has kept all My statutes and done them; he shall surely live."

Then comes the summary of the chapter: "The soul that sins, it shall die. A son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, and a father shall not bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be on him." This was already in the law of Moses for Israel's courts: "Fathers shall not be put to death for sons, and sons shall not be put to death for fathers" (Deuteronomy 24:16). King Amaziah followed that law when he punished his father's murderers but spared their children (2 Kings 14:6).

But what about the Ten Commandments? There God says He is "visiting the iniquity of fathers on sons, on the third and on the fourth generation of those who hate Me" (Exodus 20:5). Does Ezekiel contradict Moses? No, and here is why.

First, read the end of Exodus 20:5: "of those who hate Me." God visits the fathers' sin on the children who keep on hating Him as their fathers did. When sons follow in their fathers' sins, the sin and its judgment grow from one generation to the next. That is exactly what happened in Judah. The exiles were not innocent children punished for someone else. They were doing the same things their fathers did (20:30-31).

Second, Exodus 20 speaks of how sin works its way through families and nations in this life. Children really do suffer from the sins of their parents: a father's drunkenness, a mother's bitterness, a nation's idolatry. The effects are real, and Ezekiel does not deny them. But Ezekiel 18 speaks of guilt before God. The effects may fall on the children. The guilt does not. No one is condemned before God for a sin he did not commit.

Third, Exodus 20:6 goes on: God shows "steadfast love to thousands, to those who love Me and to those who keep My commandments." His mercy reaches much farther than His judgment. The son who turns to God steps out from under the curse and into the steadfast love.

So the two passages fit together. Moses warns that sin spreads its harm down the generations among those who hate God. Ezekiel promises that no one is trapped by it. Each person who turns to God will live.

There is one place in all of Scripture where the righteous did bear the iniquity of others. "The LORD has caused to fall on Him the iniquity of all of us" (Isaiah 53:6). Jesus, who never sinned, chose to bear our sins in His body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). God "made the One who did not know sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Ezekiel 18:20 is the rule. The cross is God's own act of grace beyond the rule, the Son freely taking the death that the soul who sins deserves.

18:21-22 *And the wicked, if he turns away from all his sins which he has done, and keeps all My statutes, and does justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All his transgressions which he has done shall not be remembered against him; by his righteousness which he has done he shall live.*

"And the wicked, if he turns away from all his sins which he has done, and keeps all My statutes, and does justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die." Here is the door of hope. The wicked man is not trapped by his own past any more than by his father's. If he turns, he lives.

"All his transgressions which he has done shall not be remembered against him." What a promise. God does not keep a file of old sins to pull out later. When a sinner turns to Him, God says He will remember their sins no more (Jeremiah 31:34). The psalmist says He removes our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12).

"By his righteousness which he has done he shall live." Again, this is not a man buying his life with good deeds. Turning from sin to God is repentance, and the new life that follows is the proof

of it. Under the old covenant, a turning Israelite came back to God through faith and the sacrifices He had given. Today the turning sinner comes to God through Christ. Peter preached it in Jerusalem: "Repent therefore and turn again, so that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19).

18:23 *Do I indeed take pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD? **Is it** not in his turning back from his ways, that he may live?*

"Do I indeed take pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD? Is it not in his turning back from his ways, that he may live?"

This verse shows us the heart of God. Some people picture God as eager to punish, waiting for us to slip so He can strike. Ezekiel says the opposite. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He is just, and He will judge sin. But what He wants, what pleases Him, is for the sinner to turn and live.

The New Testament says the same. God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). The Lord is "not wishing any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Jesus said there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7, 10). And "God so loved the world, that He gave His Son, the only begotten, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God proved how much He wants us to live by giving His own Son to die.

If you have been away from God, do not think He is waiting to crush you. He is waiting for you to come home.

18:24 *And when a righteous **one** turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, according to all the abominations which the wicked **one** does, he does, shall he live? All his **acts of** righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; for his unfaithfulness with which he has acted unfaithfully, and for his sin which he has sinned, for them he shall die.*

"And when a righteous one turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, according to all the abominations which the wicked one does, he does, shall he live?" Now God turns it around. Just as the wicked man is not trapped by his past, the righteous man cannot rest on his. "All his acts of righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; for his unfaithfulness with which he has acted unfaithfully, and for his sin which he has sinned, for them he shall die."

Many in Judah thought they could count on their past. They had the temple, they had once been faithful, they were children of Abraham. God says none of that would protect a man who was living in sin now. A past record of religion is no shelter for present rebellion.

Does this teach that a believer in Christ can lose his salvation? We looked at this question at 3:20-21, and the same answer holds here. Ezekiel is speaking to Israel under the old covenant, about a man who had lived rightly by the law and then turned to the sins of the wicked. The death in view was first the death coming in the judgment on Jerusalem. Ezekiel is not describing the new birth and the sealing of the Holy Spirit, which the New Testament promises to every believer in Christ (John 10:28; Romans 8:1; Ephesians 1:13-14). Some teachers believe this verse does show that a true believer can fall away and be lost, and others believe the "righteous" man here was

righteous only on the outside. What is plain for all of us is the warning. Do not lean on what you did years ago. A person who says he knows God but has turned back to the ways of the wicked and stays there should ask whether he ever truly knew Him (1 John 2:19; 2 Corinthians 13:5).

18:25-29 *And you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is My way not right? Is it not your ways **that** are not right? When a righteous **one** turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, and dies for them, for his injustice which he has done he shall die. And when a wicked **one** turns away from his wickedness which he has done, and does justice and righteousness, he shall keep his soul alive. And he sees and turns away from all his transgressions which he has done; he shall surely live; he shall not die. And the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways **that** are not right?*

The people say, "The way of the Lord is not right." The people accused God of being unfair. First they said He punished sons for fathers. Now that He says each man is judged for himself, they say it is unfair that a wicked man can turn and live, or that a righteous man's past does not save him.

"Hear now, O house of Israel: Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?" God turns the charge back on them. They were the ones who were crooked. A God who lets a turning sinner live and holds a turning saint to account is not unfair. He is just and merciful at the same time.

Verses 26 to 28 repeat the two cases. "When a righteous one turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, and dies for them, for his injustice which he has done he shall die." And "when a wicked one turns away from his wickedness which he has done, and does justice and righteousness, he shall keep his soul alive." God judges a person by the road he is on and where it leads, not by where he started.

"And he sees and turns away from all his transgressions which he has done." Notice the word "sees." Repentance begins when we see our sin for what it is, as the grandson in 18:14 saw his father's sin.

In verse 29 the people say it again: "The way of the Lord is not right." And God asks again, "Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right?" When we find ourselves calling God unfair, it is usually a sign that we do not want to face something in ourselves.

18:30 *Therefore, each man according to his ways, I will judge you, O house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD. Turn back, and turn **yourselves** away from all your transgressions, and it shall not be a stumbling block of iniquity to you.*

"Therefore, each man according to his ways, I will judge you, O house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD." Here is the conclusion. Not as a nation only, not as a family, but each one.

"Turn back, and turn yourselves away from all your transgressions, and it shall not be a stumbling block of iniquity to you." The Hebrew word for turn, shub, is the great Old Testament word for repentance. It means to turn around, to change direction, to come back. Repentance is not just feeling sorry. It is turning from sin and toward God. Notice "all your transgressions." Real repentance does not keep a few favorite sins on the side.

If they did not turn, their sin would be "a stumbling block of iniquity," the thing that tripped them up and brought them down.

18:31 *Throw away from you all your transgressions by which you have transgressed, and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit; and why will you die, O house of Israel?*

"Throw away from you all your transgressions by which you have transgressed, and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit." Throw them away, the way you would throw away something rotten.

"Make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit." How can a person make himself a new heart? Ezekiel himself answers that later. God says, "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you" (36:26), and He promised the same in 11:19. Here God commands it. There God gives it. Both are true. God calls us to turn, and He gives the power to do it. Paul said the same to believers: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is the One who is working in you" (Philippians 2:12-13). The command shows us what we need. The promise shows us where to get it. When we cry out to God for a new heart, He gives it. Jesus told Nicodemus that a man must be born again (John 3:3-7), and that new birth is the work of the Spirit. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things have passed away; look, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

"And why will you die, O house of Israel?" This is not a cold verdict. It is a plea. God asks why. Why choose death when life is offered?

18:32 *For I do not take pleasure in the death of the one who dies, declares the Lord GOD; and turn* ***yourselves*** *away, and live!"*

"For I do not take pleasure in the death of the one who dies, declares the Lord GOD; and turn yourselves away, and live!"

The chapter began with a proverb of blame. It ends with an invitation. God says again that He takes no pleasure in anyone's death. He will repeat it in 33:11, with an oath. And then come three words of command and hope: turn, and live.

The exiles had told themselves they were victims of their fathers' sins and that nothing they did would matter. God says your choices matter. Your turning matters. My door is open. That is still His word to every person today. Whatever your family, whatever your past, God says turn, and live. In Christ, He has made the way.

Chapter 18 Summary

The exiles blamed their suffering on their fathers with the proverb about sour grapes. God swore that the proverb would end, because every soul belongs to Him and "the soul that sins, it shall die." He described a righteous man who worships God alone, keeps his marriage pure and shows mercy and justice, who will live; his violent son, who will die for his own sins; and that son's son, who sees his father's sins and turns from them, who will live. A son does not bear the guilt of his father or a father of his son, which fits with Exodus 20:5, since that verse speaks of those who

keep hating God and of sin's effects in history. A wicked man who turns from his sins will live, and his sins will not be remembered, while a righteous man who turns to wickedness cannot rest on his past. When the people said God's way was not right, He answered that their ways were not right. God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. He calls each person to turn, throw away his sins, get a new heart and a new spirit, and live. That call is answered fully in Christ, who bore our sins and gives the new birth.

Chapter 18 Study Questions

1. What did the proverb about sour grapes mean, and why did the exiles like it? (18:2)

2. What does God say about every soul in 18:4?

3. What kinds of things mark the righteous man in 18:5-9? What does that tell us about what faith looks like?

4. What happens to the violent son of a righteous man, and to the son who sees his father's sins and turns from them? (18:10-18)

5. How do Exodus 20:5-6 and Ezekiel 18:20 fit together?

6. What does God promise about the past sins of a wicked man who turns? (18:21-22)

7. What does God say about His own pleasure in 18:23 and 18:32? How does that compare with 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9?

8. How can God command a new heart in 18:31 and promise to give one in 36:26?

9. Is there a sin in your family history that you have been afraid you would repeat, or that you have used as an excuse? What does this chapter say to you about it?

10. God says, "turn yourselves away, and live!" Is there anything in your life you need to turn away from today? What is one step you can take?

Chapter 19: A Lament for the Princes of Israel

Scripture

19:1-9 "And you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, and you shall say, 'What ***was*** your mother? A lioness! Among lions she lay down; in the midst of young lions she reared her cubs. And she brought up one of her cubs; he became a young lion, and he learned to tear prey; he devoured men. And nations heard about him; he was caught in their pit, and they brought him with hooks to the land of Egypt. And she saw that she had waited, ***that*** her hope was lost, and she took one of her cubs; she made him a young lion. And he went about among lions; he became a young lion, and he learned to tear prey; he devoured men. And he knew his widows, and laid waste their cities; and the land and its fullness was desolate from the sound of his roaring. And nations set ***themselves*** against him all around from ***the*** provinces, and they spread their net over him; he was caught in their pit. And they put him in the cage with hooks, and brought him to the king of Babylon; they brought him into strongholds, so that his voice would no longer be heard on the mountains of Israel.

19:10-14 Your mother ***was*** like the vine in your blood, planted by waters; fruitful and full of boughs she was, because of many waters. And it had rods of strength for scepters of rulers, and its stature was lofty among the thick foliage, and it was seen in its height with the abundance of its branches. And it was plucked up in rage; it was thrown down to the ground, and the east wind dried up its fruit; they were torn off and dried up, its rod of strength; fire consumed it. And now ***is*** planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. And fire has gone out from the rod of its shoots; it has consumed its fruit, and there is not in it a rod of strength, a scepter to rule.' It ***is*** a lamentation, and it has become a lamentation."

Chapter 19 Preview

Chapter 19 is a funeral song. God tells Ezekiel, "take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel" (19:1). A lamentation was a poem sung at a funeral, often with a limping rhythm, a long line followed by a shorter one, like a sob. But this one is sung while the royal house of Judah is still alive. It is a funeral for a family that does not know yet that it is dying.

The song has two pictures. First, a lioness raises two cubs who grow into young lions, but each one is caught in a pit and carried off, one to Egypt and one to Babylon. Second, a mother vine grows tall and strong by many waters, but it is pulled up in anger, dried by the east wind, and burned by a fire that comes out of its own branch. Both pictures describe the last kings of Judah. The chapter ends with a hard line: there is no strong rod left, "a scepter to rule" (19:14). David's throne would be empty. But we have already seen, in 17:22-24, that God Himself would plant a tender shoot, and in 21:27 we will hear of the One to whom the right to judge belongs.

Chapter 19 Study

19:1 *"And you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel,*

"And you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel." Ezekiel calls the kings "princes," as he usually does (12:10). They were the last rulers of David's line in Jerusalem. Here "Israel" means God's people as a whole, though these were the kings of Judah, since the northern kingdom had already fallen.

Why would God tell His prophet to sing a funeral song over kings who had done evil? Because God's judgment is never cold. These were David's sons. They had been given the throne God promised David forever, and they threw it away. Ezekiel was to grieve over what was lost, even while he announced that it was coming. That is a good pattern for us. We should never speak about the judgment of the wicked with a smile.

19:2 *and you shall say, 'What **was** your mother? A lioness! Among lions she lay down; in the midst of young lions she reared her cubs.*

"What was your mother? A lioness! Among lions she lay down; in the midst of young lions she reared her cubs."

Who is the mother? There are two main views. Some teachers think of Hamutal, the mother of two of these kings, Jehoahaz and Zedekiah (2 Kings 23:31; 24:18). Most see the mother as the nation of Judah itself, or the royal house of David, which raised up kings. The lion fits Judah. Jacob blessed Judah as "a lion's cub" and said the scepter would not depart from him (Genesis 49:9-10). Either way, the song is about the royal family that came from Judah.

"Among lions she lay down." Judah lived among the nations, the other lions, and she raised her cubs to be like them. That is the tragedy. Her kings learned to rule like the kings of the nations around them, not like the shepherd king David.

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

"And she brought up one of her cubs; he became a young lion, and he learned to tear prey; he devoured men." This first cub is Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah. When Josiah was killed in battle in 609 B.C., the people made Jehoahaz king. He reigned only three months, and "he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD" (2 Kings 23:31-32). To "tear prey" and devour men pictures a king who used his power to harm people instead of to protect them.

"And nations heard about him; he was caught in their pit, and they brought him with hooks to the land of Egypt." Pharaoh Neco took Jehoahaz captive, put the land under tribute, and carried him to Egypt, where he died (2 Kings 23:33-34). Hunters caught lions in pits and led them away with hooks or rings. Jeremiah said of him that he would never come back to see his native land (Jeremiah 22:10-12, where he is called Shallum).

19:5-7 *And she saw that she had waited, **that** her hope was lost, and she took one of her cubs; she made him a young lion. And he went about among lions; he became a young lion, and he learned to tear prey; he devoured men. And he knew his widows, and laid waste their cities; and the land and its fullness was desolate from the sound of his roaring.*

"And she saw that she had waited, that her hope was lost, and she took one of her cubs; she made him a young lion." The mother waited for the first cub to come back. When she saw he would not, she raised another.

Who is the second cub? Good teachers disagree. Many believe he is Jehoiachin, who reigned three months and was carried off to Babylon in 597 B.C. (2 Kings 24:8-15), the same king whose exile Ezekiel counts the years by. Others think of Jehoiakim, who reigned eleven years between Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin, did great evil, and was put in bronze chains to be taken to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:6). The song may simply be speaking of the line of kings that followed. The details of verses 6 and 7 fit Jehoiakim's long and cruel reign well, and the cage and the trip to Babylon in verse 9 fit Jehoiachin's capture well.

"And he went about among lions; he became a young lion, and he learned to tear prey; he devoured men." He did just what the first cub did. "And he knew his widows, and laid waste their cities." The phrase about widows is hard to translate. It probably means he made widows by his violence, or that he took for himself what belonged to others. Jeremiah condemned Jehoiakim for building his palace with unpaid labor and for shedding innocent blood (Jeremiah 22:13-17). "And the land and its fullness was desolate from the sound of his roaring." A king was meant to be a shepherd, but this one was a beast whose roar terrified his own people.

19:8-9 *And nations set **themselves** against him all around from **the** provinces, and they spread their net over him; he was caught in their pit. And they put him in the cage with hooks, and brought him to the king of Babylon; they brought him into strongholds, so that his voice would no longer be heard on the mountains of Israel.*

"And nations set themselves against him all around from the provinces, and they spread their net over him; he was caught in their pit." Babylon came with its allies, and the young lion was caught.

"And they put him in the cage with hooks, and brought him to the king of Babylon; they brought him into strongholds, so that his voice would no longer be heard on the mountains of Israel." Babylonian kings did keep captured kings like caged animals for show. Jehoiachin was held in prison in Babylon for thirty-seven years until a later king released him and gave him a seat at his table (2 Kings 25:27-30). His roar was silenced. He never again ruled on the mountains of Israel.

What a picture of what power without God becomes. These kings had every advantage. They were heirs of David and had the law and the prophets. But they learned to tear prey like the nations, and they ended up in cages. Any of us can do the same with whatever power we are given, as a parent, a boss or a leader. God gives authority to serve and protect, not to devour (Mark 10:42-45).

19:10-11 *Your mother **was** like the vine in your blood, planted by waters; fruitful and full of boughs she was, because of many waters. And it had rods of strength for scepters of rulers, and its stature was lofty among the thick foliage, and it was seen in its height with the abundance of its branches.*

Now the song changes pictures. "Your mother was like the vine in your blood, planted by waters; fruitful and full of boughs she was, because of many waters." The mother now is a vine. We met the vine picture in chapters 15 and 17. "In your blood" is hard to translate; it may mean in your vineyard, or in your likeness, that is, a vine like the family she came from. She grew well because she was planted by many waters. God had given Judah everything she needed to flourish.

"And it had rods of strength for scepters of rulers." The strong branches were kings. "And its stature was lofty among the thick foliage, and it was seen in its height with the abundance of its branches." The vine rose higher than the rest. This pictures the royal house in its glory, under David, Solomon and the good kings after them.

19:12-14 *And it was plucked up in rage; it was thrown down to the ground, and the east wind dried up its fruit; they were torn off and dried up, its rod of strength; fire consumed it. And now **it is** planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. And fire has gone out from the rod of its shoots; it has consumed its fruit, and there is not in it a rod of strength, a scepter to rule.' It **is** a lamentation, and it has become a lamentation."*

"And it was plucked up in rage; it was thrown down to the ground, and the east wind dried up its fruit." The rage is God's anger, and the east wind is Babylon, as in 17:10. "They were torn off and dried up, its rod of strength; fire consumed it." The strong branches, the kings, were broken off and burned.

"And now it is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land." Ezekiel's hearers were already there. Babylon was the wilderness, far from the many waters of home.

"And fire has gone out from the rod of its shoots; it has consumed its fruit." This is the saddest line of all. The fire that destroyed the vine came out of one of its own branches. Most teachers see Zedekiah here. His rebellion against Babylon (17:15) brought the fire of Nebuchadnezzar's army on Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The vine was destroyed from within.

"And there is not in it a rod of strength, a scepter to rule." After Zedekiah, no son of David sat on the throne in Jerusalem. For almost six hundred years the line of David seemed to be finished. Was God's promise to David broken? No. God had promised that David's throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16). In the fullness of time, an angel told a young woman of David's line that her Son would receive "the throne of David His father" (Luke 1:32). The scepter was not lost. It was waiting for its true King.

"It is a lamentation, and it has become a lamentation." That is, this song was written as a funeral song, and it came true. What was sung beforehand became what people really mourned.

Chapter 19 Summary

God told Ezekiel to sing a funeral song for the princes of Israel. Their mother, Judah or the royal house, was a lioness who raised cubs among the lions of the nations. The first cub, Jehoahaz, learned to tear prey and was caught and taken with hooks to Egypt in 609 B.C. The second, usually taken as Jehoiachin (some say Jehoiakim), also learned to devour men and terrified the land, and he was caught and carried in a cage to the king of Babylon, so that his voice was no longer heard on the mountains of Israel. Then the mother was pictured as a vine planted by many waters, with strong branches for scepters and a lofty height. But it was pulled up in God's rage, dried by the east wind, and replanted in a dry wilderness, and fire from one of its own branches, Zedekiah's rebellion, consumed it, until no scepter was left to rule. The song became a real lament when Jerusalem fell. Yet God's promise to David was not broken. The scepter waited for Jesus, the Son of David.

Whatever authority I have, at home, at work or at church, I want to use it to live and serve as Jesus did. Ezekiel 19 mourns leaders who used their strength to devour. Jesus used His to serve. That is the pattern I want to follow.

Chapter 19 Study Questions

1. What is a lamentation, and who was this one for? (19:1)

2. Who was the first cub, and what happened to him? (19:3-4; 2 Kings 23:31-34)

3. What are the two main views about the second cub? (19:5-9)

4. What did both young lions learn to do, and what does that say about how they used their power? (19:3, 6)

5. How does the picture of the vine describe Judah's royal house at its height? (19:10-11)

6. Where did the fire that consumed the vine come from? Who is usually seen here? (19:14)

7. Was God's promise to David broken when no scepter was left? (2 Samuel 7:16; Luke 1:32)

8. Why do you think God told Ezekiel to grieve over kings who had done evil?

9. Both cubs "learned" to tear prey among the lions. What have you picked up from the world around you that does not fit a follower of Christ?

10. Think of the authority you have, at home, at work, or in church. How can you use it to serve and protect, as Jesus did? (Mark 10:42-45)

Chapter 20: Israel's History of Rebellion

Scripture

20:1-12 And it came about in the seventh year, in the fifth ***month***, on the tenth of the month, ***that*** men from the elders of Israel came to consult the LORD, and they sat before me. And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, speak with the elders of Israel, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Are you coming to consult Me? ***As*** I live, I will not let Myself be consulted by you, declares the Lord GOD.' Will you judge them? Will you judge, son of man? Make them know the abominations of their fathers, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day when I chose Israel, and I lifted up My hand to the seed of the house of Jacob, and I made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, and I lifted up My hand to them, saying, "I ***am*** the LORD your God," on that day I lifted up My hand to them, to bring them out from the land of Egypt to a land which I had searched out for them, flowing ***with*** milk and honey; it ***is*** a beauty to all the lands. And I said to them, "Throw away, each man, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not make yourselves unclean with the idols of Egypt; I ***am*** the LORD your God." And they rebelled against Me, and they were not willing to listen to Me; each man did not throw away the detestable things of their eyes, and the idols of Egypt they did not forsake. And I said ***I would*** pour out My rage on them, to complete My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. And I acted for the sake of My name, so that it would not be profaned in the eyes of the nations in whose midst they ***were***, before whose eyes I had made Myself known to them, in bringing them out from the land of Egypt. And I brought them out from the land of Egypt, and I brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them My statutes, and My judgments I made known to them, which the man shall do, and he shall live by them. And also My Sabbaths I gave to them, to be a sign between Me and them, to know that I ***am*** the LORD who sanctifies them.

20:13-26 And the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; in My statutes they did not walk, and My judgments they rejected, which the man shall do, and he shall live by them; and My Sabbaths they greatly profaned. And I said ***I would*** pour out My rage on them in the wilderness, to make an end of them. And I acted for the sake of My name, so that it would not be profaned in the eyes of the nations before whose eyes I had brought them out. And also I lifted up My hand to them in the wilderness, not to bring them into the land which I had given, flowing ***with*** milk and honey; it ***is*** a beauty to all the lands, because they rejected My judgments, and My statutes, they did not walk in them, and My Sabbaths they profaned; for their heart was walking after their idols. And My eye looked with pity on them, from destroying them, and I did not make an end of them in the wilderness. And I said to their sons in the wilderness, "Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, and do not keep their judgments, and do not make yourselves unclean with their idols. I ***am*** the LORD your God; walk in My statutes, and keep My judgments, and do them, and keep My Sabbaths holy, and they shall be a sign between Me and you, to know that I ***am*** the LORD your God." And the sons rebelled against Me; in My statutes they did not walk, and My judgments they did not keep, to do them, which the man shall do, and he shall live by them; My Sabbaths they profaned. And I said ***I would*** pour out My rage on them, to complete My anger against them in the wilderness. And I turned back My hand, and I acted for the sake of My name, so that it would not be profaned in the eyes of the nations before whose eyes I had brought them

out. Also I lifted up My hand to them in the wilderness, to disperse them among the nations and to scatter them among the lands, because they had not done My judgments, and they had rejected My statutes, and they had profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were after the idols of their fathers. And also I gave them statutes ***that were*** not good, and judgments by which they shall not live. And I made them unclean by their gifts, in ***their*** making everything that opens the womb pass through, so that I might make them desolate, so that they might know that I ***am*** the LORD.'

20:27-38 Therefore speak to the house of Israel, son of man, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Yet in this your fathers blasphemed Me, in their acting unfaithfully against Me ***with*** unfaithfulness. And I brought them into the land which I had lifted up My hand to give to them, and they saw every high hill and every leafy tree, and they sacrificed there their sacrifices, and they presented there the provocation of their offering, and they made there their soothing aroma, and they poured out there their drink offerings. And I said to them, "What ***is*** the high place to which you are going?" And its name has been called Bamah to this day.' Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Are you making yourselves unclean in the way of your fathers? And are you acting as prostitutes after their detestable things? And in lifting up your gifts, in making your sons pass through the fire, you are making yourselves unclean with all your idols to this day. And shall I let Myself be consulted by you, O house of Israel? ***As*** I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will not let Myself be consulted by you. And what comes up on your spirit shall surely not happen, ***that*** which you are saying, "We will be like the nations, like the clans of the lands, to serve wood and stone." ***As*** I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with poured-out rage I will reign over you. And I will bring you out from the peoples, and I will gather you from the lands in which you have been scattered, with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with poured-out rage. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and I will enter into judgment with you there face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, declares the Lord GOD. And I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. And I will purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; from the land of their sojournings I will bring them out, and into the soil of Israel he shall not enter; and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD.

20:39-49 And you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord GOD: Go, serve each man his idols; and afterward, if you are not listening to Me, and My holy name you shall no longer profane with your gifts and with your idols. For on My holy mountain, on the mountain of the height of Israel, declares the Lord GOD, there all the house of Israel, all of it, shall serve Me in the land; there I will accept them, and there I will seek your contributions and the first of your offerings, with all your holy things. As a soothing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands in which you have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the eyes of the nations. And you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, when I bring you into the soil of Israel, into the land which I lifted up My hand to give to your fathers. And you shall remember there your ways and all your deeds by which you have made yourselves unclean, and you shall loathe yourselves in your ***own*** faces for all your evils which you have done. And you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, when I deal with you for the sake of My name, not according to your evil ways and according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD.'" And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face the way southward, and drip

words toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the field of the Negeb. And you shall say to the forest of the Negeb, 'Hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I am about to kindle a fire in you, and it shall consume in you every moist tree and every dry tree; the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from south to north shall be scorched by it. And all flesh shall see that I, the LORD, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.'" And I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! They are saying of me, 'Is he not speaking parables?'"

Chapter 20 Preview

About eleven months after the vision of chapters 8 to 11, some of the elders of Israel came to Ezekiel's house again to ask the LORD for a word. God refused to be consulted by them. Instead He told Ezekiel to give them a history lesson, and it is not the proud history they liked to tell. It is the story of a people who rebelled at every stage: in Egypt, in the wilderness, in the next generation in the wilderness, and in the land. Again and again God says He would have poured out His rage on them, but "I acted for the sake of My name" (20:9, 14, 22). The only reason Israel still existed was God's mercy and His concern for His own name among the nations.

Then the chapter looks ahead. God says He will not let Israel become like the nations. He will gather them from the lands where they are scattered, bring them into "the wilderness of the peoples," judge them face to face, purge out the rebels, and bring the rest into the land, where all Israel will serve Him on His holy mountain. I believe this describes a future regathering of Israel at the end of this age, after the judgment of the Tribulation, when Christ returns. The chapter closes (20:45-49) with a short word against the forest of the south, which in the Hebrew Bible begins chapter 21. This chapter also contains one of the hardest verses in Ezekiel, 20:25, where God says He gave them "statutes that were not good." We will look at it carefully.

Chapter 20 Study

20:1-4 *And it came about in the seventh year, in the fifth **month**, on the tenth of the month, **that** men from the elders of Israel came to consult the LORD, and they sat before me. And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, speak with the elders of Israel, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Are you coming to consult Me? **As** I live, I will not let Myself be consulted by you, declares the Lord GOD.' Will you judge them? Will you judge, son of man? Make them know the abominations of their fathers,*

"In the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth of the month." That is about 591 B.C., the seventh year of King Jehoiachin's exile, and five years before Jerusalem fell. "Men from the elders of Israel came to consult the LORD, and they sat before me." To consult the LORD meant to ask a prophet to seek a word from God, often about the future. We are not told what they asked. Perhaps they wanted to know when they would go home.

God's answer was sharp. "Are you coming to consult Me? As I live, I will not let Myself be consulted by you." We saw why in 14:1-5. These elders had set up idols in their hearts. They wanted a word from God without giving up their sin. God will not be used that way. The psalmist

says, "If I had regarded wickedness in my heart, the Lord would not listen" (Psalm 66:18). Prayer is not a way to get what we want from God while we keep living as we please.

"Will you judge them? Will you judge, son of man?" God tells Ezekiel to act as a judge and bring the charges. "Make them know the abominations of their fathers." The elders had to see that they were part of a long story of rebellion, and that they were living it out in their own day.

20:5-9 *and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day when I chose Israel, and I lifted up My hand to the seed of the house of Jacob, and I made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, and I lifted up My hand to them, saying, "I **am** the LORD your God," on that day I lifted up My hand to them, to bring them out from the land of Egypt to a land which I had searched out for them, flowing **with** milk and honey; it **is** a beauty to all the lands. And I said to them, "Throw away, each man, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not make yourselves unclean with the idols of Egypt; I **am** the LORD your God." And they rebelled against Me, and they were not willing to listen to Me; each man did not throw away the detestable things of their eyes, and the idols of Egypt they did not forsake. And I said **I would** pour out My rage on them, to complete My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. And I acted for the sake of My name, so that it would not be profaned in the eyes of the nations in whose midst they **were**, before whose eyes I had made Myself known to them, in bringing them out from the land of Egypt.*

The first stage is Egypt. "On the day when I chose Israel, and I lifted up My hand to the seed of the house of Jacob, and I made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt." To lift up the hand was to swear an oath. God swore to bring Israel out of Egypt to a land "flowing with milk and honey," a land "which I had searched out for them." God had chosen and scouted the land for them like a father picking a home for his family. "It is a beauty to all the lands."

"And I said to them, Throw away, each man, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not make yourselves unclean with the idols of Egypt." Exodus does not tell us much about Israel's idolatry in Egypt, but Joshua says plainly that their fathers served other gods in Egypt (Joshua 24:14). The golden calf, made just weeks after the exodus, shows how deep it ran (Exodus 32:1-6).

"And they rebelled against Me, and they were not willing to listen to Me." God said He would pour out His rage on them right there in Egypt. "And I acted for the sake of My name, so that it would not be profaned in the eyes of the nations." To profane God's name is to treat it as common or to bring it into dishonor. If God had destroyed Israel in Egypt, the nations would have said the God of Israel could not save His people, or did not keep His word. Moses argued this way when he prayed for Israel (Exodus 32:11-12; Numbers 14:13-16).

This is the key to the whole chapter. God did not spare Israel because they deserved it. He spared them because of who He is. That is the only reason any of us are spared. God saves us "according to His mercy" (Titus 3:5), and He guides us "for the sake of His name" (Psalm 23:3).

20:10-12 *And I brought them out from the land of Egypt, and I brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them My statutes, and My judgments I made known to them, which the man shall do, and he shall live by them. And also My Sabbaths I gave to them, to be a sign between Me and them, to know that I **am** the LORD who sanctifies them.*

"And I brought them out from the land of Egypt, and I brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them My statutes, and My judgments I made known to them, which the man shall do, and he shall live by them." These are good gifts: the law given at Mount Sinai. Statutes and judgments are God's commands and rulings. "Which the man shall do, and he shall live by them" comes from Leviticus 18:5. The law showed Israel the way of life under the covenant. Living by it meant blessing, long life and peace in the land.

Could anyone be saved forever by keeping the law? Paul quotes this same verse to show the difference between law and faith: "The man who has done them will live in them" (Galatians 3:12; Romans 10:5). The law promised life to the one who kept it, but no one but Jesus ever kept it perfectly. So the law shows us our sin and leads us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). Israel's problem in Ezekiel 20 was not that the law was bad. It was that they would not walk in it.

"And also My sabbaths I gave to them, to be a sign between Me and them, to know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them." The Sabbath was the seventh day, a day of rest God commanded for Israel (Exodus 20:8-11). God calls it a sign of His covenant with Israel (Exodus 31:13). Every week it reminded them that they belonged to Him and that He made them holy. Ezekiel, a priest, mentions the Sabbaths often, because breaking them showed contempt for the covenant itself. Christians differ on how the Sabbath applies to believers now. Some keep a weekly day of rest and worship, most on the Lord's Day; others see the Sabbath fulfilled in the rest we have in Christ (Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 4:9-10). All agree that God's people need rest and worship, and that the Sabbath was a gift, not a burden.

20:13-17 *And the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; in My statutes they did not walk, and My judgments they rejected, which the man shall do, and he shall live by them; and My Sabbaths they greatly profaned. And I said **I would** pour out My rage on them in the wilderness, to make an end of them. And I acted for the sake of My name, so that it would not be profaned in the eyes of the nations before whose eyes I had brought them out. And also I lifted up My hand to them in the wilderness, not to bring them into the land which I had given, flowing **with** milk and honey; it **is** a beauty to all the lands, because they rejected My judgments, and My statutes, they did not walk in them, and My Sabbaths they profaned; for their heart was walking after their idols. And My eye looked with pity on them, from destroying them, and I did not make an end of them in the wilderness.*

The second stage is the wilderness generation. "And the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness." They did not walk in His statutes, they rejected His judgments, "and My sabbaths they greatly profaned." Numbers 15:32-36 tells of a man gathering wood on the Sabbath in the wilderness. Their hearts were not in the covenant.

Again God said He would make an end of them. Again, "I acted for the sake of My name." But there was a judgment. "Also I lifted up My hand to them in the wilderness, not to bring them into the

land which I had given." After the spies' bad report, God swore that the generation that came out of Egypt would die in the wilderness and not enter the land (Numbers 14:26-35). "For their heart was walking after their idols." The root problem was the heart.

"And My eye looked with pity on them, from destroying them, and I did not make an end of them in the wilderness." Even in judgment there was pity. He kept them alive, fed them with manna, and raised up their children.

20:18-22 *And I said to their sons in the wilderness, "Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, and do not keep their judgments, and do not make yourselves unclean with their idols. I **am** the LORD your God; walk in My statutes, and keep My judgments, and do them, and keep My Sabbaths holy, and they shall be a sign between Me and you, to know that I **am** the LORD your God." And the sons rebelled against Me; in My statutes they did not walk, and My judgments they did not keep, to do them, which the man shall do, and he shall live by them; My Sabbaths they profaned. And I said **I would** pour out My rage on them, to complete My anger against them in the wilderness. And I turned back My hand, and I acted for the sake of My name, so that it would not be profaned in the eyes of the nations before whose eyes I had brought them out.*

The third stage is the second generation in the wilderness. "And I said to their sons in the wilderness, Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers." God gave the children a chance to be different from their parents, just as in 18:14-17. "I am the LORD your God; walk in My statutes, and keep My judgments, and do them, and keep My sabbaths holy." This is the message of Deuteronomy, which Moses preached to the new generation on the plains of Moab.

"And the sons rebelled against Me." The new generation fell into the same sins. At Baal-peor, on the edge of the promised land, they joined in the worship of the Baal of Peor and in immorality with the women of Moab (Numbers 25:1-3). Baal was the Canaanite storm god, and Baal-peor was his worship at the place called Peor.

"And I turned back My hand, and I acted for the sake of My name." Three times now God has said He would pour out His wrath, and three times He held it back for His name's sake. That is long-suffering beyond what any of us would show.

20:23-24 *Also I lifted up My hand to them in the wilderness, to disperse them among the nations and to scatter them among the lands, because they had not done My judgments, and they had rejected My statutes, and they had profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were after the idols of their fathers.*

"Also I lifted up My hand to them in the wilderness, to disperse them among the nations and to scatter them among the lands," Even before Israel entered the land, God warned that if they turned to idols, He would scatter them among the nations. Moses said it plainly in Leviticus 26:33 and Deuteronomy 28:64. The exile Ezekiel and his hearers were living in was not a surprise. It had been announced at the very beginning.

"Because they had not done My judgments, and they had rejected My statutes, and they had profaned My sabbaths, and their eyes were after the idols of their fathers." The exiles thought of

the exile as a sudden disaster. God says it was the end of a road their people had been walking for eight hundred years.

20:25-26 *And also I gave them statutes **that were** not good, and judgments by which they shall not live. And I made them unclean by their gifts, in **their** making everything that opens the womb pass through, so that I might make them desolate, so that they might know that I **am** the LORD.'*

"And also I gave them statutes that were not good, and judgments by which they shall not live." This is one of the hardest verses in Ezekiel. God has just called His statutes the way of life (20:11, 13, 21). Now He says He gave them statutes that were not good. What does it mean?

One thing is certain. God never commanded child sacrifice and never gave any law that was evil in itself. He forbids it in the strongest words in the law (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10). Through Jeremiah He says of the burning of children in the valley of Hinnom, "which I did not command, and it did not come up on My heart" (Jeremiah 7:31). Whatever verse 25 means, it cannot mean that.

Good Bible teachers have read it in three main ways.

The first and most common reading is that God gave them over to the pagan statutes they chose. They kept rejecting His good statutes, so He let them have the bad ones they wanted, the customs of the nations, with all the misery that came with them. Scripture often speaks of God "giving" people what they insist on as a judgment. "And I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart; they walked in their own counsels" (Psalm 81:12). Stephen says that after the golden calf, "God turned and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven" (Acts 7:42). Paul says three times that God "gave them up" to the sins they chose (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). On this reading, the "statutes that were not good" are the laws of the idols, and verse 26 shows the worst of them, the sacrifice of children.

A second reading is that God's own good laws became a means of death to them because they twisted them. Verse 26 uses the very words of God's law of the firstborn. God told Israel, "you shall cause everything that opens a womb to pass over to the LORD" (Exodus 13:12), meaning the firstborn sons were to be redeemed with an offering (Exodus 13:13). Israel took that holy law and bent it into a reason to make their children pass through the fire to idols. Paul speaks of a good commandment that, through sin, "was found by me to be for death" (Romans 7:10). On this reading, God let even His good laws become a snare to a people who would not obey them rightly.

A third reading takes the "statutes" and "judgments" as God's sentences of punishment, the decrees of judgment He pronounced on them, such as the wandering and the scattering (20:15, 23), which were "not good" in the sense that they brought harm, not life.

These readings overlap, and all of them agree on the main point: this is judgment. God handed a rebellious people over to the results of their own choices. "And I made them unclean by their gifts, in their making everything that opens the womb pass through, so that I might make them desolate, so that they might know that I am the LORD." Their worship made them unclean, and in the end it brought them to ruin, so they would learn who God is.

Is there a warning here for us? Yes. The worst thing God can do to a person who keeps pushing Him away is to let him have his way. Romans 1 shows that the same is true of nations today. When people insist on their own way long enough, God may give them over to it, and their own choices become their punishment.

20:27-29 *Therefore speak to the house of Israel, son of man, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Yet in this your fathers blasphemed Me, in their acting unfaithfully against Me **with** unfaithfulness. And I brought them into the land which I had lifted up My hand to give to them, and they saw every high hill and every leafy tree, and they sacrificed there their sacrifices, and they presented there the provocation of their offering, and they made there their soothing aroma, and they poured out there their drink offerings. And I said to them, "What **is** the high place to which you are going?" And its name has been called Bamah to this day.'*

"Therefore speak to the house of Israel." The fourth stage is the land. "Yet in this your fathers blasphemed Me, in their acting unfaithfully against Me with unfaithfulness." To blaspheme is to speak or act against God with contempt.

"And I brought them into the land which I had lifted up My hand to give to them, and they saw every high hill and every leafy tree, and they sacrificed there their sacrifices." Instead of worshiping at the one place God chose (Deuteronomy 12:5-14), they set up altars on every hilltop and under every green tree, the places the Canaanites used for their gods. They brought "the provocation of their offering," offerings that provoked God instead of pleasing Him.

"And I said to them, What is the high place to which you are going? And its name has been called Bamah to this day." A high place, bamah in Hebrew, was a hilltop shrine or raised platform for worship, usually for idols. God makes a pointed play on words: what is this bamah where you are coming (ba'im)? The question exposes how empty it was. They kept the name for centuries, but it was never a place God chose.

20:30-32 *Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Are you making yourselves unclean in the way of your fathers? And are you acting as prostitutes after their detestable things? And in lifting up your gifts, in making your sons pass through the fire, you are making yourselves unclean with all your idols to this day. And shall I let Myself be consulted by you, O house of Israel? **As** I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will not let Myself be consulted by you. And what comes up on your spirit shall surely not happen, **that** which you are saying, "We will be like the nations, like the clans of the lands, to serve wood and stone."*

"Therefore say to the house of Israel." "Are you making yourselves unclean in the way of your fathers?" Now God brings the history up to date. The elders sitting in Ezekiel's house were doing the same things as their fathers. "And in lifting up your gifts, in making your sons pass through the fire, you are making yourselves unclean with all your idols to this day." Child sacrifice was still going on in Judah in their day (Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5).

"And shall I let Myself be consulted by you, O house of Israel? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will not let Myself be consulted by you." Now we see why God would not answer them in 20:3.

Then God reveals what was in their hearts: "We will be like the nations, like the clans of the lands, to serve wood and stone." In exile, some of them were ready to give up being Israel. They would blend in with Babylon, worship its gods, and forget the LORD. God says, "And what comes up on your spirit shall surely not happen." He would not let His people disappear. That is a remarkable promise. Many nations taken into exile in the ancient world vanished from history. Israel did not, because God would not let them go.

20:33-38 ***As*** *I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with poured-out rage I will reign over you. And I will bring you out from the peoples, and I will gather you from the lands in which you have been scattered, with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with poured-out rage. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and I will enter into judgment with you there face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, declares the Lord GOD. And I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. And I will purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; from the land of their sojournings I will bring them out, and into the soil of Israel he shall not enter; and you shall know that I* ***am*** *the LORD.*

Now the chapter turns to the future. "As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with poured-out rage I will reign over you." The strong hand and outstretched arm are the words used for the exodus from Egypt (Deuteronomy 4:34; 5:15). God will do it again. But this time, the words "poured-out rage" are added. This new exodus will come with judgment.

"And I will bring you out from the peoples, and I will gather you from the lands in which you have been scattered." Notice "the peoples" and "the lands," plural. This is not just the return from Babylon. It is a gathering from many nations.

"And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and I will enter into judgment with you there face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you." In the first exodus, God judged the rebels in the wilderness, and that generation did not enter the land. In this new exodus, God will again judge His people before He brings them into the land.

"And I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant." A shepherd counted his sheep by having them pass one by one under his staff, and that is how the tithe of the flock was set apart (Leviticus 27:32). God will look at each one personally. Those who are His will be brought "into the bond of the covenant," which I believe is the new covenant God promised to Israel (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 37:26).

"And I will purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; from the land of their sojournings I will bring them out, and into the soil of Israel he shall not enter; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

When will this happen? The return from Babylon in 538 B.C. was a small foretaste, but it does not fit the whole picture. Only a part of Judah came back, there was no great judgment in a

wilderness, and "all the house of Israel, all of it" (20:40) did not return. I believe this passage describes the regathering of Israel at the end of this age. The Old Testament prophets speak of a time of great distress for Israel just before its final deliverance. Jeremiah calls it "a time of distress for Jacob, and from it he will be saved" (Jeremiah 30:7), and Jesus spoke of a great tribulation before His return (Matthew 24:21, 29-31). That seven-year period is often called the Tribulation. Zechariah says God will bring a remnant through the fire and refine them like silver, and they will say, "The LORD is my God" (Zechariah 13:9). Malachi says the Lord will sit as a refiner and purifier (Malachi 3:3).

So I read 20:33-38 this way. After the judgments of the Tribulation, when Christ returns in glory, God will gather the people of Israel from all the nations where they live. He will judge them personally. The rebels who refuse Him will not enter the kingdom. Those who turn to Him will be brought into the land under the new covenant. Paul says, "and so all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26), meaning the nation as it stands at that time, purified and believing.

Some teachers read these verses as fulfilled in the return from Babylon only, and others see their fulfillment in the church as God's people today. I believe the plain words, many lands, a judgment face to face, all the house of Israel in the land, point to a future that has not happened yet, and that God will keep His promise to Israel as a nation.

20:39-41 *And you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord GOD: Go, serve each man his idols; and afterward, if you are not listening to Me, and My holy name you shall no longer profane with your gifts and with your idols. For on My holy mountain, on the mountain of the height of Israel, declares the Lord GOD, there all the house of Israel, all of it, shall serve Me in the land; there I will accept them, and there I will seek your contributions and the first of your offerings, with all your holy things. As a soothing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands in which you have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the eyes of the nations.*

"And you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord GOD: Go, serve each man his idols." This is bitter irony. If you will not listen, go ahead. But a time is coming when God's holy name will no longer be profaned "with your gifts and with your idols."

"For on My holy mountain, on the mountain of the height of Israel, declares the Lord GOD, there all the house of Israel, all of it, shall serve Me in the land." This is the same high mountain where God plants the tender shoot in 17:22-23. Instead of a high place on every hill (20:28), there will be one holy mountain, and all Israel will worship there. "There I will accept them, and there I will seek your contributions and the first of your offerings, with all your holy things." God will gladly receive their worship again. Ezekiel will describe this worship in detail in chapters 40 to 48.

"As a soothing aroma I will accept you." In the law, a soothing aroma was an offering that pleased God (Leviticus 1:9). Here God says He will accept the people themselves as a soothing aroma. Their whole lives will be worship. "And I will be sanctified in you before the eyes of the nations." In the past, Israel profaned God's name among the nations. In the future, the nations will see God's holiness through His restored people.

20:42-44 *And you shall know that I **am** the LORD, when I bring you into the soil of Israel, into the land which I lifted up My hand to give to your fathers. And you shall remember there your ways and all your deeds by which you have made yourselves unclean, and you shall loathe yourselves in your **own** faces for all your evils which you have done. And you shall know that I **am** the LORD, when I deal with you for the sake of My name, not according to your evil ways and according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD.'"*

"And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the soil of Israel, into the land which I lifted up My hand to give to your fathers." God swore the land to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 15:18-21; 26:3; 28:13). He will keep that oath.

"And you shall remember there your ways and all your deeds by which you have made yourselves unclean, and you shall loathe yourselves in your own faces for all your evils which you have done." This is not a cruel shame God puts on them. It is real repentance that comes when a person sees his sin in the light of God's goodness. Zechariah says they will look on Him whom they pierced and mourn (Zechariah 12:10). The grace of God makes them hate what they once loved.

"And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I deal with you for the sake of My name, not according to your evil ways and according to your corrupt deeds." This is the heart of the gospel in Ezekiel. God did not spare Israel in Egypt or in the wilderness because they deserved it. He will not restore them in the future because they deserve it. He does it for His name's sake. That is how God saves anyone. "Not by works which we did in righteousness, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5). If God dealt with any of us according to our ways, we would be lost. Thank God He deals with us for the sake of His name.

20:45-48 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face the way southward, and drip **words** toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the field of the Negeb. And you shall say to the forest of the Negeb, 'Hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I am about to kindle a fire in you, and it shall consume in you every moist tree and every dry tree; the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from south to north shall be scorched by it. And all flesh shall see that I, the LORD, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.'"*

This short message begins a new section. In the Hebrew Bible, these verses are the start of chapter 21, and they belong with the sword of chapter 21.

"Son of man, set your face the way southward, and drip words toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the field of the Negeb." The Negeb is the dry land south of Judah, but here, coming from Babylon, the "south" stands for Judah and Jerusalem, since the Babylonian army would come down from the north and sweep south. To "drip words" means to let the message fall like rain, steadily.

"Look, I am about to kindle a fire in you, and it shall consume in you every moist tree and every dry tree; the flaming flame shall not be quenched." The moist tree and the dry tree mean everyone, green and dry, righteous and wicked alike. Chapter 21:3-4 explains the picture plainly: God will cut off "the righteous and the wicked." When a nation falls, its judgment falls on all. "And all flesh shall see that I, the LORD, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched."

Jesus used a similar picture on His way to the cross. He told the weeping women of Jerusalem that if men did these things when the tree was green, what would happen when it was dry (Luke 23:31).

20:49 *And I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! They are saying of me, 'Is he not speaking parables?'"*

"Ah, Lord GOD! They are saying of me." "Is he not speaking parables?" Ezekiel complained to God. The people were brushing off his messages as riddles and stories, interesting but not to be taken seriously. "Is he not speaking parables?" was their way of saying, He is just a storyteller.

God answers by speaking more plainly in chapter 21. The forest becomes the land of Israel, and the fire becomes a sword.

People still do this with God's Word. They call it stories, poetry, myths, so they do not have to obey it. Ezekiel's parables were not fairy tales. Every one of them came true. We do well to take God's Word at its plain meaning, even when it comes in pictures.

Chapter 20 Summary

In about 591 B.C., some elders came to Ezekiel to consult the LORD, and God refused to be consulted by them. Instead He told the history of Israel's rebellion. In Egypt they would not throw away their idols. In the wilderness the first generation rejected His statutes and profaned His Sabbaths and died there, and their sons did the same. Each time God would have destroyed them, but He acted for the sake of His name. He warned in the wilderness that He would scatter them, and He gave them over to "statutes that were not good," best understood as handing them over to the pagan ways they chose, until they even made their children pass through the fire. In the land they worshiped on every high place. The elders were doing the same, and some wanted to become like the nations, but God said that would never happen. Instead He will gather Israel from all the lands with a strong hand and poured-out rage, judge them face to face in the wilderness of the peoples, purge out the rebels, and bring the rest into the bond of the covenant. All Israel will serve Him on His holy mountain, and they will loathe their past sins and know that He dealt with them for His name's sake. I believe this will be fulfilled when Christ returns after the Tribulation. A last message warned of a fire in the forest of the south that would consume green and dry trees alike, and the people dismissed Ezekiel as a teller of parables.

Chapter 20 Study Questions

1. When did the elders come to Ezekiel, and why would God not let Himself be consulted by them? (20:1-3; 14:3)

2. What did God tell Israel to throw away while they were still in Egypt? (20:7)

3. What reason does God give again and again for not destroying Israel? (20:9, 14, 22)

4. What did God give Israel in the wilderness, and what were the Sabbaths meant to be? (20:11-12)

5. What are the main ways of understanding "statutes that were not good"? What can we be sure verse 25 does not mean? (20:25-26; Jeremiah 7:31)

6. What did some of the exiles want to become, and what did God say about it? (20:32)

7. What does God promise to do in 20:33-38, and how does it compare with the first exodus?

8. What will Israel do when they remember their ways, and why will God restore them? (20:43-44)

9. God's mercy to Israel was "for the sake of My name," not because they deserved it. How does that change the way you think about your own salvation? (Titus 3:5)

10. Some people dismissed Ezekiel's words as "parables." Are there parts of God's Word you have been tempted to brush off so you would not have to obey them? What would it look like to take them seriously?

Chapter 21: The Sword of the LORD

Scripture

21:1-17 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, and drip ***words*** against the sanctuaries, and prophesy against the soil of Israel, and you shall say to the soil of Israel, 'Thus says the LORD: Look, I ***am*** against you, and I will bring out My sword from its sheath, and I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked. Because I have cut off from you the righteous and the wicked, therefore My sword shall go out from its sheath against all flesh from south to north. And all flesh shall know that I, the LORD, have brought out My sword from its sheath; it shall not return again.' And you, son of man, groan with the breaking of ***your*** loins, and with bitterness you shall groan before their eyes. And it shall be, when they say to you, 'For what are you groaning?' that you shall say, 'Because of the report, for it is coming; and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall hang limp, and every spirit shall grow faint, and all knees shall go ***as*** water. Look, it is coming, and it shall happen, declares the Lord GOD.'" And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy, and you shall say, 'Thus says the Lord: Say, "A sword, a sword has been sharpened, and also polished; in order to slaughter a slaughter it has been sharpened; in order that it may have lightning it has been polished. Or shall we rejoice? The scepter of my son despises every tree. And he gave it to be polished, to be grasped in the palm; it has been sharpened, the sword, and it has been polished, to give it 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; thrown to the sword they are with My people; therefore strike ***your*** thigh. For it has been tested; and what if even the scepter that despises shall not be? declares the Lord GOD. And you, son of man, prophesy, and strike palm to palm, and let the sword be doubled, the third ***time***, the sword of the slain; it ***is*** the sword of the great slain ***one***, which surrounds them, so that ***the*** heart may melt and the stumblings be multiplied; at all their gates I have set the slaughter of the sword. Ah! It is made for lightning, wrapped for slaughter. Be sharp, go to the right; set ***yourself***, go to the left, wherever your face is appointed. And I also, I will strike My palm to My palm, and I will cause My rage to rest; I, the LORD, have spoken."

21:18-32 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "And you, son of man, make for yourself two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to come; from one land both of them shall go out. And carve a marker; at the head of the way to a city carve ***it***. A way you shall make for the sword to come to Rabbah of the sons of Ammon, and to Judah, into fortified Jerusalem. For the king of Babylon has stood at the mother of the way, at the head of the two ways, to divine ***by*** divination; he has shaken the arrows, he has inquired of the teraphim, he has looked at the liver. In his right ***hand*** was the divination ***for*** Jerusalem: to set battering rams, to open ***the*** mouth in killing, to raise ***the*** voice with a war cry, to set battering rams against the gates, to pour out a mound, to build a siege wall. And it shall be to them like divining falsehood in their eyes; oaths of oaths ***are*** theirs; and he brings iniquity to remembrance, that they may be seized. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have brought your iniquity to remembrance, in your transgressions being uncovered, so that your sins are seen in all your deeds, because you have been remembered, you shall be seized by the palm. And you, O profane, wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come, in the time of the iniquity of the end, thus says the Lord GOD: Remove the turban, and take off the

crown; this ***shall*** not ***be*** this; exalt the low ***one***, and bring low the exalted ***one***. A ruin, a ruin, a ruin I will make it; this also has not been, until he comes to whom the judgment ***belongs***, and I will give it. And you, son of man, prophesy, and you shall say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the sons of Ammon and concerning their reproach,' and you shall say, 'A sword, a sword is drawn; for slaughter ***it is*** polished, to contain ***it***, because of ***its*** lightning, while they see worthlessness for you, while they divine a lie for you, to put you on the necks of the profane of the wicked, whose day has come, in the time of the iniquity of the end. Put ***it*** back into its sheath! In the place where you were created, in the land of your origins, I will judge you. And I will pour out My indignation on you; with the fire of My wrath I will blow on you, and I will give you into the hand of brutish men, craftsmen of destruction. For the fire you shall be fuel; your blood shall be in the midst of the land; you shall not be remembered, for I, the LORD, have spoken.'"

Chapter 21 Preview

In 20:49 the people brushed off Ezekiel's word about a fire in the forest as just another parable. So in chapter 21 God speaks plainly. The fire becomes a sword, the forest becomes the land of Israel, and the sword is in the LORD's own hand. The chapter has four messages. First, God draws His sword against Jerusalem, and Ezekiel is to groan in public as a sign (21:1-7). Second comes a fierce song of the sword, sharpened and polished for slaughter (21:8-17). Third, Ezekiel draws a map with a fork in the road, where the king of Babylon stands and uses divination to choose between Jerusalem and Rabbah of the Ammonites, and the lot falls on Jerusalem (21:18-24). Fourth, God speaks to the wicked prince of Israel, Zedekiah, and to the Ammonites (21:25-32).

In the middle of this hard chapter is one of the great promises of the Messiah. God says the crown will be taken off, and David's throne will be "a ruin, a ruin, a ruin," "until he comes to whom the judgment belongs, and I will give it" (21:27). That is, the throne will stay empty until the One comes who has the right to it. That One is Jesus Christ.

Chapter 21 Study

21:1-5 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, and drip **words** against the sanctuaries, and prophesy against the soil of Israel, and you shall say to the soil of Israel, 'Thus says the LORD: Look, I **am** against you, and I will bring out My sword from its sheath, and I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked. Because I have cut off from you the righteous and the wicked, therefore My sword shall go out from its sheath against all flesh from south to north. And all flesh shall know that I, the LORD, have brought out My sword from its sheath; it shall not return again.'*

"Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, and drip words against the sanctuaries, and prophesy against the soil of Israel," This explains 20:46. The "south" was Jerusalem, the "forest" was the land of Israel, and now the fire is a sword.

"Look, I am against you, and I will bring out My sword from its sheath, and I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked." This is a hard word, and it can sound like it contradicts chapter 18. How can God cut off the righteous along with the wicked? Chapter 18 speaks of each person's

standing before God. Here God speaks of the judgment that would fall on a whole city and land in war. When Babylon came, the sword did not stop to sort people out. Godly people suffered in the siege too. Jeremiah himself went through it, and Daniel and Ezekiel went into exile. But suffering in a nation's judgment is not the same as being condemned before God. The righteous who died in the fall of Jerusalem died in the Lord. The moist tree and the dry tree of 20:47 mean the same thing: no one in the land would escape the effects.

"Therefore My sword shall go out from its sheath against all flesh from south to north." The judgment would sweep the whole land from end to end. "And all flesh shall know that I, the LORD, have brought out My sword from its sheath; it shall not return again." Once drawn, it would not be put back until its work was done.

21:6-7 *And you, son of man, groan with the breaking of **your** loins, and with bitterness you shall groan before their eyes. And it shall be, when they say to you, 'For what are you groaning?' that you shall say, 'Because of the report, for it is coming; and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall hang limp, and every spirit shall grow faint, and all knees shall go **as** water. Look, it is coming, and it shall happen, declares the Lord GOD.'"*

"And you, son of man, groan with the breaking of your loins, and with bitterness you shall groan before their eyes." Ezekiel was to groan as a man groans when his body is doubled over in pain. This was another sign act. He did it in public, "before their eyes," so that people would ask him why.

"Because of the report, for it is coming; and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall hang limp, and every spirit shall grow faint, and all knees shall go as water." When the news of Jerusalem's fall arrived, the exiles would be overcome. Their courage would melt, their hands would hang limp and their knees would give way. Ezekiel's groaning was a preview of their own grief. The report did come, in 33:21.

A preacher of judgment should groan, not gloat. Ezekiel felt the weight of what he was saying before he said it.

21:8-11 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy, and you shall say, 'Thus says the Lord: Say, "A sword, a sword has been sharpened, and also polished; in order to slaughter a slaughter it has been sharpened; in order that it may have lightning it has been polished. Or shall we rejoice? The scepter of my son despises every tree. And he gave it to be polished, to be grasped in the palm; it has been sharpened, the sword, and it has been polished, to give it into the hand of the slayer."'*

"A sword, a sword has been sharpened, and also polished." This is the song of the sword, one of the most frightening poems in the Bible. The lines are short and sharp, like blows. The sword has been sharpened "to slaughter a slaughter" and polished "that it may have lightning," so that it flashes in the sun.

"Or shall we rejoice? The scepter of my son despises every tree." This line is hard, and translations differ. The best explanation is that the people were saying, Shall we rejoice? Judah's royal scepter

is safe. Jacob had promised that the scepter would not depart from Judah (Genesis 49:10), and God calls Israel His son (Exodus 4:22). They thought God's promise to David meant no harm could come to them. The answer is that this sword despises every tree, every rod or scepter. It treats the scepter of Judah like any other stick of wood. Another reading takes the "scepter" as the rod of God's discipline that has no regard for any lesser rod. Either way, the point is that Judah's royal line would not protect her from this sword.

"And he gave it to be polished, to be grasped in the palm; it has been sharpened, the sword, and it has been polished, to give it into the hand of the slayer." God prepared the sword, and He hands it to the slayer, the king of Babylon. Babylon was the hand, but the sword was God's.

21:12-13 *Cry out and wail, son of man, for it is against My people; it **is** against all the princes of Israel; thrown to the sword they are with My people; therefore strike **your** thigh. For it has been tested; and what if even the scepter that despises shall not be? declares the Lord GOD.*

"Cry out and wail, son of man, for it is against My people; it is against all the princes of Israel." The sword was not aimed at Israel's enemies this time. It was aimed at God's own people and their leaders. "Therefore strike your thigh." Striking the thigh was a sign of deep grief and shame (Jeremiah 31:19).

"For it has been tested; and what if even the scepter that despises shall not be?" The sword had been tried and proven. The second half of the verse is again hard. It seems to mean: what if the proud scepter of Judah, which despised God's warnings, comes to an end? And that is exactly what would happen. In verse 27 God says the crown will be removed.

21:14-17 *And you, son of man, prophesy, and strike palm to palm, and let the sword be doubled, the third **time**, the sword of the slain; it **is** the sword of the great slain **one**, which surrounds them, so that **the** heart may melt and the stumblings be multiplied; at all their gates I have set the slaughter of the sword. Ah! It is made for lightning, wrapped for slaughter. Be sharp, go to the right; set **yourself**, go to the left, wherever your face is appointed. And I also, I will strike My palm to My palm, and I will cause My rage to rest; I, the LORD, have spoken."*

"And you, son of man, prophesy, and strike palm to palm." Clapping the hands here is not applause. It was a gesture of anger or of calling for action, like a man urging on an attack (6:11). "And let the sword be doubled, the third time." The sword strikes again and again. "It is the sword of the great slain one, which surrounds them." There is no way out.

"At all their gates I have set the slaughter of the sword." The city gates were the place of safety and of business. Now death waits at every gate. "Ah! It is made for lightning, wrapped for slaughter."

"Be sharp, go to the right; set yourself, go to the left, wherever your face is appointed." God speaks to the sword itself, sending it wherever He directs.

"And I also, I will strike My palm to My palm, and I will cause My rage to rest; I, the LORD, have spoken." God Himself claps His hands as the sign to strike. When the judgment is complete, His anger will come to rest.

This song is hard to read. It is meant to be. Judah had heard warnings in gentle words for years, and they did not listen. Sometimes God speaks loudly because we would not hear Him when He spoke softly. Hebrews 10:31 says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But the same God who drew the sword against Jerusalem would one day let the sword fall on His own Son for our sake (Zechariah 13:7; Matthew 26:31).

21:18-20 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "And you, son of man, make for yourself two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to come; from one land both of them shall go out. And carve a marker; at the head of the way to a city carve* ***it****. A way you shall make for the sword to come to Rabbah of the sons of Ammon, and to Judah, into fortified Jerusalem.*

"And you, son of man, make for yourself two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to come; from one land both of them shall go out." Ezekiel was to draw a map, perhaps on a clay tablet or in the dust, as he did in chapter 4. One road came out of Babylon and then split in two. "And carve a marker; at the head of the way to a city carve it." He was to put up a signpost at the fork.

"A way you shall make for the sword to come to Rabbah of the sons of Ammon, and to Judah, into fortified Jerusalem." Rabbah was the capital of Ammon, east of the Jordan River, where Amman, the capital of Jordan, stands today. Both Judah and Ammon had joined in plotting against Babylon (Jeremiah 27:3). Nebuchadnezzar had to decide which one to attack first.

21:21-23 *For the king of Babylon has stood at the mother of the way, at the head of the two ways, to divine* ***by*** *divination; he has shaken the arrows, he has inquired of the teraphim, he has looked at the liver. In his right* ***hand*** *was the divination* ***for*** *Jerusalem: to set battering rams, to open* ***the*** *mouth in killing, to raise* ***the*** *voice with a war cry, to set battering rams against the gates, to pour out a mound, to build a siege wall. And it shall be to them like divining falsehood in their eyes; oaths of oaths* ***are*** *theirs; and he brings iniquity to remembrance, that they may be seized.*

"For the king of Babylon has stood at the mother of the way, at the head of the two ways, to divine by divination." The "mother of the way" is the fork in the road. Nebuchadnezzar did what pagan kings did. He asked his gods which way to go, using three methods.

"He has shaken the arrows." This was a kind of lot. Arrows marked with names were shaken in a quiver, and the first one drawn out gave the answer. "He has inquired of the teraphim." Teraphim were household idols (Genesis 31:19). "He has looked at the liver." Babylonian priests killed an animal and studied the shape and marks of its liver to read the will of their gods. Clay models of livers used for this have been found by archaeologists.

"In his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem." The right hand was the place of the favorable answer. The lot fell on Jerusalem. Then Ezekiel describes the siege: "to set battering rams," to shout the war cry, to build the siege mound and the siege wall.

Did God speak through pagan divination? No. God condemns divination (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). But God rules over everything, even the lots of pagan kings. "Into the lap the lot is thrown, and from the LORD is its every judgment" (Proverbs 16:33). Nebuchadnezzar thought his gods were guiding him. In fact, the LORD was steering him to Jerusalem.

"And it shall be to them like divining falsehood in their eyes." The people of Jerusalem would not believe the omen. They thought it was a false reading. They trusted in their treaties, "oaths of oaths are theirs," perhaps the oaths they had sworn with Egypt, or the oath Zedekiah had sworn to Babylon and broken (17:13-19). "And he brings iniquity to remembrance, that they may be seized." The king of Babylon would remember their broken oath and come to punish it.

21:24 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have brought your iniquity to remembrance, in your transgressions being uncovered, so that your sins are seen in all your deeds, because you have been remembered, you shall be seized by the palm.*

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have brought your iniquity to remembrance, in your transgressions being uncovered, so that your sins are seen in all your deeds." Jerusalem's sins were out in the open. They had not been hidden. "Because you have been remembered, you shall be seized by the palm." They would be taken in hand, captured.

Our sins are never truly hidden. Moses told Israel, "know your sin, that it will find you" (Numbers 32:23). The only safe place for sin is under the blood of Christ, where God Himself says He will remember it no more (Hebrews 8:12).

21:25-27 *And you, O profane, wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come, in the time of the iniquity of the end, thus says the Lord GOD: Remove the turban, and take off the crown; this **shall** not **be** this; exalt the low **one**, and bring low the exalted **one**. A ruin, a ruin, a ruin I will make it; this also has not been, until he comes to whom the judgment **belongs**, and I will give it.*

"And you, O profane, wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come, in the time of the iniquity of the end." This is Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. God calls him profane, meaning he treated holy things as common. He had sworn an oath in God's name and broken it (17:19). His day had come, the time when his iniquity would bring the end.

"Remove the turban, and take off the crown." The crown was the sign of the king. The word for turban here is the same word used for the turban of the high priest in the law (Exodus 28:4, 37). Some teachers think it simply means a royal headdress here. Others see both offices being stripped away together, priest and king, which would not be held by one man again until the Messiah came. Zechariah promised that the Branch would be "a priest on his throne" (Zechariah 6:13), and Hebrews shows that Jesus is our great high priest after the order of Melchizedek, who was both king and priest (Hebrews 7:1-3, 17).

"This shall not be this." Things will not stay as they are. "Exalt the low one, and bring low the exalted one." Zedekiah, proud on his throne, would be brought low. God brings down the proud and lifts up the humble, as He said in 17:24.

"A ruin, a ruin, a ruin I will make it." In Hebrew, saying something three times is the strongest way to say it. The throne of David in Jerusalem would be overturned completely. And it was. After Zedekiah, no king of David's line ruled in Jerusalem. Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, led the people back from exile, but he was a governor under Persia, not a king. For six hundred years the throne stood empty.

"This also has not been, until he comes to whom the judgment belongs, and I will give it." This is the promise. The throne would stay overturned until a certain One comes. The word for judgment here, mishpat, means justice, the right to judge and to rule. The throne belongs to Him, and God will give it to Him.

These words sound very much like Jacob's blessing on Judah long before: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, and the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him will be the obedience of peoples" (Genesis 49:10). The meaning of the name Shiloh has been debated for centuries. Many Jewish and Christian teachers have understood it to mean the one to whom it belongs. If so, Ezekiel 21:27 is Ezekiel's echo of Genesis 49:10. Either way, both verses speak of one King from Judah who has the right to rule and to whom the peoples will give obedience.

Who is He? I believe He is Jesus Christ. He is the Son of David according to the flesh (Romans 1:3). The angel told Mary, "the Lord God will give Him the throne of David His father" (Luke 1:32). Notice how close that is to Ezekiel's "and I will give it." God the Father gives the throne to His Son. Revelation calls Him "the Lion who is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (Revelation 5:5). He is the King with the right to judge: the Father "has given all the judgment to the Son" (John 5:22).

Jesus came the first time as the humble One, "the low one" whom God exalts. He was rejected and crucified, and God raised Him and gave Him the name above every name (Philippians 2:8-11). He now reigns at the Father's right hand. And I believe He will return in glory to sit on David's throne in Jerusalem and rule the nations, as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:16), in His thousand-year kingdom and forever. "Of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33).

Zedekiah wore a crown he had no right to keep, and he lost it. Jesus wore a crown of thorns, and God gave Him the crown that is rightfully His. Every other ruler borrows his authority. Jesus alone has it by right. Have you given Him the throne of your own life? He has the right to it.

21:28-29 *And you, son of man, prophesy, and you shall say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the sons of Ammon and concerning their reproach,' and you shall say, 'A sword, a sword is drawn; for slaughter **it is** polished, to contain **it**, because of **its** lightning, while they see worthlessness for you, while they divine a lie for you, to put you on the necks of the profane of the wicked, whose day has come, in the time of the iniquity of the end.*

Now God turns to the Ammonites. Nebuchadnezzar had chosen Jerusalem first, and the Ammonites may have thought they had escaped. They even mocked Judah in her fall (25:3, 6). God says they are next. "A sword, a sword is drawn; for slaughter it is polished." The same sword that fell on Jerusalem would fall on them.

"While they see worthlessness for you, while they divine a lie for you," Ammon had its own diviners and false prophets, who told them they were safe. But the sword would put them "on the necks of the profane of the wicked," that is, they would fall with the slain of Judah, "whose day has come."

21:30-32 *Put **it** back into its sheath! In the place where you were created, in the land of your origins, I will judge you. And I will pour out My indignation on you; with the fire of My wrath I will blow on you, and I will give you into the hand of brutish men, craftsmen of destruction. For the fire you shall be fuel; your blood shall be in the midst of the land; you shall not be remembered, for I, the LORD, have spoken.'"*

"Put it back into its sheath!" Some read this as God telling Ammon to stop resisting, since its sword is useless. Others read it as the sword of Babylon being put away after Ammon's judgment, because there would be no more need for it there.

"In the place where you were created, in the land of your origins, I will judge you." Israel was taken into exile and later brought back. Ammon would be judged in its own land and not be restored. "And I will give you into the hand of brutish men, craftsmen of destruction." "For the fire you shall be fuel; your blood shall be in the midst of the land; you shall not be remembered."

This came true. Ammon was conquered and later swallowed up by the peoples who moved into its land. Unlike Israel, which God promised to restore, the Ammonites as a nation disappeared from history. The name lives on only in the name of the city of Amman.

Why the difference? Not because Israel was better. Chapter 20 has made that clear. It was because God had made covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and He keeps His word. Israel was disciplined and will be restored. God's enemies are judged and do not come back. "For I, the LORD, have spoken."

Chapter 21 Summary

God answered the people's charge that Ezekiel only spoke parables by speaking plainly. He drew His sword against Jerusalem and the land of Israel, to cut off the righteous and the wicked in the judgment of war, and told Ezekiel to groan in public as a sign of the grief that would come with the news. A song of the sword described it sharpened and polished for slaughter, despising even the royal scepter of Judah, and placed in the hand of the slayer. Ezekiel drew a map of a fork in the road where the king of Babylon used arrows, idols and a liver to choose between Rabbah and Jerusalem, and the lot fell on Jerusalem because God was steering it. God told Zedekiah, the profane and wicked prince, to remove the turban and the crown, and said the throne would be "a ruin, a ruin, a ruin" until the One comes to whom the judgment belongs, and God will give it to Him. That One is Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who has the right to David's throne. Last, God said the sword would fall on the Ammonites too, who would be judged in their own land and not be remembered.

Chapter 21 Study Questions

1. How does chapter 21 explain the fire in the forest of 20:45-49? (21:1-3)

2. Why was Ezekiel told to groan in front of the people, and what news would make them feel the same way? (21:6-7; 33:21)

3. How is the sword described in 21:9-11, and whose hand is it really in?

4. What three methods did the king of Babylon use to decide where to go, and who was really guiding the outcome? (21:21-22; Proverbs 16:33)

5. What does God tell the "profane, wicked one, prince of Israel" to remove? (21:25-26)

6. What does "until he comes to whom the judgment belongs, and I will give it" mean, and how does it connect with Genesis 49:10? (21:27)

7. How do Luke 1:32-33 and Revelation 5:5 show that Jesus is the One with the right to the throne?

8. Why was Israel later restored while Ammon was "not remembered"? (21:32; chapter 20)

9. Ezekiel groaned over the judgment he had to announce. When you think about people who do not know Christ, do you grieve for them? How might that change the way you speak to them?

10. Jesus is the One "to whom the judgment belongs." Are there parts of your life where you have kept the crown for yourself? What would it look like to give Him the throne?

Chapter 22: The City of Bloodshed

Scripture

22:1-16 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "And you, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the city of bloodshed? Then you shall make known to it all its abominations. And you shall say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: A city shedding blood in its midst, so that its time comes, and it has made idols on itself to become unclean! By your blood which you have shed you have become guilty, and by your idols which you have made you have become unclean; and you have brought your days near, and you have come to your years. Therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations and a derision to all the lands. The ***ones*** near and the ***ones*** far from you shall deride you, unclean of name, great in turmoil. Look, the princes of Israel, each according to his arm, have been in you in order to shed blood. Father and mother they have treated with contempt in you; toward the sojourner they have acted with oppression in your midst; fatherless and widow they have mistreated in you. My holy things you have despised, and My Sabbaths you have profaned. Men of slander have been in you in order to shed blood; and on the mountains they have eaten in you; lewdness they have done in your midst. The nakedness of a father one has uncovered in you; the ***woman*** unclean in menstruation they have humiliated in you. And a man has done abomination with the wife of his neighbor, and a man has made his daughter-in-law unclean with lewdness, and a man has humiliated his sister, the daughter of his father, in you. A bribe they have taken in you in order to shed blood; interest and increase you have taken, and you have gained unjustly ***from*** your neighbors by oppression, and Me you have forgotten, declares the Lord GOD. And look, I have struck My palm at your unjust gain which you have made, and at your blood which has been in your midst. Will your heart endure, or will your hands be strong, in the days when I ***am*** dealing with you? I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will act. And I will disperse you among the nations and scatter you among the lands, and I will make an end of your uncleanness from you. And you shall be profaned through yourself in the eyes of the nations, and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD.'"

22:17-31 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "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 midst of a furnace; dross of silver they have become. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because all of you have become dross, therefore look, I ***am*** gathering you into the midst of Jerusalem. ***As*** the gathering of silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the midst of a furnace, to blow fire on it to melt so I will gather ***you*** in My anger and in My rage, and I will set ***you*** down and melt you. And I will collect you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst. Like the melting of silver in the midst of a furnace, so you shall be melted in its midst; and you shall know that I, the LORD, have poured out My rage on you." And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, say to it, 'You ***are*** a land that is not cleansed, not rained on in a day of indignation.' A conspiracy of its prophets ***is*** in its midst, like a roaring lion tearing prey; they have devoured souls; treasure and precious things they take; its widows they have multiplied in its midst. Its priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things; between the holy and the common they have not made a distinction, and between the unclean and the clean they have not made ***it*** known; and from My Sabbaths they have hidden their eyes, and I am

profaned in their midst. Its officials in its midst ***are*** like wolves tearing prey, to shed blood, to destroy souls, in order to gain unjust gain. And its prophets have plastered ***with*** whitewash for them, seeing worthlessness and divining a lie for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' and the LORD has not spoken. The people of the land have oppressed ***with*** oppression and robbed ***with*** robbery; and the poor and the needy they have mistreated, and the sojourner they have oppressed without justice. And I sought from among them a man building a wall and standing in the breach before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; and I did not find ***one***. And I have poured out My indignation on them; with the fire of My wrath I have consumed them; their way I have put on their head, declares the Lord GOD."

Chapter 22 Preview

In chapter 20 God told the story of Israel's past. In chapter 22 He reads out the charges against Jerusalem in the present. He calls it "the city of bloodshed" (22:2), and He lists its sins one after another: violence by its princes, contempt for parents, oppression of foreigners, widows and orphans, broken Sabbaths, sexual sin inside families, bribes and greed. And He sums up the root of it all in three words: "Me you have forgotten" (22:12).

The chapter has three messages. First, the charges (22:1-16). Second, a picture of a furnace where God will melt down His people like metal to burn out the dross (22:17-22). Third, a survey of every group in the land, prophets, priests, officials and common people, all of them corrupt (22:23-31). It ends with one of the saddest verses in the Bible. God looked for a man who would build up the wall and stand in the breach before Him for the land, so that He would not destroy it, "and I did not find one" (22:30). We will spend time on that verse, because God is still looking for such people today, and because it points us to the One Man who did stand in the breach for us.

Chapter 22 Study

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 city of bloodshed? Then you shall make known to it all its abominations. And you shall say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: A city shedding blood in its midst, so that its time comes, and it has made idols on itself to become unclean! By your blood which you have shed you have become guilty, and by your idols which you have made you have become unclean; and you have brought your days near, and you have come to your years. Therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations and a derision to all the lands. The* ***ones*** *near and the* ***ones*** *far from you shall deride you, unclean of name, great in turmoil.*

"And you, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the city of bloodshed? Then you shall make known to it all its abominations." As in 20:4, Ezekiel is called to bring the charges like a prosecutor. Jerusalem is "the city of bloodshed." Nahum called Nineveh by almost the same name (Nahum 3:1). The holy city had become like the cruelest pagan capital.

"A city shedding blood in its midst, so that its time comes, and it has made idols on itself to become unclean!" Two great sins run through the chapter: bloodshed, which is sin against people,

and idolatry, which is sin against God. They always go together. When people stop fearing God, they stop valuing human life, because every person is made in God's image (Genesis 9:6).

"You have brought your days near, and you have come to your years." By its sins Jerusalem was hurrying its own judgment. "Therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations and a derision to all the lands." The city that should have been a light to the nations (Isaiah 49:6) would become a joke among them, "unclean of name, great in turmoil."

22:6-12 *Look, the princes of Israel, each according to his arm, have been in you in order to shed blood. Father and mother they have treated with contempt in you; toward the sojourner they have acted with oppression in your midst; fatherless and widow they have mistreated in you. My holy things you have despised, and My Sabbaths you have profaned. Men of slander have been in you in order to shed blood; and on the mountains they have eaten in you; lewdness they have done in your midst. The nakedness of a father one has uncovered in you; the* ***woman*** *unclean in menstruation they have humiliated in you. And a man has done abomination with the wife of his neighbor, and a man has made his daughter-in-law unclean with lewdness, and a man has humiliated his sister, the daughter of his father, in you. A bribe they have taken in you in order to shed blood; interest and increase you have taken, and you have gained unjustly* ***from*** *your neighbors by oppression, and Me you have forgotten, declares the Lord GOD.*

Now come the charges, one by one. Many of them come straight from the law of Moses, especially Leviticus 18 to 20 and Exodus 22 to 23. Jerusalem had broken the very commands that made it God's people.

"Look, the princes of Israel, each according to his arm, have been in you in order to shed blood." The kings used their power, their "arm," to kill. Manasseh "shed very much innocent blood" until it filled Jerusalem from end to end (2 Kings 21:16), and Jehoiakim killed the prophet Uriah (Jeremiah 26:20-23).

"Father and mother they have treated with contempt in you." The fifth commandment says to honor your father and mother (Exodus 20:12). "Toward the sojourner they have acted with oppression in your midst; fatherless and widow they have mistreated in you." A sojourner was a foreigner living among Israel. God told Israel to protect sojourners, widows and orphans, because they had no one else to defend them (Exodus 22:21-22). How a society treats its weakest people shows what it thinks of God.

"My holy things you have despised, and My Sabbaths you have profaned." They treated the temple and its offerings as common, and they ignored the day God set apart.

"Men of slander have been in you in order to shed blood." Lies and false witness were used to get people killed, as Jezebel did to Naboth (1 Kings 21:10-13). "And on the mountains they have eaten in you," at idol feasts. "Lewdness they have done in your midst."

Verses 10 and 11 list sexual sins the law forbade (Leviticus 18:6-20; 20:10-21): sins with a father's wife, against a woman in her time of uncleanness, with a neighbor's wife, with a daughter-in-law,

and against a half-sister. I will not go into detail. The point is that sexual sin had broken down even the walls of the family. When the home is not safe, a society is near its end.

"A bribe they have taken in you in order to shed blood." Judges were paid to condemn the innocent (Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 27:25). "Interest and increase you have taken, and you have gained unjustly from your neighbors by oppression." The lenders squeezed the poor, the very thing the righteous man of 18:8 refused to do.

Then the root: "and Me you have forgotten, declares the Lord GOD." Every sin on the list grows from this one. They did not forget that God existed. They still had the temple. But they forgot Him in the way they lived. Moses had warned that when they were full and comfortable in the land, they would be tempted to forget the LORD (Deuteronomy 8:11-14). Is that a danger for us? It is. We can go to church, sing the songs and know the verses, and still live through the week as if God had nothing to say about how we treat our parents, our neighbors, our money and our bodies.

22:13-16 *And look, I have struck My palm at your unjust gain which you have made, and at your blood which has been in your midst. Will your heart endure, or will your hands be strong, in the days when I **am** dealing with you? I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will act. And I will disperse you among the nations and scatter you among the lands, and I will make an end of your uncleanness from you. And you shall be profaned through yourself in the eyes of the nations, and you shall know that I **am** the LORD.'"*

"And look, I have struck My palm at your unjust gain which you have made, and at your blood which has been in your midst." God claps His hands in anger, as in 21:17. He had seen every unjust coin and every drop of innocent blood.

"Will your heart endure, or will your hands be strong, in the days when I am dealing with you?" The people felt strong and secure. God asks whether their courage will hold when He acts. No one can stand against Him. "I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will act."

"And I will disperse you among the nations and scatter you among the lands, and I will make an end of your uncleanness from you." The exile would scatter them, and it would also cleanse them. After the exile, Israel never again fell into the open idolatry of these years.

"And you shall be profaned through yourself in the eyes of the nations." Jerusalem had profaned God's holy things. Now she herself would be treated as common in the eyes of the nations. "And you shall know that I am the LORD."

22:17-22 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "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 midst of a furnace; dross of silver they have become. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because all of you have become dross, therefore look, I **am** gathering you into the midst of Jerusalem. **As** the gathering of silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the midst of a furnace, to blow fire on it to melt **it**, so I will gather **you** in My anger and in My rage, and I will set **you** down and melt you. And I will collect you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst. Like the melting of silver in the midst of a furnace, so you shall be melted in its midst; and you shall know that I, the LORD, have poured out My rage on you."*

"Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me." Dross is the scum and waste that separates out when metal is melted. Silver ore was heated in a furnace so that the pure silver could be separated from the lead, copper and other metals mixed in it. Isaiah used the same picture: "Your silver has become dross" (Isaiah 1:22).

"All of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the midst of a furnace; dross of silver they have become." Israel was supposed to be silver, precious to God. Instead they had become the worthless leftovers.

"Therefore look, I am gathering you into the midst of Jerusalem." When the Babylonians came, people from all over Judah fled into Jerusalem for safety behind its walls. They thought the city would protect them. God says He is gathering them there like metal into a furnace. "So I will gather you in My anger and in My rage, and I will set you down and melt you." The siege would be the furnace, and the fire of God's wrath would blow on it.

"Like the melting of silver in the midst of a furnace, so you shall be melted in its midst; and you shall know that I, the LORD, have poured out My rage on you."

Notice that here the furnace seems to show that there was no silver left, only dross (22:18). That was the judgment on the city. But elsewhere God uses the refining fire to purify a remnant, and He promises to do that for Israel in the future (Zechariah 13:9; Malachi 3:2-3). And God uses trials in the lives of believers in the same way. Peter says our faith is tested by fire so that it may be found genuine, more precious than gold (1 Peter 1:6-7). The fire is not pleasant. But in God's hands it burns away what is worthless and leaves what is real.

22:23-24 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, say to it, 'You **are** a land that is not cleansed, not rained on in a day of indignation.'*

"Son of man, say to it." "You are a land that is not cleansed, not rained on in a day of indignation." In a dry land like Israel, rain was a sign of God's blessing (Deuteronomy 11:13-17). A land without rain was a land under God's displeasure. Jerusalem was not cleansed. Its sin had not been washed away, and no rain of blessing would fall on it in the day of God's anger.

Now God goes through every class of leaders and people, one by one, and every group is guilty.

22:25 *A conspiracy of its prophets **is** in its midst, like a roaring lion tearing prey; they have devoured souls; treasure and precious things they take; its widows they have multiplied in its midst.*

"A conspiracy of its prophets is in its midst, like a roaring lion tearing prey." The prophets should have been the conscience of the nation. Instead they banded together, perhaps to support each other's false messages of peace (13:10). They were like lions, devouring people. "They have devoured souls; treasure and precious things they take; its widows they have multiplied in its midst." They took money for their prophecies, and their false promises of safety led men to die in the war, leaving widows.

Some Hebrew manuscripts and the Greek translation read "princes" here instead of "prophets," which would fit verse 6 and the list that follows. The SLB follows the Hebrew text as most have it, and either way the leaders were the ones devouring the people.

22:26 *Its priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things; between the holy and the common they have not made a distinction, and between the unclean and the clean they have not made **it** known; and from My Sabbaths they have hidden their eyes, and I am profaned in their midst.*

"Its priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things." The priests' job was to teach God's law and guard what was holy. Ezekiel, a priest himself, felt this deeply. "Between the holy and the common they have not made a distinction, and between the unclean and the clean they have not made it known." That was the very thing God told Aaron and his sons to do (Leviticus 10:10-11). In the future temple, God says the priests will do it rightly (44:23).

"And from My Sabbaths they have hidden their eyes, and I am profaned in their midst." They looked the other way when the Sabbath was broken. When leaders stop teaching the difference between holy and common, the people soon forget there is any difference at all. The same thing happens in churches today when pastors stop teaching what God calls sin.

22:27-28 *Its officials in its midst **are** like wolves tearing prey, to shed blood, to destroy souls, in order to gain unjust gain. And its prophets have plastered **with** whitewash for them, seeing worthlessness and divining a lie for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' and the LORD has not spoken.*

"Its officials in its midst are like wolves tearing prey, to shed blood, to destroy souls, in order to gain unjust gain." The government officials were wolves. Jesus warned of the same kind of leaders, wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15), and of shepherds who do not care for the sheep (John 10:12).

"And its prophets have plastered with whitewash for them." The false prophets covered over the sins of the officials, like painting whitewash over a cracked wall (13:10-16). They were "seeing worthlessness and divining a lie for them," saying, "Thus says the Lord GOD," "and the LORD has not spoken." There is no worse lie than to put God's name on your own words.

22:29 *The people of the land have oppressed **with** oppression and robbed **with** robbery; and the poor and the needy they have mistreated, and the sojourner they have oppressed without justice.*

"The people of the land have oppressed with oppression and robbed with robbery." The common people were no better. They followed their leaders' example. "And the poor and the needy they have mistreated, and the sojourner they have oppressed without justice."

From the top to the bottom, prophets, priests, officials and people, the whole nation was corrupt. Jeremiah was told to search the streets of Jerusalem to see if he could find even one man who did justice and sought faithfulness (Jeremiah 5:1). The answer was the same as here.

22:30 *And I sought from among them a man building a wall and standing in the breach before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; and I did not find **one**.*

"And I sought from among them a man building a wall and standing in the breach before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; and I did not find one."

Many Bibles put it as God looking for a man to stand in the gap. The picture is of a city wall that has been broken open. When an enemy breaks through a city wall, the city is lost unless someone rebuilds the wall or stands in the opening and holds the line. In 13:5 God rebuked the false prophets because they had not gone up into the breaches or built a wall around the house of Israel. Here, the enemy at the breach is not only Babylon. It is God's own judgment coming in through the broken wall of Israel's sin. God was looking for someone to stand in the breach "before Me," to stand between the people and His wrath.

What would such a man do? Two things, I believe. First, he would build the wall. He would call the people back to God's law, rebuild what sin had broken down, and live a righteous life in front of them. Second, he would stand in the breach before God. He would pray for the people, confess their sin, and plead for mercy. That is intercession, praying on behalf of others.

The Bible gives us examples. When Israel made the golden calf, God said He would destroy them, "had not Moses His chosen one stood in the breach before Him, to turn back His wrath from destroying" (Psalm 106:23; Exodus 32:9-14). Abraham pleaded for Sodom (Genesis 18:22-33). Aaron ran with his censer and stood between the dead and the living, and the plague stopped (Numbers 16:46-48). Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stopped (Psalm 106:30). Samuel said, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you (1 Samuel 12:23).

But in Jerusalem, God "did not find one." What about Jeremiah? He was there, and he did pray. But God had told Jeremiah not to pray for this people, because the time for that prayer had passed (Jeremiah 7:16; 14:11; 15:1). In Jeremiah 15:1 God said that even if Moses and Samuel stood before Him, His heart would not turn toward this people. Ezekiel 14:14 said that even Noah, Daniel and Job could save only themselves. The point of 22:30 is that among the leaders and people of the land there was no one who could turn the nation back. The few faithful ones could not hold back a judgment that the whole nation had chosen for centuries.

This verse says two things to us.

First, God still looks for people who will stand in the breach. He is not looking for perfect people. He is looking for people who care enough about their families, their churches and their nation to pray for them and to live rightly in front of them. "The prayer of a righteous man, being at work, prevails much" (James 5:16). Paul urges that prayers be made for all people, for kings and all in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2). You may feel small. But God has always worked through one person who would stand in the gap. Is there a breach in your home, your church or your town where God is calling you to pray and to build?

Second, and most of all, this verse points us to Jesus Christ. Isaiah saw the same emptiness: "And He saw that there was no man, and He was appalled that there was no one to intercede; and His own arm brought salvation to Him" (Isaiah 59:16). When God found no man to stand in the breach, He sent His own Son. Jesus is the Man who stood between a holy God and a guilty world. He did not just pray for us. He took the wrath that was coming through the breach on Himself at the cross. "For there is one God, and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). And He still stands there. "He is also able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, always living to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:25). If you belong to Christ, Someone has stood in the breach for you, and He will never step away.

22:31 *And I have poured out My indignation on them; with the fire of My wrath I have consumed them; their way I have put on their head, declares the Lord GOD."*

"And I have poured out My indignation on them; with the fire of My wrath I have consumed them." God speaks as if the judgment has already happened. It was so certain that He could speak of it in the past tense. "Their way I have put on their head, declares the Lord GOD." They received what their own way had earned. God's judgment was not random. It was the harvest of what they had planted (Galatians 6:7).

Jerusalem fell because no one stood in the breach. We are saved because Someone did.

Chapter 22 Summary

God told Ezekiel to judge "the city of bloodshed" and make known its abominations. Jerusalem had shed innocent blood and made idols, and it had brought its own day of judgment near. Its princes used their power to kill; its people despised their parents, oppressed foreigners, widows and orphans, despised God's holy things and Sabbaths, slandered to shed blood, ate at idol feasts, broke down the walls of the family with sexual sin, took bribes and interest, and forgot God. God would scatter them among the nations and end their uncleanness. He pictured Israel as dross, the waste of silver, and said He would gather them into Jerusalem as into a furnace and melt them in His wrath. Then He named every group: prophets who devoured souls like lions and covered sin with whitewash, priests who did not teach the difference between holy and common, officials who were wolves, and people who robbed the poor. God looked for a man to build the wall and stand in the breach before Him for the land, and He found no one, so He poured out His wrath. That verse calls us to pray and to stand for righteousness, and it points to Jesus, the one Mediator, who stood in the breach for us.

Chapter 22 Study Questions

1. What does God call Jerusalem in 22:2, and what two kinds of sin does He name first? (22:2-4)

2. List some of the ways the people of Jerusalem mistreated others in 22:6-12. Which of the Ten Commandments did they break?

3. What does God say is the root of all their sins? (22:12)

4. What is dross, and what does the picture of the furnace mean for Jerusalem? (22:18-22)

5. What did each group, prophets, priests, officials and people, do wrong? (22:25-29)

6. What was God looking for in 22:30, and what would such a person do?

7. How did Moses stand in the breach for Israel? (Psalm 106:23; Exodus 32:9-14)

8. How does Jesus fulfill what God could not find in 22:30? (Isaiah 59:16; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25)

9. God said, "Me you have forgotten." Are there areas of your week where you live as if God has nothing to say? What would remembering Him look like there?

10. Is there a "breach" in your family, church or community where God may be calling you to pray and to build? Who could you begin praying for this week?

Chapter 23: The Two Sisters, Oholah and Oholibah

Scripture

23:1-10 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, ***there*** were two women, the daughters of one mother. And they played the prostitute in Egypt; in their youth they played the prostitute; there their breasts were pressed, and there they squeezed the nipples of their virginity. And their names ***were*** Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister; and they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. And ***as for*** their names: Samaria ***is*** Oholah, and Jerusalem ***is*** Oholibah. And Oholah played the prostitute ***while*** under Me, and she lusted after her lovers, after Assyria, ***those*** near, clothed ***in*** blue, governors and prefects, desirable young men all of them, horsemen riding horses. And she bestowed her prostitutions on them, the choicest of the sons of Assyria, all of them; and with all after whom she lusted, with all their idols, she made herself unclean. And her prostitutions from Egypt she did not forsake, for they had lain with her in her youth, and they had squeezed the nipples of her virginity and poured out their prostitution on her. Therefore I gave her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the sons of Assyria, after whom she had lusted. They uncovered her nakedness; her sons and her daughters they took, and her they killed with the sword; and she became a name among women, and they executed judgments on her.

23:11-21 And her sister Oholibah saw ***it***, and she made her lust more corrupt than she, and her prostitutions more than the harlotries of her sister. After the sons of Assyria she lusted, governors and prefects, ***those*** near, clothed ***in*** perfection, horsemen riding horses, desirable young men all of them. And I saw that she had made herself unclean; one way ***was*** for both of them. And she added to her prostitutions; and she saw men carved on the wall, images of the Chaldeans engraved in vermilion, girded ***with*** a belt on their hips, ***with*** overhanging turbans on their heads, the appearance of officers, all of them, the likeness of the sons of Babylon, Chaldeans ***being*** the land of their birth. And she lusted after them at the sight of her eyes, and she sent messengers to them, to ***the*** Chaldeans. And the sons of Babylon came to her, to the bed of love, and they made her unclean with their prostitution; and she became unclean with them, and her soul was wrenched away from them. And she uncovered her prostitutions and uncovered her nakedness; and My soul was wrenched away from her, just as My soul had been alienated from her sister. And she multiplied her prostitutions, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the prostitute in the land of Egypt. And she lusted after their paramours, whose flesh ***is*** the flesh of donkeys, and whose emission ***is*** the emission of horses. And you sought the lewdness of your youth, when ***those*** from Egypt squeezed your nipples on account of the breasts of your youth.

23:22-35 Therefore, Oholibah, thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** rousing your lovers against you, ***those*** from whom your soul was alienated, and I will bring them against you from all around: the sons of Babylon and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, all the sons of Assyria with them, desirable young men, governors and prefects all of them, officers and called ***ones***, riding horses all of them. And they shall come against you ***with*** weapons, chariots and wheels, and with an assembly of peoples; large shield and shield and helmet they shall set against you all around; and I will set judgment before them, and they shall judge you according to their judgments. And I will set My jealousy against you, and they shall deal with you in rage; your nose

and your ears they shall remove, and the rest of you shall fall by the sword; they shall take your sons and your daughters, and the rest of you shall be devoured by the fire. And they shall strip you of your clothes and take away the articles of your beauty. And I will make your lewdness cease from you, and your harlotry from the land of Egypt; and you shall not lift up your eyes to them, and Egypt you shall not remember again. For thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** giving you into the hand of ***those*** whom you hate, into the hand of ***those*** from whom your soul was alienated. And they shall deal with you in hatred and take all your labor and leave you naked and bare; and the nakedness of your harlotries shall be uncovered, and your lewdness and your prostitutions. ***They will*** do these ***things*** to you because you played the prostitute after ***the*** nations, because you made yourself unclean with their idols. In the way of your sister you have walked; and I will put her cup into your hand. Thus says the Lord GOD: The cup of your sister you shall drink, the deep and the wide; it shall be for laughter and for derision, much to contain. With drunkenness and sorrow you shall be filled; a cup of horror and desolation ***is*** the cup of your sister Samaria. And you shall drink it and drain ***it***, and its shards you shall gnaw, and your breasts you shall tear out; for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, so you also, bear your lewdness and your prostitutions."

23:36-49 And the LORD said to me, "Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations. For they have committed adultery, and blood ***is*** on their hands; and with their idols they have committed adultery; and also their sons whom they bore to Me they have made pass through to them for food. Moreover, this they have done to Me: they have made My sanctuary unclean on that day, and My Sabbaths they have profaned. And when they had slaughtered their sons to their idols, they came into My sanctuary on that day to profane it; and look, thus they have done in the midst of My house. And moreover, they sent for men coming from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and look, they came, for whom you bathed, painted your eyes, and adorned ***yourself with*** ornaments. And you sat on a glorious couch, and a table ***was*** arranged before it, and My incense and My oil you set on it. And the sound of a multitude at ease ***was*** in her; and to men from the multitude of mankind Sabeans were brought from the wilderness; and they put bracelets on their hands and a crown of beauty on their heads. And I said of the ***one*** worn out ***with*** adulteries, 'Now they will play the prostitute ***with*** her prostitutions, and she ***too***.' And ***one*** went in to her as ***one*** goes in to a woman, a prostitute; so they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah, the women of lewdness. And righteous men, they shall judge them ***with*** the judgment of adulteresses and the judgment of ***women who*** shed blood; for they ***are*** adulteresses, and blood ***is*** on their hands. For thus says the Lord GOD: Bring up an assembly against them, and give them over to terror and to plunder. And the assembly shall stone them ***with*** stones and cut them down with their swords; their sons and their daughters they shall kill, and their houses they shall burn with fire. And I will make lewdness cease from the land, and all the women shall be warned and shall not do according to your lewdness. And they shall put your lewdness on you, and the sins of your idols you shall bear; and you shall know that I ***am*** the Lord GOD."

Chapter 23 Preview

Chapter 23 is a companion to chapter 16, and it is just as hard to read. God tells the story of two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah. He tells us plainly who they are: "Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem is Oholibah" (23:4). They are the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Both belonged to God, and both were unfaithful to Him. Chapter 16 focused mainly on idolatry. Chapter 23 focuses mainly on foreign alliances: the way Israel and Judah ran after Egypt, Assyria and Babylon, trusting in their armies and taking up their gods, instead of trusting in the LORD.

As in chapter 16, the Bible uses the picture of an unfaithful wife, and Ezekiel's language is blunt because the sin was ugly. I will explain the picture plainly and modestly, without going into its details, and leaders will want to read the chapter ahead of time and decide how much to read aloud. The lesson is simple and serious. Samaria went after the nations and was destroyed by them in 722 B.C. Jerusalem saw it happen and did worse. So she would drink the same cup. And the sin that ran under it all is named in one sentence: "you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back" (23:35).

Chapter 23 Study

23:1-4 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man,* ***there*** *were two women, the daughters of one mother. And they played the prostitute in Egypt; in their youth they played the prostitute; there their breasts were pressed, and there they squeezed the nipples of their virginity. And their names* ***were*** *Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister; and they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. And* ***as for*** *their names: Samaria* ***is*** *Oholah, and Jerusalem* ***is*** *Oholibah.*

"Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother." The mother is the one nation of Israel, from which both kingdoms came when the kingdom divided about 930 B.C.

"And they played the prostitute in Egypt; in their youth they played the prostitute." Their unfaithfulness began early, in Egypt, before they ever reached the promised land. Ezekiel has already said this in 20:7-8: they would not throw away the idols of Egypt. The golden calf, made soon after the exodus, may well have copied the bull gods Israel had seen in Egypt (Exodus 32:1-4). Ezekiel's next words describe that early unfaithfulness in the strong language of a girl who gave herself away too young. I will not repeat it.

"And their names were Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister." The names come from the Hebrew word for tent, ohel. Oholah means her tent, and Oholibah means my tent is in her. Many teachers see a meaning here. Samaria set up her own places of worship at Bethel and Dan, apart from God's temple (1 Kings 12:26-33). She had her own tent. Jerusalem had God's tent, His temple, in her midst. That made her unfaithfulness worse.

"And they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters." God took them as His own in covenant at Sinai. The sons and daughters are their people.

"Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem is Oholibah." God explains the picture Himself, so we do not have to guess. Samaria is called the elder because the northern kingdom was larger, as in 16:46.

23:5-10 *And Oholah played the prostitute **while** under Me, and she lusted after her lovers, after Assyria, **those** near, clothed **in** blue, governors and prefects, desirable young men all of them, horsemen riding horses. And she bestowed her prostitutions on them, the choicest of the sons of Assyria, all of them; and with all after whom she lusted, with all their idols, she made herself unclean. And her prostitutions from Egypt she did not forsake, for they had lain with her in her youth, and they had squeezed the nipples of her virginity and poured out their prostitution on her. Therefore I gave her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the sons of Assyria, after whom she had lusted. They uncovered her nakedness; her sons and her daughters they took, and her they killed with the sword; and she became a name among women, and they executed judgments on her.*

"And Oholah played the prostitute while under Me, and she lusted after her lovers, after Assyria." While she was still bound to God in covenant, Samaria went after Assyria. The kings of the northern kingdom paid tribute to Assyria and made treaties with it. King Jehu bowed before the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, and King Menahem paid a thousand talents of silver to Pul, the king of Assyria, to keep his throne (2 Kings 15:19-20). Hosea, who preached in the north, said Ephraim was like a silly dove, calling to Egypt and going to Assyria (Hosea 7:11).

Why does Ezekiel describe the Assyrians as "clothed in blue, governors and prefects, desirable young men all of them, horsemen riding horses"? Because that is how Assyria looked to a small kingdom: powerful, rich, impressive, glamorous. Israel was drawn by the outward glory of the world's strongest empire. "And with all after whom she lusted, with all their idols, she made herself unclean." The alliance brought the gods of Assyria with it. You could not take the protection of a great king without honoring his gods.

"And her prostitutions from Egypt she did not forsake." Samaria also kept running to Egypt. Her last king, Hoshea, sent messengers to the king of Egypt and stopped paying tribute to Assyria, and that brought the end (2 Kings 17:4).

"Therefore I gave her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the sons of Assyria, after whom she had lusted." The very nation Samaria courted destroyed her. "Her sons and her daughters they took, and her they killed with the sword." Assyria besieged Samaria for three years, and in 722 B.C. the city fell and its people were carried away (2 Kings 17:5-6). "And she became a name among women," a byword among the nations, "and they executed judgments on her."

This is how sin works. The thing we run to instead of God becomes the thing that ruins us.

23:11-21 *And her sister Oholibah saw **it**, and she made her lust more corrupt than she, and her prostitutions more than the harlotries of her sister. After the sons of Assyria she lusted, governors and prefects, **those** near, clothed **in** perfection, horsemen riding horses, desirable young men all of them. And I saw that she had made herself unclean; one way **was** for both of them. And she added to her prostitutions; and she saw men carved on the wall, images of the Chaldeans engraved in vermilion, girded **with** a belt on their hips, **with** overhanging turbans on their heads, the appearance of officers, all of them, the likeness of the sons of Babylon, Chaldeans **being** the land of their birth. And she lusted after them at the sight of her eyes, and she sent messengers to them, to **the** Chaldeans. And the sons of Babylon came to her, to the bed of love, and they made her unclean with their prostitution; and she became unclean with them, and her soul was wrenched away from them. And she uncovered her prostitutions and uncovered her nakedness; and My soul was wrenched away from her, just as My soul had been alienated from her sister. And she multiplied her prostitutions, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the prostitute in the land of Egypt. And she lusted after their paramours, whose flesh **is** the flesh of donkeys, and whose emission **is** the emission of horses. And you sought the lewdness of your youth, when **those** from Egypt squeezed your nipples on account of the breasts of your youth.*

"And her sister Oholibah saw it, and she made her lust more corrupt than she." Jerusalem watched Samaria fall. She had every warning she could need. And she did worse. Jeremiah said the same: Judah saw what happened to Israel and was not afraid (Jeremiah 3:6-10).

"After the sons of Assyria she lusted." King Ahaz of Judah sent silver and gold to the king of Assyria and asked for his help against his enemies, saying, I am your servant and your son. Then he went to Damascus to meet the Assyrian king, copied an altar he saw there, and put it in the temple of the LORD (2 Kings 16:7-18). "And I saw that she had made herself unclean; one way was for both of them."

"And she added to her prostitutions; and she saw men carved on the wall, images of the Chaldeans engraved in vermilion." Vermilion is a bright red paint. The Babylonians decorated their palace walls with painted carvings of their officers and soldiers, in fine belts and tall turbans. Jerusalem did not even need to see the Babylonians in person. She saw their pictures, and she wanted them. "And she lusted after them at the sight of her eyes, and she sent messengers to them, to the Chaldeans." King Hezekiah proudly showed his treasures to the envoys from Babylon (2 Kings 20:12-19), and later kings sought Babylon's favor.

How often does sin begin with the eyes? Eve saw that the fruit was a delight to the eyes (Genesis 3:6). Achan saw, coveted and took (Joshua 7:21). David saw from the roof (2 Samuel 11:2). John warns us of "the lust of the eyes" (1 John 2:16). What we look at and admire shapes what we want.

"And the sons of Babylon came to her." Judah became Babylon's vassal. "And her soul was wrenched away from them." Then Jerusalem turned against Babylon. Jehoiakim rebelled after three years (2 Kings 24:1), and Zedekiah broke his oath (17:15). But turning away from one lover only meant running to another. In verse 19 she went back to Egypt, "remembering the days of her youth, when she played the prostitute in the land of Egypt." Ezekiel's language in verses 20 and 21

is coarse on purpose, to show how degrading her chase after Egypt's power had become. The point is that Judah's longing for Egypt's horses and armies was shameful.

"And My soul was wrenched away from her, just as My soul had been alienated from her sister." This is the saddest line in this section. God turned away from her in grief and disgust, as a husband turns from a wife who has betrayed him again and again.

23:22-27 *Therefore, Oholibah, thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** rousing your lovers against you, **those** from whom your soul was alienated, and I will bring them against you from all around: the sons of Babylon and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, all the sons of Assyria with them, desirable young men, governors and prefects all of them, officers and called **ones**, riding horses all of them. And they shall come against you **with** weapons, chariots and wheels, and with an assembly of peoples; large shield and shield and helmet they shall set against you all around; and I will set judgment before them, and they shall judge you according to their judgments. And I will set My jealousy against you, and they shall deal with you in rage; your nose and your ears they shall remove, and the rest of you shall fall by the sword; they shall take your sons and your daughters, and the rest of you shall be devoured by the fire. And they shall strip you of your clothes and take away the articles of your beauty. And I will make your lewdness cease from you, and your harlotry from the land of Egypt; and you shall not lift up your eyes to them, and Egypt you shall not remember again.*

"Therefore, Oholibah, thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I am rousing your lovers against you." As with Samaria, the nations Jerusalem courted would become her destroyers. "The sons of Babylon and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, all the sons of Assyria with them." Pekod, Shoa and Koa were peoples in and around Babylonia. By this time Assyria had fallen, and its lands and soldiers were part of Babylon's empire.

"And they shall come against you with weapons, chariots and wheels, and with an assembly of peoples." The Babylonian army was made up of many nations. "And I will set judgment before them, and they shall judge you according to their judgments." God handed Jerusalem over to be judged by the harsh standards of the pagans she admired. She wanted to be like them, so she would be treated as they treated their enemies.

Verse 25 describes the cruelties that ancient armies practiced on captives, including cutting off noses and ears. I mention it only so we understand that God was not inventing new cruelties. He was letting Jerusalem fall into the hands of the very nations she had trusted, and those nations did what they always did. "They shall take your sons and your daughters, and the rest of you shall be devoured by the fire."

"And they shall strip you of your clothes and take away the articles of your beauty." As in 16:39, this pictures the city stripped of all its wealth and glory. The Babylonians carried off the treasures of the temple and the palace and burned the city (2 Kings 25:9-17).

"And I will make your lewdness cease from you, and your harlotry from the land of Egypt; and you shall not lift up your eyes to them, and Egypt you shall not remember again." The judgment

would cure her. After the exile, the Jews never again went chasing after foreign gods the way they had before.

23:28-35 *For thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** giving you into the hand of **those** whom you hate, into the hand of **those** from whom your soul was alienated. And they shall deal with you in hatred and take all your labor and leave you naked and bare; and the nakedness of your harlotries shall be uncovered, and your lewdness and your prostitutions. **They will** do these **things** to you because you played the prostitute after **the** nations, because you made yourself unclean with their idols. In the way of your sister you have walked; and I will put her cup into your hand. Thus says the Lord GOD: The cup of your sister you shall drink, the deep and the wide; it shall be for laughter and for derision, much to contain. With drunkenness and sorrow you shall be filled; a cup of horror and desolation **is** the cup of your sister Samaria. And you shall drink it and drain **it**, and its shards you shall gnaw, and your breasts you shall tear out; for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, so you also, bear your lewdness and your prostitutions."*

"Look, I am giving you into the hand of those whom you hate, into the hand of those from whom your soul was alienated." She had turned against Babylon, but she would fall into Babylon's hand. "And they shall deal with you in hatred and take all your labor and leave you naked and bare." Everything she had worked for would be taken.

"They will do these things to you because you played the prostitute after the nations, because you made yourself unclean with their idols." God names the sin plainly so we cannot miss what the picture means: chasing after the nations and their idols.

"In the way of your sister you have walked; and I will put her cup into your hand." In the Bible, a cup is often a picture of God's judgment, poured out for the guilty to drink (Psalm 75:8; Jeremiah 25:15-17). "The cup of your sister you shall drink, the deep and the wide; it shall be for laughter and for derision, much to contain. With drunkenness and sorrow you shall be filled; a cup of horror and desolation is the cup of your sister Samaria." Jerusalem would drink the same cup Samaria drank, and drain it to the bottom.

Here I want to point to something wonderful. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matthew 26:39). What cup? The cup of God's wrath against sin. Jesus drank that cup for us, to the bottom, on the cross. Because He drank it, everyone who trusts in Him will never have to.

"Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, so you also, bear your lewdness and your prostitutions." Here is the root again, as in 22:12. They forgot God. They threw Him behind their back, like something you do not want to look at. That is what unfaithfulness to God really is. It is not first a matter of what we run to, but of whom we turn our back on.

23:36-42 *And the LORD said to me, "Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations. For they have committed adultery, and blood* ***is*** *on their hands; and with their idols they have committed adultery; and also their sons whom they bore to Me they have made pass through to them for food. Moreover, this they have done to Me: they have made My sanctuary unclean on that day, and My Sabbaths they have profaned. And when they had slaughtered their sons to their idols, they came into My sanctuary on that day to profane it; and look, thus they have done in the midst of My house. And moreover, they sent for men coming from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and look, they came, for whom you bathed, painted your eyes, and adorned* ***yourself with*** *ornaments. And you sat on a glorious couch, and a table* ***was*** *arranged before it, and My incense and My oil you set on it. And the sound of a multitude at ease* ***was*** *in her; and to men from the multitude of mankind Sabeans were brought from the wilderness; and they put bracelets on their hands and a crown of beauty on their heads.*

"Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations." In this last section, God gathers up both sisters' sins again.

"For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands; and with their idols they have committed adultery." Here God says plainly what the adultery is: idolatry. "And also their sons whom they bore to Me they have made pass through to them for food." They sacrificed their children to idols, as in 16:20-21. I will not say more about it, except what I said there: I believe little children who die are safe with God (2 Samuel 12:23).

"Moreover, this they have done to Me: they have made My sanctuary unclean on that day, and My Sabbaths they have profaned. And when they had slaughtered their sons to their idols, they came into My sanctuary on that day to profane it." This is shocking. On the same day they killed their children for an idol, they walked into God's temple to worship, as if nothing had happened. They tried to serve the LORD and the idols at the same time. Jeremiah described the same people stealing, murdering and burning incense to Baal, and then coming to stand before God in His house and saying, We are delivered (Jeremiah 7:9-10). God says, "and look, thus they have done in the midst of My house."

That kind of double life is still possible. A person can sit in church on Sunday and serve other gods the rest of the week. Jesus said no one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

In verses 40 to 42, Ezekiel pictures the sisters preparing for guests. They "sent for men coming from afar," bathed, painted their eyes, and put on ornaments. She sat on a glorious couch with a table spread, "and My incense and My oil you set on it." This pictures Jerusalem sending envoys to foreign powers and welcoming them with every honor, using the very things God had given for His worship. The "sound of a multitude at ease" was the noise of a careless crowd, and men were brought from the wilderness, who put bracelets and crowns on the sisters, as if to reward them.

23:43-49 *And I said of the **one** worn out **with** adulteries, 'Now they will play the prostitute **with** her prostitutions, and she **too**.' And **one** went in to her as **one** goes in to a woman, a prostitute; so they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah, the women of lewdness. And righteous men, they shall judge them **with** the judgment of adulteresses and the judgment of **women who** shed blood; for they **are** adulteresses, and blood **is** on their hands. For thus says the Lord GOD: Bring up an assembly against them, and give them over to terror and to plunder. And the assembly shall stone them **with** stones and cut them down with their swords; their sons and their daughters they shall kill, and their houses they shall burn with fire. And I will make lewdness cease from the land, and all the women shall be warned and shall not do according to your lewdness. And they shall put your lewdness on you, and the sins of your idols you shall bear; and you shall know that I **am** the Lord GOD."*

"And I said of the one worn out with adulteries." Jerusalem was worn out by her sin, yet she kept going. That is what sin does. It wears us out, and still we go back to it.

In verse 44 Ezekiel sums up the sisters' behavior once more in the plain language of the picture. Then comes the verdict. "And righteous men, they shall judge them with the judgment of adulteresses and the judgment of women who shed blood; for they are adulteresses, and blood is on their hands." The "righteous men" are most likely those who carry out God's righteous sentence, here the nations He used to judge. The sentence is the one the law gave for adultery and murder (Leviticus 20:10; Numbers 35:31).

"Bring up an assembly against them, and give them over to terror and to plunder. And the assembly shall stone them with stones and cut them down with their swords." As in 16:40-41, this is the language of the law's penalty, and it describes what really happened when armies destroyed Samaria and then Jerusalem: the people killed, the houses burned.

I want to say plainly here what I said in chapter 16, because it matters just as much. This is a picture of the fall of two cities, told in the terms of a marriage covenant broken by the wife. It shows how serious idolatry and trusting in the world are to God. It is not a pattern for how any man may treat his wife. Scripture commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25), and to live with them in an understanding way and honor them (1 Peter 3:7). No one may use this chapter to excuse abuse. In this picture, God is the faithful one, and the nations who carried out the sentence were not righteous in themselves; God used them in judgment, and later He judged them too (chapters 25 to 32).

"And I will make lewdness cease from the land, and all the women shall be warned and shall not do according to your lewdness." The other nations, pictured as women, would learn from what happened. "And they shall put your lewdness on you, and the sins of your idols you shall bear; and you shall know that I am the Lord GOD."

Chapter 23 does not end with the promise of restoration, as chapter 16 does. But we already know from 16:60-63 how the story ends. God will remember His covenant. And through the cup Jesus drank, the unfaithful can be forgiven. James says that friendship with the world is hostility toward God (James 4:4), yet he also says God gives more grace, and "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

Chapter 23 Summary

God told the story of two sisters, daughters of one mother, who were unfaithful to Him from their youth in Egypt. Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem. Both became God's, but Oholah ran after Assyria, dazzled by its power, and took up its idols, and kept running to Egypt, so God gave her into the hand of Assyria, which destroyed her in 722 B.C. Oholibah saw it and did worse. She ran after Assyria, then after Babylon when she saw their images on the wall, then turned from Babylon back to Egypt. So God would rouse her lovers, the armies of Babylon and its peoples, against her, to judge her by their own harsh ways and strip her of everything. She would drink her sister's cup of horror and desolation, because she had forgotten God and cast Him behind her back. Both sisters committed adultery with idols, sacrificed their children, and on the same day came into God's sanctuary to profane it. They would be judged as adulteresses and murderers, and their lewdness would come to an end. The picture shows how seriously God takes idolatry and trust in the world, and it reminds us that Jesus drank the cup of judgment so the unfaithful could be forgiven.

Chapter 23 Study Questions

1. Who are Oholah and Oholibah, and who explains the picture? (23:4)

2. Where did the sisters' unfaithfulness begin? (23:3; 20:7-8)

3. What drew Oholah to Assyria, and what did the alliance bring with it? (23:5-7)

4. What happened to Oholah, and why is it fitting that her lovers destroyed her? (23:9-10; 2 Kings 17:5-6)

5. What did Oholibah see happen to her sister, and how did she respond? (23:11)

6. How did Oholibah's desire for Babylon begin? What does that teach about the eyes and sin? (23:14-16; 1 John 2:16)

7. What is the "cup" Jerusalem would drink, and how does Jesus' prayer in Matthew 26:39 relate to it? (23:31-34)

8. What did the sisters do in God's sanctuary on the same day they sinned against their children? (23:38-39)

9. God says, "you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back" (23:35). What are some ways people turn their backs on God while still keeping up a religious life? Do you see any of them in yourself?

10. Israel and Judah trusted in powerful nations instead of God. What are you tempted to trust in for security? How can you turn that trust back to Him? (James 4:4, 8)

Chapter 24: The Boiling Pot and the Death of Ezekiel's Wife

Scripture

24:1-14 And the word of the LORD came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, saying, "Son of man, write for yourself the name of the day, this very day. The king of Babylon has leaned against Jerusalem on this very day. And speak a parable to the house of rebellion, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Set on the pot, set ***it*** on, and also pour water into it. Gather its pieces into it, every good piece, thigh and shoulder; fill ***it with*** the choicest of the bones. Take the choicest of the flock, and also pile the bones under it; make its boiling boil; also its bones have boiled in its midst. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Woe ***to*** the city of bloodshed, the pot whose rust ***is*** in it, and whose rust has not gone out of it! By its pieces, by its pieces bring it out; no lot has fallen on it. For its blood has been in its midst; on a bare rock it put it; it did not pour it out on the ground to cover it over ***with*** dust. To stir up rage, to avenge vengeance, I have put its blood on a bare rock, so that it is not covered. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Woe ***to*** the city of bloodshed! I also will make the pile great. Multiply the wood, kindle the fire, consume the flesh, and mix the seasoning, and let the bones be burned. And set it empty on its coals, so that it may grow hot, and its bronze may burn, and its uncleanness be melted in its midst, its rust be consumed. It has wearied ***itself with*** toils, and its great rust does not go out of it; in fire ***is*** its rust. In your uncleanness ***is*** lewdness. Because I cleansed you, and you were not clean, from your uncleanness you shall not be clean again until I bring My rage to rest on you. I, the LORD, have spoken; it is coming, and I will act. I will not let ***it*** go, and I will not pity, and I will not relent; according to your ways and according to your deeds they have judged you, declares the Lord GOD.'"

24:15-27 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, look, I ***am*** taking from you the desire of your eyes with a stroke; and you shall not lament, and you shall not weep, and your tears shall not come. Groan, be silent; mourning ***for the*** dead you shall not make; bind your turban on yourself, and your sandals you shall put on your feet, and you shall not cover over ***your*** mustache, and the bread of men you shall not eat." And I spoke to the people in the morning, and my wife died in the evening; and I did in the morning as I had been commanded. And the people said to me, "Will you not tell us what these ***things are*** to us, that you ***are*** doing ***them***?" And I said to them, "The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** profaning My sanctuary, the pride of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and the compassion of your soul; and your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind shall fall by the sword. And you shall do just as I have done: you shall not cover over ***your*** mustache, and the bread of men you shall not eat. And your turbans ***shall be*** on your heads, and your sandals on your feet; you shall not lament, and you shall not weep; and you shall waste away in your iniquities and groan, each to his brother. And Ezekiel shall be a portent for you; according to all that he has done you shall do; when it comes, you shall know that I ***am*** the Lord GOD."'" "And you, son of man, ***will it*** not ***be*** on the day when I take from them their stronghold, the joy of their beauty, the desire of their eyes, and the lifting up of their soul, their sons and their daughters, ***that*** on that day the escapee shall come to you to make ***your*** ears hear ***it***? On that day

your mouth shall be opened with the escapee, and you shall speak and be mute no more; and you shall be a portent for them, and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD."

Chapter 24 Preview

Chapter 24 brings the first half of Ezekiel to a close. On one exact day, the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year of the exile, about 588 B.C., God told Ezekiel to write down the date, because on that very day the king of Babylon had laid siege to Jerusalem. Ezekiel was hundreds of miles away in Babylon, with no way of knowing it except by the word of the LORD. 2 Kings 25:1 gives the same date for the start of the siege. Then God gave him a parable of a rusty cooking pot set on the fire. Jerusalem was the pot, and the people inside thought they were safe like meat in a pot. But the fire would burn until the pot itself was empty and its rust was burned away.

Then comes one of the most personal and painful passages in the Bible. God told Ezekiel that He was about to take "the desire of your eyes" (24:16), and that evening Ezekiel's wife died. God told him not to mourn in public, as a sign to the people. When the temple, the desire of their eyes, was destroyed, they would be too stunned to mourn as well. This is a hard passage, and we will read it slowly. It shows us a real man who loved his wife and lost her, a God who does not hide from us what it cost, and a sign that the end had come. The chapter ends with a promise: when a survivor from Jerusalem arrived with the news, Ezekiel's mouth would be opened (24:27). That happens in 33:21-22.

Chapter 24 Study

24:1-2 *And the word of the LORD came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, saying, "Son of man, write for yourself the name of the day, this very day. The king of Babylon has leaned against Jerusalem on this very day.*

"And the word of the LORD came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month." Counting from Jehoiachin's exile in 597 B.C., this is about 588 B.C., in the winter. Jeremiah 52:4 and 2 Kings 25:1 give the same day as the day Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem and built siege works around it. The Jews remembered this day for generations with a fast (Zechariah 8:19, "the fast of the tenth").

"Son of man, write for yourself the name of the day, this very day. The king of Babylon has leaned against Jerusalem on this very day." Why write it down? So that when the news came from Jerusalem months later, the exiles could check the date and see that God had told Ezekiel on the very day it happened. Messages took weeks or months to travel from Jerusalem to Babylon. Ezekiel's written date would be proof that this was the word of the LORD and not a guess.

God knows what is happening everywhere, at every moment. Nothing that happens to His people is hidden from Him (Psalm 139:1-12).

24:3-5 *And speak a parable to the house of rebellion, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Set on the pot, set **it** on, and also pour water into it. Gather its pieces into it, every good piece, thigh and shoulder; fill **it with** the choicest of the bones. Take the choicest of the flock, and also pile the bones under it; make its boiling boil; also its bones have boiled in its midst.*

"And speak a parable to the house of rebellion." "Set on the pot, set it on, and also pour water into it." This picks up a saying we heard in 11:3, where the leaders of Jerusalem boasted that the city was the pot and they were the meat. They meant that they were the choice pieces, safe inside the walls like meat inside an iron pot. God now turns their own picture against them.

"Gather its pieces into it, every good piece, thigh and shoulder; fill it with the choicest of the bones." The choice pieces are the leading people of Jerusalem and the many who fled into the city for safety. "Take the choicest of the flock, and also pile the bones under it; make its boiling boil." The pot would not keep them safe. It would cook them. The siege would be the fire.

24:6-8 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Woe **to** the city of bloodshed, the pot whose rust **is** in it, and whose rust has not gone out of it! By its pieces, by its pieces bring it out; no lot has fallen on it. For its blood has been in its midst; on a bare rock it put it; it did not pour it out on the ground to cover it over **with** dust. To stir up rage, to avenge vengeance, I have put its blood on a bare rock, so that it is not covered.*

"Woe to the city of bloodshed, the pot whose rust is in it, and whose rust has not gone out of it!" Here the picture changes. The pot itself is crusted with rust or corrosion that will not come off. This is Jerusalem's guilt, built up over the years, the "city of bloodshed" of chapter 22.

"By its pieces, by its pieces bring it out; no lot has fallen on it." The pieces would be taken out one by one, without choosing. No lot would be cast to spare some. Everyone in the city would share in the judgment, whether killed or carried away.

"For its blood has been in its midst; on a bare rock it put it; it did not pour it out on the ground to cover it over with dust." The law said that when an animal's blood was shed, it should be poured on the ground and covered with dust (Leviticus 17:13). Blood left uncovered was thought to cry out, as Abel's blood cried out to God from the ground (Genesis 4:10). Jerusalem did not even try to hide the innocent blood it shed. It left it in the open, on a bare rock, as if it did not care who saw.

"To stir up rage, to avenge vengeance, I have put its blood on a bare rock, so that it is not covered." Because Jerusalem did not cover the blood, God would not cover it either. It would stay before His eyes and call for justice.

24:9-14 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Woe **to** the city of bloodshed! I also will make the pile great. Multiply the wood, kindle the fire, consume the flesh, and mix the seasoning, and let the bones be burned. And set it empty on its coals, so that it may grow hot, and its bronze may burn, and its uncleanness be melted in its midst, its rust be consumed. It has wearied **itself with** toils, and its great rust does not go out of it; in fire **is** its rust. In your uncleanness **is** lewdness. Because I cleansed you, and you were not clean, from your uncleanness you shall not be clean again until I bring My rage to rest on you. I, the LORD, have spoken; it is coming, and I will act. I will not let **it** go, and I will not pity, and I will not relent; according to your ways and according to your deeds they have judged you, declares the Lord GOD.'"*

"Woe to the city of bloodshed! I also will make the pile great." God Himself piles on the wood. "Multiply the wood, kindle the fire, consume the flesh, and mix the seasoning, and let the bones be burned."

"And set it empty on its coals, so that it may grow hot, and its bronze may burn, and its uncleanness be melted in its midst, its rust be consumed." After the meat is gone, the empty pot is left on the fire to burn off the rust. After the people were taken, the city itself would be burned. Nebuchadnezzar's commander burned the temple, the palace and every great house in Jerusalem and broke down its walls (2 Kings 25:9-10).

"It has wearied itself with toils, and its great rust does not go out of it; in fire is its rust." Nothing else had worked. "Because I cleansed you, and you were not clean, from your uncleanness you shall not be clean again until I bring My rage to rest on you." God had tried to cleanse Jerusalem again and again through the prophets, through the reforms of good kings like Hezekiah and Josiah, and through lesser judgments. But the rust kept coming back. Only the fire would do it now.

"I, the LORD, have spoken; it is coming, and I will act. I will not let it go, and I will not pity, and I will not relent." These are some of the strongest words of finality in the book. The time for turning back the judgment was over.

"According to your ways and according to your deeds they have judged you." It was the harvest of what they had sown.

Is there a warning for us? Yes. God is patient for a long time, but His patience is meant to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4). There can come a point when a heart that keeps refusing to be cleansed is left to the fire. Today is the day to come to Him (Hebrews 3:15).

24:15-17 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, look, I **am** taking from you the desire of your eyes with a stroke; and you shall not lament, and you shall not weep, and your tears shall not come. Groan, be silent; mourning **for the** dead you shall not make; bind your turban on yourself, and your sandals you shall put on your feet, and you shall not cover over **your** mustache, and the bread of men you shall not eat."*

"And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Son of man, look, I am taking from you the desire of your eyes with a stroke."

Here the book becomes very personal. "The desire of your eyes" is Ezekiel's wife. We know almost nothing about her, not even her name. But we know what she was to him. God Himself calls her the desire of his eyes, the one he loved to look at, the delight of his life. Ezekiel was not a cold man. He loved his wife.

"With a stroke" means a sudden blow. She would die suddenly. The same word is used for a plague, but here it simply means a sudden death from the hand of God.

Then came the hardest part of the command. "And you shall not lament, and you shall not weep, and your tears shall not come. Groan, be silent." In Israel, when someone died, the family mourned in public. They wailed loudly, took off their turbans and sandals, covered the lower part of their face, and ate the food that friends and neighbors brought to them (Jeremiah 16:7; Micah 3:7). Ezekiel was told to do none of this. "Bind your turban on yourself, and your sandals you shall put on your feet, and you shall not cover over your mustache, and the bread of men you shall not eat." He was to dress as on any normal day. He could "groan" quietly, "be silent," but he was not to hold a public funeral.

This does not mean Ezekiel felt no grief, or that God forbade him to feel it. God told him to "groan," and that shows his grief was real. What God forbade was the public rites of mourning. His grief was to be held inside, silent, so that the people would see something was terribly wrong.

24:18 *And I spoke to the people in the morning, and my wife died in the evening; and I did in the morning as I had been commanded.*

"And I spoke to the people in the morning, and my wife died in the evening; and I did in the morning as I had been commanded."

This is one of the shortest and saddest verses in the Bible. Ezekiel does not describe his feelings. He just tells us what happened. In the morning, he preached. In the evening, his wife died. The next morning, he obeyed.

We should not read this quickly. Think of what it cost him. He had already given up his priestly service in Jerusalem, his home and his voice for more than four years. Now God asked him to give up his wife, and even the comfort of mourning her openly. He did it. I do not believe Ezekiel's obedience means he did not hurt. I believe it means he trusted God with his hurt.

Why would God do this? Scripture does not tell us everything. It does not say Ezekiel's wife died because of any sin. She may have been ill. God may simply have told Ezekiel ahead of time what was going to happen, and used it. What Scripture does tell us is that God used even this sorrow for a purpose: to make His people see what was coming. Ezekiel's whole life had become a message.

If you have lost a husband or wife, this passage may be hard to read. I want to say clearly that God does not ask you to hold back your tears. Ezekiel's silence was a one-time sign for a particular moment in Israel's history. It is not a pattern for us. Jesus wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus, even knowing He was about to raise him (John 11:35). Paul tells believers not to grieve as those who have no hope, but he does not tell us not to grieve (1 Thessalonians 4:13). God is "near to the

broken of heart" (Psalm 34:18). He keeps our tears (Psalm 56:8), and one day He will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:4). Grief is not a lack of faith. It is the price of love.

24:19-24 *And the people said to me, "Will you not tell us what these **things are** to us, that you **are** doing **them**?" And I said to them, "The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** profaning My sanctuary, the pride of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and the compassion of your soul; and your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind shall fall by the sword. And you shall do just as I have done: you shall not cover over **your** mustache, and the bread of men you shall not eat. And your turbans **shall be** on your heads, and your sandals on your feet; you shall not lament, and you shall not weep; and you shall waste away in your iniquities and groan, each to his brother. And Ezekiel shall be a portent for you; according to all that he has done you shall do; when it comes, you shall know that I **am** the Lord GOD."'"*

"And the people said to me, Will you not tell us what these things are to us, that you are doing them?" The people knew Ezekiel's wife had died. When they saw him go out in his turban and sandals, not mourning, they knew it had to be a sign. They asked what it meant for them.

Ezekiel answered with God's word. "Look, I am profaning My sanctuary, the pride of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and the compassion of your soul." Notice the words "the desire of your eyes." The same words God used for Ezekiel's wife, He now uses for the temple. As Ezekiel's wife was the delight of his eyes, the temple was the delight of the people's eyes. It was their pride, the thing they trusted in, the thing they loved. God would let it be profaned and destroyed. "And your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind shall fall by the sword." Many of the exiles had family still in Jerusalem.

"And you shall do just as I have done." When the news came, they would not mourn in the usual way either. "And your turbans shall be on your heads, and your sandals on your feet; you shall not lament, and you shall not weep." Why not? Some think it means the grief would be too deep for the usual rites, so that they would be stunned into silence. Others think it means that, as captives in a foreign land, they would not be free to mourn openly. Either way, the shock would be so great that the ordinary customs would fail. "And you shall waste away in your iniquities and groan, each to his brother." They would quietly waste away, and their groaning would be the groaning of guilt, as they realized their sin had brought this.

"And Ezekiel shall be a portent for you." A portent is a sign of something to come. This is one of only two places in the book where Ezekiel's name appears (the other is 1:3). Here, at the deepest point of his own sorrow, God names him. "According to all that he has done you shall do; when it comes, you shall know that I am the Lord GOD."

God does not stand far off from the grief He asks His servants to bear. Ezekiel's loss pictured the loss God Himself felt over His house and His people. The prophets show us a God who grieves (Hosea 11:8). And one day God would give up the One He loved most, His own Son, so that we would not be lost (Romans 8:32).

24:25-27 *"And you, son of man, **will it** not **be** on the day when I take from them their stronghold, the joy of their beauty, the desire of their eyes, and the lifting up of their soul, their sons and their daughters, **that** on that day the escapee shall come to you to make **your** ears hear **it**? On that day your mouth shall be opened with the escapee, and you shall speak and be mute no more; and you shall be a portent for them, and they shall know that I **am** the LORD."*

"And you, son of man, will it not be on the day when I take from them their stronghold, the joy of their beauty, the desire of their eyes, and the lifting up of their soul, their sons and their daughters." Again, the temple and their children, everything they loved, would be taken.

"That on that day the escapee shall come to you to make your ears hear it?" A survivor would escape from Jerusalem and bring the news to Babylon. "On that day your mouth shall be opened with the escapee, and you shall speak and be mute no more."

Ever since his call, Ezekiel had been unable to speak freely except when God gave him a message (3:26-27). That silence would end when the news arrived. Chapter 33:21-22 tells us it happened just as God said. The escapee arrived and said, "The city has been struck," and the evening before, the hand of the LORD came on Ezekiel and opened his mouth.

"And you shall be a portent for them, and they shall know that I am the LORD." When the city fell, and Ezekiel's mouth was opened, the people would know that every word Ezekiel had spoken was from God.

The first half of Ezekiel ends here. From chapter 25 to 32, Ezekiel speaks to the nations around Israel. When we come back to Israel in chapter 33, the news has come, and Ezekiel's message turns from judgment to hope. The fire had done its work. Now God would begin to rebuild.

Chapter 24 Summary

On the day the king of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem, about 588 B.C., God told Ezekiel to write down the date as proof that the word was from Him. He gave a parable of a pot filled with choice meat and set on a fire. Jerusalem was the pot, crusted with the rust of its bloodshed, which it had left uncovered on a bare rock. The meat would be taken out piece by piece, and the empty pot left on the coals until its rust was burned away, because God had tried to cleanse it and it would not be clean. Then God told Ezekiel He would take the desire of his eyes, his wife, with a sudden blow, and that he was not to mourn in public. She died that evening, and the next morning Ezekiel obeyed. When the people asked what it meant, he told them that God would profane His sanctuary, the desire of their eyes, and their children would fall by the sword, and they too would be too stunned to mourn. Ezekiel was a sign to them. When the escapee came with the news, Ezekiel's mouth would be opened, and the people would know that God had spoken.

Chapter 24 Study Questions

1. Why did God tell Ezekiel to write down the date in 24:2? (2 Kings 25:1)

2. What saying from 11:3 does the parable of the pot turn around? What did the people think the pot would do for them? (24:3-5)

3. What is the "rust" in the pot, and why does God say He put its blood on a bare rock? (24:6-8)

4. Why would the pot be set empty on the coals? (24:11-13)

5. What does God call Ezekiel's wife, and what does that tell us about him? (24:16)

6. What exactly did God forbid Ezekiel to do, and what did He still allow? (24:16-17)

7. What was "the desire of your eyes" for the people, and what would happen to it? (24:21)

8. What would happen when the escapee came, and where do we see it fulfilled? (24:26-27; 33:21-22)

9. Ezekiel trusted God with a loss he could not understand. Is there a loss in your life you are still carrying? What comfort do John 11:35 and Psalm 34:18 give you?

10. The people loved the temple more than the God of the temple. Is there something good in your life that you might be loving more than God? How can you hold it with an open hand?

Chapter 25: Against Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia

Scripture

25:1-17 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face toward the sons of Ammon, and prophesy against them. And you shall say to the sons of Ammon, 'Hear the word of the Lord GOD. Thus says the Lord GOD: Because you said, "Aha!" over My sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the soil of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when they went into exile, therefore look, I ***am*** giving you to the sons of the east for a possession, and they shall set up their encampments in you and make their dwellings in you; they shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk. And I will make Rabbah a pasture of camels, and the sons of Ammon a resting place of flocks; and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. For thus says the Lord GOD: Because you clapped ***your*** hand and stamped with ***your*** foot, and rejoiced with all your scorn in ***your*** soul over the soil of Israel, therefore look, I have stretched out My hand against you, and I will give you as plunder to the nations, and I will cut you off from the peoples and make you perish from the lands; I will destroy you, and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD.' Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Moab and Seir said, 'Look, the house of Judah ***is*** like all the nations,' therefore look, I ***am*** opening the shoulder of Moab from the cities, from its cities, from its frontier, the beauty of the land, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and to Kiriathaim, to the sons of the east, along with the sons of Ammon; and I will give it for a possession, so that the sons of Ammon shall not be remembered among the nations. And on Moab I will execute judgments, and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Edom acted by avenging vengeance on the house of Judah, and they have surely become guilty and have avenged themselves on them, therefore thus says the Lord GOD: And I will stretch out My hand against Edom and cut off from it man and animal, and I will make it a desolation; from Teman and to Dedan they shall fall by the sword. And I will put My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel, and they shall do in Edom according to My anger and according to My rage; and they shall know My vengeance, declares the Lord GOD. Thus says the Lord GOD: Because the Philistines acted in vengeance and avenged themselves ***with*** vengeance with scorn in ***the*** soul, to destroy ***with*** everlasting enmity, therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** stretching out My hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Kerethites and make the remnant of the coast of the sea perish. And I will execute great vengeance on them with rebukes of rage; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, when I put My vengeance on them."

Chapter 25 Preview

With chapter 25, Ezekiel turns from Israel to the nations. Chapters 25 to 32 are messages against seven nations: Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia (chapter 25), Tyre (26 to 28), Sidon (28) and Egypt (29 to 32). Most of them were given around the time of Jerusalem's siege and fall. Their place in the book is important. They come between the announcement that the siege had begun (24:1-2) and the news that the city had fallen (33:21). While the exiles waited for that terrible news, God told them that He was not only the God of Israel. He ruled over all the nations, and He would hold them to account too.

Chapter 25 deals with Israel's four nearest neighbors, two to the east, one to the south, and one to the west. Each message follows the same simple pattern: because you did this, therefore I will do that, and you shall know that I am the LORD. Their sin was the way they treated Judah in her day of disaster. They laughed, they mocked, and they took revenge. God had promised Abraham, "the one who disdains you I will curse" (Genesis 12:3), and these messages show Him keeping that promise. They also show that God does not take pleasure when His people's enemies gloat over their fall, even when the fall is His own judgment.

Chapter 25 Study

25:1-5 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face toward the sons of Ammon, and prophesy against them. And you shall say to the sons of Ammon, 'Hear the word of the Lord GOD. Thus says the Lord GOD: Because you said, "Aha!" over My sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the soil of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when they went into exile, therefore look, I* ***am*** *giving you to the sons of the east for a possession, and they shall set up their encampments in you and make their dwellings in you; they shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk. And I will make Rabbah a pasture of camels, and the sons of Ammon a resting place of flocks; and you shall know that I* ***am*** *the LORD.*

"Son of man, set your face toward the sons of Ammon, and prophesy against them." The Ammonites lived east of the Jordan River, with their capital at Rabbah, where Amman, the capital of Jordan, stands today. They came from Lot, Abraham's nephew (Genesis 19:38), so they were relatives of Israel. But they had been enemies for centuries. In 21:28-32 we saw that the sword of Babylon would come to them too.

What was their sin? God says they said "Aha!" "over My sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the soil of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when they went into exile." Aha is the sound of someone gloating. When the temple was burned, the land destroyed and the people carried away, the Ammonites cheered. Notice God's words: "My sanctuary." By mocking the temple, they were mocking the LORD.

"Therefore look, I am giving you to the sons of the east for a possession." The sons of the east were the desert tribes from the Arabian desert beyond Ammon. "They shall set up their encampments in you and make their dwellings in you; they shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk." The nomads would move into Ammon's land and live off it.

"And I will make Rabbah a pasture of camels." The capital city would become a place where camels graze. And the land of Ammon would be "a resting place of flocks." The proud cities would be empty land where shepherds bring their flocks to rest. "And you shall know that I am the LORD." Even Israel's enemies would learn who the true God is, by His judgments if not by His mercy.

This came true. Ammon was conquered by Babylon a few years after Jerusalem fell, and over the following centuries Arab tribes moved into its land. The Ammonites as a people disappeared from history.

25:6-7 *For thus says the Lord GOD: Because you clapped **your** hand and stamped with **your** foot, and rejoiced with all your scorn in **your** soul over the soil of Israel, therefore look, I have stretched out My hand against you, and I will give you as plunder to the nations, and I will cut you off from the peoples and make you perish from the lands; I will destroy you, and you shall know that I **am** the LORD.'*

"Because you clapped your hand and stamped with your foot, and rejoiced with all your scorn in your soul over the soil of Israel." The Ammonites did not just say Aha. They clapped and stomped their feet for joy. Their contempt came from deep in their hearts, "with all your scorn in your soul."

"Therefore look, I have stretched out My hand against you, and I will give you as plunder to the nations, and I will cut you off from the peoples and make you perish from the lands; I will destroy you, and you shall know that I am the LORD."

Why is gloating such a serious sin? Because it takes pleasure in another person's pain. Proverbs warns, "When your enemy falls, do not rejoice, and when he stumbles, let your heart not be joyful" (Proverbs 24:17). Judah's fall was God's judgment on Judah's sin. But that did not give Ammon the right to celebrate. God disciplines His people, but He takes no delight in their pain (Lamentations 3:31-33). Anyone who cheers when God's people suffer will answer to Him.

It is easy to feel a quiet satisfaction when someone we dislike falls. A coworker who wronged us gets in trouble, or a public figure we disagree with is disgraced. This passage warns us to watch our hearts. Love "does not rejoice over unrighteousness" (1 Corinthians 13:6).

25:8-11 *Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Moab and Seir said, 'Look, the house of Judah **is** like all the nations,' therefore look, I **am** opening the shoulder of Moab from the cities, from its cities, from its frontier, the beauty of the land, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and to Kiriathaim, to the sons of the east, along with the sons of Ammon; and I will give it for a possession, so that the sons of Ammon shall not be remembered among the nations. And on Moab I will execute judgments, and they shall know that I **am** the LORD.*

"Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Moab" and its neighbor said, "Look, the house of Judah is like all the nations." Moab lived east of the Dead Sea, south of Ammon. The Moabites also came from Lot (Genesis 19:37). The other name in the verse is Seir, the mountain country of Edom, south of Moab.

What was Moab's sin? It was a statement of contempt: Judah is just like everyone else. Israel claimed to be the chosen people of the one true God. Now that Jerusalem had fallen, Moab said, You see? Their God is no different from ours. Their claim was empty. It was an insult to Judah and to the LORD.

Was Moab right? In one sense, Judah had become like the nations in its sin (5:7; 20:32). But Moab was wrong about God. His people were disciplined, not destroyed. He still had a plan for them that no other nation had. Paul says that the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29).

"Therefore look, I am opening the shoulder of Moab from the cities." The shoulder is the side of Moab's land, its frontier with its strong cities on the high ground. God names three of them, "Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and to Kiriathaim," the glory of the land. They would be laid open to invaders. Moab would be given to the sons of the east along with Ammon.

"And on Moab I will execute judgments, and they shall know that I am the LORD." Moab, like Ammon, was conquered and later faded from history. Isaiah 15 and 16 and Jeremiah 48 also prophesied against Moab.

25:12-14 *Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Edom acted by avenging vengeance on the house of Judah, and they have surely become guilty and have avenged themselves on them, therefore thus says the Lord GOD: And I will stretch out My hand against Edom and cut off from it man and animal, and I will make it a desolation; from Teman and to Dedan they shall fall by the sword. And I will put My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel, and they shall do in Edom according to My anger and according to My rage; and they shall know My vengeance, declares the Lord GOD.*

"Because Edom acted by avenging vengeance on the house of Judah, and they have surely become guilty and have avenged themselves on them." Edom lived south of the Dead Sea. The Edomites came from Esau, Jacob's twin brother (Genesis 36:1), so they were the closest relatives Israel had. But there had been bitterness between them since the days of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27:41), and it never healed.

When Jerusalem fell, Edom took revenge. The psalmist remembered how the sons of Edom cried out, "Lay it bare, lay it bare, to the foundation in it!" (Psalm 137:7). Obadiah tells us that on the day strangers entered Jerusalem's gates, Edom "also were like one of them" (Obadiah 11). They stood at the crossroads to cut off those who escaped and handed them over (Obadiah 14). Edom will appear again in chapter 35, where God speaks against Mount Seir at more length.

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: And I will stretch out My hand against Edom and cut off from it man and animal, and I will make it a desolation; from Teman and to Dedan they shall fall by the sword." Teman was in the north of Edom and Dedan to the south, so this means the whole land.

"And I will put My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel." This is different from the other nations. God would use Israel itself to judge Edom. History shows a partial fulfillment of this. Several centuries later, the Edomites were driven out of their land by Arab peoples and moved into the south of Judah, where they were called Idumeans. About 125 B.C., the Jewish ruler John Hyrcanus conquered them and made them part of the Jewish nation. The prophets also speak of a future day when Israel will be restored and the house of Jacob will be a fire and "the house of Esau for stubble" (Obadiah 18; Isaiah 11:14). Some teachers see a final fulfillment in the last days.

"And they shall know My vengeance, declares the Lord GOD." Vengeance belongs to God. Paul quotes the law, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" (Romans 12:19, from Deuteronomy 32:35). That is why we should not take revenge ourselves. Edom took vengeance into its own hands, and God

took vengeance on Edom. When we are wronged, we can leave it with God, who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23).

25:15-17 *Thus says the Lord GOD: Because the Philistines acted in vengeance and avenged themselves **with** vengeance with scorn in **the** soul, to destroy **with** everlasting enmity, therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** stretching out My hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Kerethites and make the remnant of the coast of the sea perish. And I will execute great vengeance on them with rebukes of rage; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD, when I put My vengeance on them."*

"Because the Philistines acted in vengeance and avenged themselves with vengeance with scorn in the soul, to destroy with everlasting enmity." The Philistines lived on the coast west of Judah. They had been Israel's enemies since the days of the judges, Samson, Saul and David. Their hatred was "everlasting enmity," an old hatred that never let go. When Judah was weak, they took the chance to strike (2 Chronicles 28:18).

"Look, I am stretching out My hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Kerethites and make the remnant of the coast of the sea perish." The Kerethites were a group of Philistines or a people closely linked to them, probably from the island of Crete (1 Samuel 30:14; Zephaniah 2:5). The Hebrew has a play on words: God will cut off (hikrati) the Kerethites (keretim).

"And I will execute great vengeance on them with rebukes of rage; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I put My vengeance on them." The Philistines were conquered by Babylon and later by other empires, and they too disappeared as a people.

What do these four messages say to us? First, God sees how people treat His people, and He takes it personally. Second, God is the Judge of all nations, not only Israel. He rules history. Third, He does not need us to take revenge for Him. And fourth, every one of these judgments ends with the same purpose: "they shall know that I am the LORD." God's desire is that all people would know Him. Even through judgment, He makes Himself known. Today He makes Himself known through the gospel, calling people from every nation, Ammonites and Moabites, Edomites and Philistines included, to know Him through Jesus Christ (Revelation 7:9).

Chapter 25 Summary

Ezekiel turned to the nations around Israel. Ammon said "Aha!" when the temple was profaned, the land laid waste, and Judah taken into exile, and clapped and stamped for joy, so God would give their land to the people of the east, make Rabbah a pasture for camels, and cut them off. Moab said that the house of Judah was like all the nations, mocking Israel's God, so God would open Moab's frontier cities to invaders and judge it. Edom took revenge on Judah in her disaster, so God would make Edom a desolation from Teman to Dedan and bring His vengeance on it by the hand of His people Israel. The Philistines acted with old and lasting hatred, so God would cut off the Kerethites and the rest of the coast. In each case God judged a nation for how it treated His people, and the purpose was the same: they shall know that I am the LORD.

Chapter 25 Study Questions

1. Where do chapters 25 to 32 fall in the story of Jerusalem's siege and fall, and why does that matter? (24:1-2; 33:21)

2. What did the Ammonites say and do when Jerusalem fell, and what would happen to them? (25:3-7)

3. What did Moab say about Judah, and why was it really an insult to God? (25:8)

4. How was Edom related to Israel, and what did Edom do when Jerusalem fell? (25:12; Psalm 137:7; Obadiah 11-14)

5. How did God say He would judge Edom differently from the others? (25:14)

6. What was the Philistines' sin? (25:15)

7. What phrase ends each of these messages, and what does it show about God's purpose? (25:5, 7, 11, 17)

8. What does God's promise in Genesis 12:3 have to do with this chapter?

9. Have you ever felt a quiet pleasure when someone who hurt you, or someone you disagree with, got into trouble? What does Proverbs 24:17 and 1 Corinthians 13:6 say to you about it?

10. Edom took revenge into its own hands. Is there someone you have wanted to get even with? How can you leave it with God? (Romans 12:19; 1 Peter 2:23)

Chapter 26: Against Tyre

Scripture

26:1-14 And it came about in the eleventh year, on the first of the month, ***that*** the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, 'Aha! It is broken, the doors of the peoples; it has turned to me; I shall be filled; it has been laid waste,' therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** against you, Tyre, and I will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre and tear down its towers; and I will scrape its dust from it and make it a bare rock. It shall be a spreading place of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD; and it shall become plunder for the nations. And its daughters which ***are*** in the field shall be killed by the sword; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. For thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** bringing against Tyre Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the north, a king of kings, with horses and with chariots and with horsemen, and an assembly and a great people. Your daughters in the field he shall kill with the sword; and he shall set a siege wall against you, and pour out a mound against you, and raise up a large shield against you. And the blow of his battering ram he shall set against your walls, and your towers he shall break down with his swords. From the abundance of his horses their dust shall cover you; from the sound of horseman and wheel and chariot your walls shall shake, when he enters your gates like the entering of a city broken into. With the hooves of his horses he shall trample all your streets; your people he shall kill with the sword, and the pillars of your strength shall come down to the ground. And they shall plunder your wealth and take your merchandise as spoil, and tear down your walls; and the houses of your desire they shall pull down; and your stones and your wood and your dust they shall put in the midst of the waters. And I will put an end to the noise of your songs, and the sound of your lyres shall not be heard again. And I will make you a bare rock; a spreading place of nets you shall be; you shall not be built again; for I, the LORD, have spoken, declares the Lord GOD.

26:15-21 Thus says the Lord GOD to Tyre: Will not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall, when the wounded groan, when slaughter is done in your midst? And all the princes of the sea shall go down from their thrones and remove their robes and strip off their embroidered garments; tremblings they shall put on; on the ground they shall sit, and they shall tremble every moment and be appalled at you. And they shall take up a lamentation over you and say to you, 'How you have perished, ***you who were*** inhabited from the seas, the city that was praised, which was mighty in the sea, it and its inhabitants, who gave their terror to all its inhabitants! Now the coastlands tremble ***on*** the day of your fall, and the coastlands that ***are*** in the sea are terrified at your going out.' For thus says the Lord GOD: When I make you a desolate city, like the cities that are not inhabited, when I bring up ***the*** deep over you and the many waters cover you, and I will bring you down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of long ago, and I will make you dwell in the land of the lowest parts, like the ruins from long ago, with those who go down to the pit, so that you shall not be inhabited; and I will set beauty in the land of the living. Terrors I will make you, and you shall be no more; and you shall be sought, and you shall not be found again forever, declares the Lord GOD."

Chapter 26 Preview

Tyre was the great sea power of Ezekiel's world. It was a Phoenician city on the coast north of Israel, in what is now Lebanon. Part of the city stood on the mainland, and the main fortress stood on a rocky island about half a mile off shore. Its ships sailed the whole Mediterranean Sea, and its merchants grew rich on trade from every land. Hiram, king of Tyre, had been a friend of David and Solomon and had sent cedar and craftsmen to build the temple (1 Kings 5:1-12). But by Ezekiel's day, Tyre cared only for money. When Jerusalem fell, Tyre rubbed its hands. A competitor was out of the way.

Ezekiel spends three chapters on Tyre, more than on any nation except Egypt. Chapter 26 announces its fall. God will bring many nations against Tyre like waves of the sea. First Nebuchadnezzar would come, and then others, until the city was scraped down to bare rock, a place for fishermen to spread their nets. History records how this came true, first under Nebuchadnezzar and later, in 332 B.C., under Alexander the Great. The chapter ends with the princes of the sea mourning over Tyre's fall, and with Tyre going down to the pit, never to be found again.

Chapter 26 Study

26:1-2 *And it came about in the eleventh year, on the first of the month, **that** the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, 'Aha! It is broken, the doors of the peoples; it has turned to me; I shall be filled; it has been laid waste,'*

"And it came about in the eleventh year, on the first of the month." The eleventh year of the exile is about 587 or 586 B.C., the year Jerusalem fell. Ezekiel does not name the month, and scholars have suggested several. What is clear is that the news of Jerusalem's fall, or its coming fall, had reached Tyre.

"Because Tyre has said against Jerusalem." "Aha! It is broken, the doors of the peoples." Tyre gloated like Ammon (25:3). Jerusalem was "the doors of the peoples," a gateway for trade. The main trade routes from Egypt to Syria and from Arabia to the Mediterranean passed through or near the land of Judah, and Judah could tax the trade that went through. Now that gate was broken. "It has turned to me; I shall be filled; it has been laid waste." Tyre saw Jerusalem's ruin as a business opportunity. With Jerusalem gone, the trade would come to Tyre.

That is what greed does. It looks at another person's disaster and asks, What's in it for me? Tyre did not care about the people of Jerusalem. It cared about the profit. Jesus asked, "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world but suffers the loss of his life?" (Matthew 16:26).

26:3-6 *therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** against you, Tyre, and I will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre and tear down its towers; and I will scrape its dust from it and make it a bare rock. It shall be a spreading place of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD; and it shall become plunder for the nations. And its daughters which **are** in the field shall be killed by the sword; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD.*

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I am against you, Tyre, and I will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves." This is a perfect picture for a city in the sea. Waves do not come all at once. They come one after another. God would bring nation after nation against Tyre over the centuries.

"And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre and tear down its towers; and I will scrape its dust from it and make it a bare rock." The name Tyre (Tsor in Hebrew) means rock. The city built on a rock would be scraped down to the bare rock. "It shall be a spreading place of nets in the midst of the sea." Fishermen dry their nets by spreading them out on flat rocks by the shore. The great city would be a place for that.

"And its daughters which are in the field shall be killed by the sword." The daughters are the towns and villages that belonged to Tyre on the mainland. "And they shall know that I am the LORD."

26:7-11 *For thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** bringing against Tyre Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the north, a king of kings, with horses and with chariots and with horsemen, and an assembly and a great people. Your daughters in the field he shall kill with the sword; and he shall set a siege wall against you, and pour out a mound against you, and raise up a large shield against you. And the blow of his battering ram he shall set against your walls, and your towers he shall break down with his swords. From the abundance of his horses their dust shall cover you; from the sound of horseman and wheel and chariot your walls shall shake, when he enters your gates like the entering of a city broken into. With the hooves of his horses he shall trample all your streets; your people he shall kill with the sword, and the pillars of your strength shall come down to the ground.*

Now God names the first wave. "Look, I am bringing against Tyre Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the north, a king of kings, with horses and with chariots and with horsemen." Nebuchadnezzar was "a king of kings" because he ruled over many kings. Daniel uses the same title for him (Daniel 2:37). He came "from the north" because armies from Babylon followed the river valleys up and around the desert and came down the coast from the north.

Notice that in these verses the word is "he." Nebuchadnezzar would kill "your daughters in the field," the mainland towns. "He shall set a siege wall against you, and pour out a mound against you, and raise up a large shield against you." These are the tools of a land siege. "The blow of his battering ram he shall set against your walls, and your towers he shall break down with his swords." His horses would raise so much dust it would cover the city, and the noise of his chariots would shake the walls. "With the hooves of his horses he shall trample all your streets; your

people he shall kill with the sword, and the pillars of your strength shall come down to the ground."

This is what happened. Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre for thirteen years, from about 586 to 573 B.C. He destroyed the mainland city. But the island fortress, protected by the sea and supplied by its ships, held out. In the end Tyre came to terms with Babylon and accepted its rule. We will see in 29:18 that God Himself says Nebuchadnezzar's army worked very hard at Tyre and got little reward for it.

26:12-14 *And they shall plunder your wealth and take your merchandise as spoil, and tear down your walls; and the houses of your desire they shall pull down; and your stones and your wood and your dust they shall put in the midst of the waters. And I will put an end to the noise of your songs, and the sound of your lyres shall not be heard again. And I will make you a bare rock; a spreading place of nets you shall be; you shall not be built again; for I, the LORD, have spoken, declares the Lord GOD.*

"And they shall plunder your wealth and take your merchandise as spoil, and tear down your walls." Notice the change from "he" to "they." Verse 3 said "many nations" would come like waves. Nebuchadnezzar was the first. Others would follow.

"And the houses of your desire they shall pull down; and your stones and your wood and your dust they shall put in the midst of the waters." This is a strange detail. Why would an army throw the stones, timber and even the dust of a city into the sea?

More than two hundred and fifty years later, in 332 B.C., Alexander the Great came. The island city of Tyre refused to open its gates to him. Alexander had no fleet strong enough to take it from the sea, so he built a causeway, a road of stone and earth, out across the water to the island. Historians tell us that he used the ruins of the old mainland city to build it, its stones, its timbers and its rubble. After a siege of about seven months, his army crossed the causeway and took the city. Many of its people were killed, and many thousands were sold as slaves. The causeway is still there today, filled in over the centuries by sand, so that the old island is now joined to the mainland.

"And I will put an end to the noise of your songs, and the sound of your lyres shall not be heard again." Tyre was a city of feasting and music. Isaiah called it a city of joy and pictured it as a singer (Isaiah 23:7, 15-16). The music would stop. Revelation uses similar words for the fall of the great city Babylon at the end of the age: the sound of musicians will never be heard in you again (Revelation 18:22).

"And I will make you a bare rock; a spreading place of nets you shall be; you shall not be built again; for I, the LORD, have spoken."

What does "you shall not be built again" mean, since there is a town called Tyre (Sur) on the site today? Careful teachers give two answers that work together. First, the great Tyre of Ezekiel's day, the queen of the seas and the center of world trade, never rose again. Later towns were built nearby, but the glory and power of Tyre were gone for good. Second, the old mainland city, whose

stones went into the sea, was never rebuilt on its site, and fishermen have long spread their nets on the rocks there. God's word came true in the way He spoke it.

Fulfilled prophecy like this is one of the strong evidences that the Bible is God's Word. Ezekiel spoke of the waves of nations, the rubble thrown into the sea, and the bare rock, long before Alexander was born. Peter tells us that no prophecy of Scripture ever came by the will of man, but men spoke from God, carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21).

26:15-18 *Thus says the Lord GOD to Tyre: Will not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall, when the wounded groan, when slaughter is done in your midst? And all the princes of the sea shall go down from their thrones and remove their robes and strip off their embroidered garments; tremblings they shall put on; on the ground they shall sit, and they shall tremble every moment and be appalled at you. And they shall take up a lamentation over you and say to you, 'How you have perished, **you who were** inhabited from the seas, the city that was praised, which was mighty in the sea, it and its inhabitants, who gave their terror to all its inhabitants! Now the coastlands tremble **on** the day of your fall, and the coastlands that **are** in the sea are terrified at your going out.'*

"Will not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall, when the wounded groan, when slaughter is done in your midst?" The coastlands are the cities and islands around the Mediterranean that traded with Tyre. Its fall would send shock waves through the whole trading world.

"And all the princes of the sea shall go down from their thrones and remove their robes and strip off their embroidered garments." The rulers of the trading cities would take off their royal clothes and sit on the ground, the way people mourned. "Tremblings they shall put on." They would wear fear like a garment. "They shall tremble every moment and be appalled at you." If Tyre could fall, who was safe?

"And they shall take up a lamentation over you." Here is their funeral song: "How you have perished, you who were inhabited from the seas, the city that was praised, which was mighty in the sea, it and its inhabitants, who gave their terror to all its inhabitants!" Tyre had been feared and praised. Now it was gone. "Now the coastlands tremble on the day of your fall, and the coastlands that are in the sea are terrified at your going out."

Notice what the princes of the sea mourned. They did not mourn the people who died. They mourned the loss of their trading partner. When the world's systems of wealth fall, the world weeps for its money. Revelation 18:9-19 pictures the kings and merchants of the earth standing far off and weeping over the fall of Babylon, because no one buys their cargo anymore. The two passages sound much alike, and they warn us not to build our lives on what can be lost in a day.

26:19-21 *For thus says the Lord GOD: When I make you a desolate city, like the cities that are not inhabited, when I bring up* ***the*** *deep over you and the many waters cover you, and I will bring you down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of long ago, and I will make you dwell in the land of the lowest parts, like the ruins from long ago, with those who go down to the pit, so that you shall not be inhabited; and I will set beauty in the land of the living. Terrors I will make you, and you shall be no more; and you shall be sought, and you shall not be found again forever, declares the Lord GOD."*

"When I make you a desolate city, like the cities that are not inhabited, when I bring up the deep over you and the many waters cover you." The sea that made Tyre great would swallow it. The deep, the great ocean, would cover it.

"And I will bring you down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of long ago." The pit is the grave, the world of the dead, called Sheol in Hebrew. Ezekiel pictures the great city going down to join the long-dead nations of the past. "And I will make you dwell in the land of the lowest parts, like the ruins from long ago, with those who go down to the pit, so that you shall not be inhabited." Ezekiel will use this picture again of Egypt in chapters 31 and 32.

"And I will set beauty in the land of the living." Tyre would go down to the pit, but God would set beauty, or glory, in the land of the living. Many teachers see here a contrast between Tyre and the land of Israel. Tyre's glory would end, but God would one day put His glory back in His own land, among the living.

"Terrors I will make you, and you shall be no more; and you shall be sought, and you shall not be found again forever, declares the Lord GOD." People would look for the great Tyre, and it would not be found.

Tyre trusted in its walls, its ships, its wealth and its island. None of it could stand against the word of God. Jesus said, "The heaven and the earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24:35). What are you building your life on? Wealth and position can be scraped away like the dust of Tyre. Only what is built on Christ will stand (Matthew 7:24-27).

Chapter 26 Summary

In the eleventh year, about 587 or 586 B.C., God spoke against Tyre, the great sea trading city, because it gloated over Jerusalem's fall as a chance to make money. God would bring many nations against Tyre like the waves of the sea, tear down its walls, scrape it down to bare rock, and make it a place where fishermen spread their nets. Nebuchadnezzar would come first with his army and destroy the mainland towns and city, as he did in a thirteen-year siege. Then "they" would throw its stones, wood and dust into the sea, which happened when Alexander the Great built a causeway from its ruins to take the island city in 332 B.C. The music of Tyre would stop, and it would not be built again as the great city it had been. The princes of the sea would come down from their thrones and mourn over it, and Tyre would go down to the pit with the nations of old and never be found again, while God would set beauty in the land of the living.

Chapter 26 Study Questions

1. Why did Tyre rejoice when Jerusalem fell? (26:2)

2. What picture does God use for the many nations He would bring against Tyre? (26:3)

3. What would Tyre become, according to 26:4-5 and 26:14?

4. Who was the first king God named, and what did he do to Tyre? (26:7-11)

5. Why is the change from "he" to "they" in 26:12 important?

6. How did Alexander the Great fulfill 26:12? What does fulfilled prophecy tell us about the Bible? (2 Peter 1:20-21)

7. What did the princes of the sea mourn when Tyre fell? How does this compare with Revelation 18:9-19? (26:16-18)

8. Where would Tyre go, and what would God set in the land of the living? (26:20)

9. Tyre looked at Jerusalem's disaster and thought about its profit. When others suffer, are you ever tempted to think first about how it affects you? How can you learn to care instead?

10. Tyre trusted in its walls, its wealth and the sea. What are you most tempted to trust in for security? How does Matthew 7:24-27 help you build on something that lasts?

Chapter 27: A Lament over Tyre

Scripture

27:1-11 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "And you, son of man, take up a lamentation over Tyre, and say to Tyre, who dwells at the entrances of the sea, the trader of the peoples to many coastlands, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Tyre, you have said, "I ***am*** perfect of beauty." Your borders ***are*** in the heart of the seas; your builders have perfected your beauty. Of cypresses from Senir they have built for you all the planks; a cedar from Lebanon they have taken to make a mast on you. ***Of*** oaks from Bashan they have made your oars; your deck they have made ***of*** ivory inlaid in pine from the coastlands of Cyprus. Fine linen with embroidery from Egypt was your sail, to be a banner for you; blue and purple from the coastlands of Elishah was your covering. The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your rowers; your wise men, Tyre, were in you; they ***were*** your sailors. The elders of Gebal and its wise men were in you, repairing your breaches; all the ships of the sea and their mariners were in you to trade your merchandise. Persia and Lud and Put were in your army, your men of war; shield and helmet they hung in you; they gave your splendor. The sons of Arvad and Helech ***were*** on your walls all around, and the Gamad were in your towers; their shields they hung on your walls all around; they perfected your beauty.

27:12-25 Tarshish ***was*** your merchant because of the abundance of all wealth; with silver, iron, tin, and lead they gave ***for*** your wares. Greece, Tubal, and Meshech, they ***were*** your traders; with the souls of men and vessels of bronze they gave ***for*** your merchandise. From the house of Togarmah they gave ***for*** your wares horses and steeds and mules. The sons of Dedan ***were*** your traders; many coastlands ***were*** the market of your hand; horns of ivory and ebony they brought back ***as*** your tribute. Syria ***was*** your merchant because of the abundance of your products; with turquoise, purple, and embroidery, and fine linen, and coral, and ruby they gave ***for*** your wares. Judah and the land of Israel, they ***were*** your traders; with wheat of Minnith, and cake, and honey, and oil, and balm they gave ***for*** your merchandise. Damascus ***was*** your merchant in the abundance of your products, because of the abundance of all wealth, in wine of Helbon and wool of Sahar. Vedan and Greece from Uzal gave wrought iron for your wares; cassia and calamus were in your merchandise. Dedan ***was*** your trader in garments of spreading for riding. Arabia and all the princes of Kedar, they ***were*** the merchants of your hand; in lambs and rams and goats, in these ***they were*** your merchants. The traders of Sheba and Raamah, they ***were*** your traders; with the best of every spice, and with every precious stone and gold they gave ***for*** your wares. Haran and Canneh and Eden, the traders of Sheba, Assyria ***and*** Chilmad ***were*** your trader. They ***were*** your traders in choice garments, in cloaks of blue and embroidery, and in chests of variegated cloth, with cords bound and made firm, in your marketplace. The ships of Tarshish ***were*** your carriers ***for*** your merchandise; and you were filled and became very heavy in the heart of the seas.

27:26-36 Into many waters your rowers have brought you; the east wind has broken you in the heart of the seas. Your wealth and your wares, your merchandise, your mariners and your sailors, the repairers of your breaches and the traders of your merchandise, and all your men of war who ***are*** in you, and with all your assembly which ***is*** in your midst, shall fall in the heart of the seas on

the day of your fall. At the sound of the outcry of your sailors the pasturelands shall shake. And all who handle the oar, the mariners, all the sailors of the sea, shall come down from their ships; they shall stand on the land. And they shall make their voice heard over you and cry out bitterly, and they shall bring up dust on their heads; they shall roll in the ashes. And they shall make themselves bald for you ***with*** baldness and gird themselves ***with*** sackcloth, and they shall weep for you in bitterness of soul, ***with*** bitter wailing. And in their wailing they shall take up a lamentation for you and lament over you: "Who ***is*** like Tyre, like ***the one*** silenced in the midst of the sea? When your wares went out from the seas, you satisfied many peoples; with the abundance of your wealth and your merchandise you made rich the kings of the earth. ***Now, at the*** time ***you are*** broken by the seas, in the depths of the waters, your merchandise and all your assembly in your midst have fallen. All the inhabitants of the coastlands are appalled at you, and their kings shudder ***with*** shuddering; ***their*** faces are troubled. The merchants among the peoples hiss at you; you have become terrors, and you ***shall*** be no more forever."'"

Chapter 27 Preview

In chapter 26 the princes of the sea sang a short funeral song over Tyre. In chapter 27 God tells Ezekiel to sing a long one. Tyre is pictured as a magnificent merchant ship, built of the finest wood from Lebanon and Bashan, with sails of Egyptian linen and a deck of ivory, rowed by men of Sidon and steered by Tyre's own wise men. In the middle of the poem Ezekiel lists the nations that traded with Tyre and the goods they brought, from Spain in the far west to Arabia and Mesopotamia in the east. It is like reading the shipping records of the ancient world.

Then the east wind blows, and the great ship breaks apart and sinks in the heart of the seas, with all its cargo and crew. The sailors of the world stand on the shore and weep. This chapter shows us what a life or a nation built on trade and wealth looks like, and how quickly it can go down. Revelation 18 uses many of the same pictures for the fall of Babylon the great at the end of the age. The lesson is the same in both: "you shall be no more forever" (27:36).

Chapter 27 Study

27:1-4 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "And you, son of man, take up a lamentation over Tyre, and say to Tyre, who dwells at the entrances of the sea, the trader of the peoples to many coastlands, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Tyre, you have said, "I **am** perfect of beauty." Your borders **are** in the heart of the seas; your builders have perfected your beauty.*

"And you, son of man, take up a lamentation over Tyre." A lamentation is a funeral song, like the one in chapter 19. Ezekiel was to sing it over Tyre before Tyre had fallen.

Tyre "dwells at the entrances of the sea," with harbors that opened onto the Mediterranean, and it was "the trader of the peoples to many coastlands." Its ships carried goods to and from every port.

"Tyre, you have said, I am perfect of beauty." Here is the root of Tyre's sin: pride. Tyre admired itself. "Your borders are in the heart of the seas; your builders have perfected your beauty." The

island city, surrounded by water, looked like a great ship at anchor. That is the picture Ezekiel paints in the verses that follow.

27:5-9 *Of cypresses from Senir they have built for you all the planks; a cedar from Lebanon they have taken to make a mast on you.* ***Of*** *oaks from Bashan they have made your oars; your deck they have made* ***of*** *ivory inlaid in pine from the coastlands of Cyprus. Fine linen with embroidery from Egypt was your sail, to be a banner for you; blue and purple from the coastlands of Elishah was your covering. The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your rowers; your wise men, Tyre, were in you; they* ***were*** *your sailors. The elders of Gebal and its wise men were in you, repairing your breaches; all the ships of the sea and their mariners were in you to trade your merchandise.*

Ezekiel describes how the ship was built, and every part came from the best source in the world.

"Of cypresses from Senir they have built for you all the planks." Senir is another name for Mount Hermon (Deuteronomy 3:9). "A cedar from Lebanon they have taken to make a mast on you." The tall cedars of Lebanon made the finest masts. "Of oaks from Bashan they have made your oars." Bashan, east of the Sea of Galilee, was famous for its oaks (Isaiah 2:13). "Your deck they have made of ivory inlaid in pine from the coastlands of Cyprus." Ivory was a luxury. A deck of ivory is a picture of wealth beyond need.

"Fine linen with embroidery from Egypt was your sail, to be a banner for you." Egypt was famous for its linen. The sail was also the ship's flag, a sign of its glory. "Blue and purple from the coastlands of Elishah was your covering." Purple dye was made from sea snails and was very costly. The Phoenicians were famous for it. Elishah was likely Cyprus or another island or coast in the west.

"The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your rowers." Sidon and Arvad were other Phoenician cities on the coast. "Your wise men, Tyre, were in you; they were your sailors." Tyre's own skilled men were the officers who steered the ship. "The elders of Gebal and its wise men were in you, repairing your breaches." Gebal, which the Greeks called Byblos, was known for its skilled builders (1 Kings 5:18). "All the ships of the sea and their mariners were in you to trade your merchandise."

The picture is of something perfect, built of the best, manned by the best. Tyre had everything the world could offer.

27:10-11 *Persia and Lud and Put were in your army, your men of war; shield and helmet they hung in you; they gave your splendor. The sons of Arvad and Helech* ***were*** *on your walls all around, and the Gamad were in your towers; their shields they hung on your walls all around; they perfected your beauty.*

The picture shifts for a moment from the ship to the city. "Persia and Lud and Put were in your army, your men of war." Tyre hired soldiers from far away. Persia was east of Babylon. Lud was probably Lydia, in what is now western Turkey, and Put was in Africa, probably Libya. Tyre was rich enough to pay others to fight for it. "Shield and helmet they hung in you; they gave your splendor." The shields of the soldiers hung on the city walls like decorations.

"The sons of Arvad and Helech were on your walls all around, and the Gamad were in your towers." Men from the other coastal towns guarded its walls. "They perfected your beauty." Even its defense was part of its pride.

27:12-25 *Tarshish **was** your merchant because of the abundance of all wealth; with silver, iron, tin, and lead they gave **for** your wares. Greece, Tubal, and Meshech, they **were** your traders; with the souls of men and vessels of bronze they gave **for** your merchandise. From the house of Togarmah they gave **for** your wares horses and steeds and mules. The sons of Dedan **were** your traders; many coastlands **were** the market of your hand; horns of ivory and ebony they brought back **as** your tribute. Syria **was** your merchant because of the abundance of your products; with turquoise, purple, and embroidery, and fine linen, and coral, and ruby they gave **for** your wares. Judah and the land of Israel, they **were** your traders; with wheat of Minnith, and cake, and honey, and oil, and balm they gave **for** your merchandise. Damascus **was** your merchant in the abundance of your products, because of the abundance of all wealth, in wine of Helbon and wool of Sahar. Vedan and Greece from Uzal gave wrought iron for your wares; cassia and calamus were in your merchandise. Dedan **was** your trader in garments of spreading for riding. Arabia and all the princes of Kedar, they **were** the merchants of your hand; in lambs and rams and goats, in these **they were** your merchants. The traders of Sheba and Raamah, they **were** your traders; with the best of every spice, and with every precious stone and gold they gave **for** your wares. Haran and Canneh and Eden, the traders of Sheba, Assyria **and** Chilmad **were** your trader. They **were** your traders in choice garments, in cloaks of blue and embroidery, and in chests of variegated cloth, with cords bound and made firm, in your marketplace. The ships of Tarshish **were** your carriers **for** your merchandise; and you were filled and became very heavy in the heart of the seas.*

Now comes the list of Tyre's trading partners. It moves roughly from west to east around the known world, with the goods each one traded. I will not comment on every name. Here is the outline.

In the far west was "Tarshish," probably in Spain, which paid "with silver, iron, tin, and lead." Tarshish was the place Jonah tried to flee to (Jonah 1:3), at the far end of the known world. To the northwest were "Greece, Tubal, and Meshech," peoples of the Greek coasts and of what is now Turkey. We will meet Tubal and Meshech again in 38:2. They traded "with the souls of men and vessels of bronze." The souls of men means slaves. Tyre grew rich in part by buying and selling human beings. Revelation lists "souls of men" at the end of the cargo of Babylon the great (Revelation 18:13). God sees the trade in human lives and will judge it. "From the house of Togarmah," to the north, came horses and mules. Togarmah appears again in 38:6.

"The sons of Dedan" brought "horns of ivory and ebony." Syria (Aram) brought precious stones, purple, embroidery, linen and coral. "Judah and the land of Israel" were also Tyre's traders, "with wheat of Minnith, and cake, and honey, and oil, and balm." Israel had sold farm goods to Tyre since Solomon's day (1 Kings 5:11). Damascus traded "in wine of Helbon and wool of Sahar."

From the east and south came more. Dedan traded saddle cloths. "Arabia and all the princes of Kedar" brought lambs, rams and goats. The traders of Sheba and Raamah, in southern Arabia, brought "the best of every spice, and with every precious stone and gold." Cities in Mesopotamia,

among them Haran, where Abraham once lived (Genesis 11:31), and Eden, a town on the Euphrates, traded in "choice garments, in cloaks of blue and embroidery," and fine rugs.

"The ships of Tarshish were your carriers for your merchandise; and you were filled and became very heavy in the heart of the seas." The ships of Tarshish were the great ocean-going cargo ships. The ship of Tyre was loaded to the top. It was "very heavy." That word sets up what comes next. A ship loaded too heavily is in danger in a storm.

Why does God give us this long list? It shows how great Tyre really was. The whole world came to its door. When it fell, the whole world would feel it. And it shows that God sees every part of the world's business, its ports and markets, its goods and its trade in human lives. Nothing is outside His knowledge or His rule.

27:26-27 *Into many waters your rowers have brought you; the east wind has broken you in the heart of the seas. Your wealth and your wares, your merchandise, your mariners and your sailors, the repairers of your breaches and the traders of your merchandise, and all your men of war who **are** in you, and with all your assembly which **is** in your midst, shall fall in the heart of the seas on the day of your fall.*

"Into many waters your rowers have brought you." The rowers took the great ship out into deep water, proud and heavy. "The east wind has broken you in the heart of the seas." The east wind was the fierce wind off the desert that could wreck ships at sea (Psalm 48:7). Here it pictures Babylon, as in 17:10 and 19:12. The ship that seemed unsinkable broke apart.

"Your wealth and your wares, your merchandise, your mariners and your sailors, the repairers of your breaches and the traders of your merchandise, and all your men of war who are in you, and with all your assembly which is in your midst, shall fall in the heart of the seas on the day of your fall." Everything went down together, the cargo, the crew, the soldiers, all of it. The things that made Tyre great could not keep it afloat. In fact, they helped sink it.

27:28-32 *At the sound of the outcry of your sailors the pasturelands shall shake. And all who handle the oar, the mariners, all the sailors of the sea, shall come down from their ships; they shall stand on the land. And they shall make their voice heard over you and cry out bitterly, and they shall bring up dust on their heads; they shall roll in the ashes. And they shall make themselves bald for you **with** baldness and gird themselves **with** sackcloth, and they shall weep for you in bitterness of soul, **with** bitter wailing. And in their wailing they shall take up a lamentation for you and lament over you: "Who **is** like Tyre, like **the one** silenced in the midst of the sea?*

"At the sound of the outcry of your sailors the pasturelands shall shake." The cry of the drowning crew was heard even on the land.

"And all who handle the oar, the mariners, all the sailors of the sea, shall come down from their ships; they shall stand on the land." The sailors of other ships came to shore, afraid to go out. "And they shall make their voice heard over you and cry out bitterly, and they shall bring up dust on their heads; they shall roll in the ashes. And they shall make themselves bald for you with baldness and gird themselves with sackcloth." These were the signs of deep mourning in the

ancient world: dust and ashes on the head, shaved heads, and sackcloth, a rough cloth made of goat hair.

"And in their wailing they shall take up a lamentation for you and lament over you." Then comes their song: "Who is like Tyre, like the one silenced in the midst of the sea?" Once people asked, Who is like Tyre? in admiration. Now they ask it in grief. The great voice of the world's market was silent.

27:33-36 *When your wares went out from the seas, you satisfied many peoples; with the abundance of your wealth and your merchandise you made rich the kings of the earth.* ***Now, at the*** *time* ***you are*** *broken by the seas, in the depths of the waters, your merchandise and all your assembly in your midst have fallen. All the inhabitants of the coastlands are appalled at you, and their kings shudder* ***with*** *shuddering;* ***their*** *faces are troubled. The merchants among the peoples hiss at you; you have become terrors, and you* ***shall*** *be no more forever."'"*

"When your wares went out from the seas, you satisfied many peoples; with the abundance of your wealth and your merchandise you made rich the kings of the earth." Tyre made other nations rich. Its trade fed the economies of the world. That is why its fall was felt everywhere.

"Now, at the time you are broken by the seas, in the depths of the waters, your merchandise and all your assembly in your midst have fallen."

"All the inhabitants of the coastlands are appalled at you, and their kings shudder with shuddering." "The merchants among the peoples hiss at you." Hissing could be a sound of shock or of scorn (Jeremiah 19:8). "You have become terrors, and you shall be no more forever."

Revelation 18 tells of the fall of Babylon the great at the end of the age in words that echo this chapter. The kings of the earth, the merchants and the sea captains stand far off and weep, saying, Who is like the great city? (Revelation 18:9-19). They throw dust on their heads and cry, because in one hour her wealth was laid waste. The world's system of wealth, pride and trade, built without God, will one day sink like the ship of Tyre.

What does this mean for us? Trade and business are not evil in themselves. Israel traded with Tyre, and Scripture praises honest work and fair dealing. But Tyre's heart said, "I am perfect of beauty" (27:3). It trusted in its wealth, traded in human lives, and lived for gain. Jesus warned, "Watch out and guard yourselves from covetousness, because even when anyone has abundance, his life is not from his possessions" (Luke 12:15). Paul tells the rich not to be proud or to set their hope on uncertain riches, but on God (1 Timothy 6:17). A life loaded with treasure on earth can be broken in a day. Treasure in heaven cannot be lost (Matthew 6:19-21).

Chapter 27 Summary

God told Ezekiel to sing a funeral song over Tyre, which said, "I am perfect of beauty." Tyre was pictured as a splendid merchant ship built from the best materials of the world: cypress planks from Senir, a cedar mast from Lebanon, oak oars from Bashan, an ivory deck, a sail of Egyptian linen and coverings of purple, rowed by men of Sidon and Arvad and repaired by the craftsmen of

Gebal. Its army was hired from Persia, Lud and Put. A long list showed the nations that traded with Tyre, from Tarshish in the west to Arabia and Mesopotamia in the east, bringing metals, horses, ivory, grain, wine, spices, gold, cloth, and even slaves. Loaded heavy, the ship was taken into deep water, and the east wind broke it in the heart of the seas, so that its wealth, crew and soldiers all went down. The sailors of the world came to shore and mourned with dust, ashes and sackcloth, asking, "Who is like Tyre?" The kings and merchants who grew rich from it were appalled, and Tyre would be no more forever.

Chapter 27 Study Questions

1. What did Tyre say about itself, and what picture does Ezekiel use for the city? (27:3-4)

2. Where did the materials for the ship come from, and what does that say about Tyre's wealth? (27:5-9)

3. Who fought in Tyre's army, and why might a rich city hire soldiers from far away? (27:10-11)

4. Name a few of Tyre's trading partners and what they traded. (27:12-25)

5. What does "the souls of men" mean in 27:13, and where does that phrase appear again in Scripture? (Revelation 18:13)

6. What happened to the ship when it was "very heavy" and the east wind blew? (27:25-27)

7. How did the sailors and merchants respond to Tyre's fall? (27:29-36)

8. How does Revelation 18:9-19 echo this chapter?

9. Tyre's pride came from its beauty and wealth. Is there something you are proud of that you might be trusting in more than God? (1 Timothy 6:17)

10. Jesus said that even when anyone has abundance, "his life is not from his possessions" (Luke 12:15). How would your week look different if you really believed that?

Chapter 28: The King of Tyre and the Judgment of Sidon

Scripture

28:1-10 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Because your heart has been haughty, and you have said, "I ***am*** a god; I sit ***in*** the seat of gods in the heart of the seas," and you ***are*** a man and not a god, and you have made your heart like the heart of God, look, you ***are*** wiser than Daniel; no hidden ***thing*** have they kept dark from you. By your wisdom and by your understanding you have made wealth for yourself, and you have made gold and silver in your treasuries. By the abundance of your wisdom, by your trade, you have multiplied your wealth, and your heart has been haughty in your wealth. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have made your heart like the heart of God, therefore look, I ***am*** bringing strangers against you, the ruthless of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and profane your splendor. To the pit they shall bring you down, and you shall die the deaths of the slain in the heart of the seas. Will you really say, "I ***am*** a god," before him who kills you? And you ***are*** a man and not a god in the hand of those who pierce you. The deaths of the uncircumcised you shall die by the hand of strangers; for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD.'"

28:11-19 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: You ***were*** a sealer of a pattern, full of wisdom and perfect of beauty. In Eden, the garden of God, you were; every precious stone ***was*** your covering: ruby, topaz, and emerald, chrysolite, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and beryl, and gold; the workmanship of your tambourines and your settings ***was*** in you; on the day you were created they were prepared. You ***were*** an outstretched cherub that covers, and I set you on the holy mountain of God; you were ***there***; in the midst of stones of fire you walked about. You ***were*** blameless in your ways from the day you were created, until unrighteousness was found in you. By the abundance of your trade they filled your midst ***with*** violence, and you sinned; and I profaned you from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was haughty because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. On the ground I cast you; before kings I set you, for ***them*** to look at you. By the abundance of your iniquities, by the unrighteousness of your trade, you profaned your sanctuaries; and I brought out fire from your midst; it has consumed you, and I have made you ashes on the earth in the eyes of all who see you. All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have become terrors, and you ***shall*** be no more forever.'"

28:20-26 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, and prophesy against it, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** against you, Sidon, and I will be glorified in your midst; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, when I execute judgments in it and show Myself holy in it. And I will send pestilence into it and blood into its streets; and the slain shall fall in its midst by the sword ***that is*** against it all around; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. And there shall no longer be for the house of Israel a brier that pricks and a thorn that pains from all ***those*** around them who despise them; and they shall know that I ***am*** the Lord GOD. Thus says the Lord GOD: When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they have been dispersed, and show Myself holy among them in the eyes of

the nations, and they shall dwell on their soil which I gave to My servant, to Jacob. And they shall dwell on it in security, and they shall build houses and plant vineyards; and they shall dwell in security, when I execute judgments on all who despise them from around them; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD their God.'"

Chapter 28 Preview

Chapters 26 and 27 spoke about the city of Tyre. Chapter 28 speaks to its ruler. First comes a message to "the ruler of Tyre" (28:2), a man whose wealth and wisdom had gone to his head until he said, "I am a god." God answers that he is "a man and not a god" (28:2, 9), and strangers will bring him down to the pit. Then comes a lament over "the king of Tyre" (28:12), and the language changes. He was "in Eden, the garden of God," covered with precious stones, "an outstretched cherub that covers," on "the holy mountain of God," and "blameless" from the day he was created "until unrighteousness was found in you" (28:13-15). These words go far beyond any human king.

Many Bible teachers believe that in 28:11-19 God looks past the human king of Tyre to the power behind him, Satan himself, and describes his creation and his fall through pride. Others believe the passage describes the human king in poetic language, comparing him to Adam in Eden or mocking his own claims to be divine. We will look at both views carefully. The chapter then gives a short message against Sidon, Tyre's sister city (28:20-23), and ends with a promise that God will gather Israel and let them live securely in their own land, with no more thorns around them (28:24-26).

Chapter 28 Study

28:1-5 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Because your heart has been haughty, and you have said, "I **am** a god; I sit **in** the seat of gods in the heart of the seas," and you **are** a man and not a god, and you have made your heart like the heart of God, look, you **are** wiser than Daniel; no hidden **thing** have they kept dark from you. By your wisdom and by your understanding you have made wealth for yourself, and you have made gold and silver in your treasuries. By the abundance of your wisdom, by your trade, you have multiplied your wealth, and your heart has been haughty in your wealth.*

"Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre." The ruler of Tyre at this time was a king named Ethbaal (Ittobaal III in history books), who reigned when Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city. The Hebrew word for ruler here, nagid, means a leader or prince.

"Because your heart has been haughty, and you have said, I am a god; I sit in the seat of gods in the heart of the seas." His island city, rising out of the sea, was like a throne. Many ancient kings claimed to be gods or sons of gods. This man looked at his wealth, his fortress and his power, and he thought himself divine.

"And you are a man and not a god, and you have made your heart like the heart of God." God cuts him down to size in one line. He was only a man. To make your heart like the heart of God means to think you are the one in charge, the one who answers to no one. This is the oldest temptation. The serpent told Eve, "you will be like God" (Genesis 3:5).

"Look, you are wiser than Daniel; no hidden thing have they kept dark from you." This is sarcasm. Daniel, Ezekiel's fellow exile, was known even then for his God-given wisdom (Daniel 1:20; 2:48; Ezekiel 14:14). The king of Tyre thought he was wiser still. And he was clever. "By your wisdom and by your understanding you have made wealth for yourself, and you have made gold and silver in your treasuries." He was a brilliant businessman. "And your heart has been haughty in your wealth."

Wisdom and wealth are gifts from God. But when we take credit for them, they become a trap. Moses warned Israel not to say in their hearts, My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth, but to remember that it is God who gives the power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:17-18).

28:6-10 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have made your heart like the heart of God, therefore look, I **am** bringing strangers against you, the ruthless of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and profane your splendor. To the pit they shall bring you down, and you shall die the deaths of the slain in the heart of the seas. Will you really say, "I **am** a god," before him who kills you? And you **are** a man and not a god in the hand of those who pierce you. The deaths of the uncircumcised you shall die by the hand of strangers; for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD.'"*

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have made your heart like the heart of God, therefore look, I am bringing strangers against you, the ruthless of the nations." The "ruthless of the nations" are the Babylonians (30:11 uses the same words for them). "And they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and profane your splendor."

"To the pit they shall bring you down, and you shall die the deaths of the slain in the heart of the seas." The man who sat on a throne in the heart of the seas would die there.

"Will you really say, "I am a god," before him who kills you? And you are a man and not a god in the hand of those who pierce you." When the sword was at his throat, he would not feel like a god. Death shows every man what he really is. King Herod accepted the people's cry that his was the voice of a god and not of a man, "because he did not give the glory to God," and an angel of the Lord struck him (Acts 12:22-23).

"The deaths of the uncircumcised you shall die by the hand of strangers." Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-11). To die the death of the uncircumcised meant to die in disgrace, like an outcast, without honor. "For I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD."

God opposes the proud (James 4:6). Pride is the sin of putting ourselves in God's place. It does not always look like a king claiming to be a god. It can look like a man who thinks he does not need God, who believes his success is all his own doing, or who will not take correction from anyone. The end of every such life is the same. Only the humble will stand.

28:11 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying,*

"Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre." Notice two changes. First, the title changes from "ruler" (28:2) to "king." Second, the message changes from a judgment speech to a lamentation, a funeral song. And as we read on, the description changes too. It no longer fits a man.

Before we look at the verses, let me lay out the two main ways good Bible teachers have read this passage.

Many teachers, through much of church history and especially among those who read Scripture plainly, believe God is speaking here to the spiritual power behind the king of Tyre, Satan. They point out that the king is said to have been in Eden, to have been a cherub, to have been on the holy mountain of God, and to have been blameless from the day he was created until sin was found in him. None of that is true of any human king. Scripture elsewhere shows that real spiritual powers stand behind earthly kingdoms. Daniel speaks of "the prince of the kingdom of Persia" who opposed God's angel (Daniel 10:13). Jesus once spoke to Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan!" (Matthew 16:23), speaking to the one who was using Peter's words. On this view, God addresses the king of Tyre, but He looks through the king to the one who was really ruling in his heart. Isaiah 14:12-15 is often read the same way, where the king of Babylon is addressed as the "shining one, son of dawn" who said, "I will make myself like the Most High."

Other teachers believe the passage is about the human king of Tyre throughout, told in exalted poetic language. Some think God compares him to Adam, the first man, who was placed in Eden, had every blessing, was blameless at first, and fell. Others think God is mocking the king's own claims: you think you are a heavenly being living in the garden of the gods, so let Me describe you that way, and then describe your fall. They point out that the precious stones in verse 13 are like the stones on the breastplate of Israel's high priest, and that the passage still mentions trade (28:16, 18), which fits a merchant king.

I want to be fair to both views. What is clear in either case is that the passage teaches the danger of pride, describes a fall from great privilege to ruin because of sin, and shows that God judges the proud. As we go through the verses, I will point out where each view reads them.

28:12-13 *"Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: You **were** a sealer of a pattern, full of wisdom and perfect of beauty. In Eden, the garden of God, you were; every precious stone **was** your covering: ruby, topaz, and emerald, chrysolite, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and beryl, and gold; the workmanship of your tambourines and your settings **was** in you; on the day you were created they were prepared.*

"You were a sealer of a pattern, full of wisdom and perfect of beauty." A seal was used to stamp a pattern into clay or wax. To be "a sealer of a pattern" probably means he was the model of perfection, the finished pattern. Other translations render it you had the seal of perfection. He was "full of wisdom and perfect of beauty." Tyre called itself "perfect of beauty" in 27:3. Here God says this one really was, at first.

"In Eden, the garden of God, you were." On the first view, this is Satan in Eden, which Genesis 3 shows us, where the serpent came to tempt Eve. Revelation calls Satan "the ancient serpent" (Revelation 12:9). On the second view, it pictures the king as like Adam in Eden, or as living in a paradise of wealth.

"Every precious stone was your covering: ruby, topaz, and emerald, chrysolite, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and beryl, and gold." Nine stones are named, and all of them are among the twelve stones on the high priest's breastplate (Exodus 28:17-20). Some teachers see in this a picture of a being who once stood in a place of worship and service before God. Others see the splendor of a rich king.

"The workmanship of your tambourines and your settings was in you; on the day you were created they were prepared." The words for tambourines and settings are hard to translate, and some take them as settings for jewels rather than musical instruments. Those who see Satan here often suggest he once led worship in heaven, but Scripture does not say that plainly, and I would not build on it. Notice the words "on the day you were created." This one was created. He was not eternal. Whether we read it of Satan or of the king, he was a creature, made by God.

28:14-15 *You **were** an outstretched cherub that covers, and I set you on the holy mountain of God; you were **there**; in the midst of stones of fire you walked about. You **were** blameless in your ways from the day you were created, until unrighteousness was found in you.*

"You were an outstretched cherub that covers, and I set you on the holy mountain of God." Cherubim are the angels closest to God's throne (1:5; 10:20). The covering cherubim on the ark of the covenant spread their wings over the mercy seat where God's presence rested (Exodus 25:20). This one was "an outstretched cherub that covers," set on "the holy mountain of God," the place of God's presence. "In the midst of stones of fire you walked about." Fire is often linked with God's presence (1:13; Exodus 24:17).

On the first view, this describes Satan's place before his fall: a high angel, a guardian cherub, in the very presence of God. On the second view, it is the king's proud self-image as a divine guardian, or a comparison with the cherub that guarded Eden after Adam's fall (Genesis 3:24).

"You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, until unrighteousness was found in you." This is one of the most important lines in the passage. He was created blameless. God did not make him evil. Sin was "found in" him. It came from within, by his own choice.

This fits what the rest of Scripture says about the devil. God made everything good (Genesis 1:31). Jesus said the devil "has not stood in the truth" (John 8:44), which suggests that he once stood in it and fell away. Paul warns that a new believer should not be made a leader "lest, having been puffed up, he fall into the judgment of the devil" (1 Timothy 3:6). That suggests the devil's own sin was pride. Jesus said, "I was watching Satan fall like lightning out of heaven" (Luke 10:18). Scripture does not give us a full account of how or when Satan fell, and we should be careful not to say more than it says. But many teachers believe Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 give us a look behind the curtain.

28:16-17 *By the abundance of your trade they filled your midst **with** violence, and you sinned; and I profaned you from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was haughty because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. On the ground I cast you; before kings I set you, for **them** to look at you.*

"By the abundance of your trade they filled your midst with violence, and you sinned." Here is a detail that fits the merchant king of Tyre: his trade led to violence and sin. Those who see Satan here note that the word for trade comes from a word meaning to go about, and some take it as the slander and scheming of one who goes about (compare Job 1:7). Others take it plainly as Tyre's commerce. Both views agree that the one described turned the gifts he was given into a means of sin.

"And I profaned you from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire." God threw him out of his place of privilege. What was holy became profane.

"Your heart was haughty because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor." Here is the root again: pride. He looked at his own beauty and wisdom, and his heart was lifted up. The same gifts that came from God became the reason he turned from God.

That is how pride works. It takes God's gifts and turns them into reasons to admire ourselves. Pride was the first sin, and it remains the root of many others. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

"On the ground I cast you; before kings I set you, for them to look at you." He was thrown down and made a spectacle.

28:18-19 *By the abundance of your iniquities, by the unrighteousness of your trade, you profaned your sanctuaries; and I brought out fire from your midst; it has consumed you, and I have made you ashes on the earth in the eyes of all who see you. All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have become terrors, and you **shall** be no more forever.'"*

"By the abundance of your iniquities, by the unrighteousness of your trade, you profaned your sanctuaries; and I brought out fire from your midst; it has consumed you." The fire came from within, as in 19:14. Sin carries the seeds of its own destruction. "And I have made you ashes on the earth in the eyes of all who see you." "All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have become terrors, and you shall be no more forever." The last line repeats the end of 26:21 and 27:36, which ties this lament back to Tyre.

The final end of Satan is not yet. He is still active, "who deceives the whole inhabited world" (Revelation 12:9). But his doom is certain. Jesus came "so that through death He might render powerless the one who holds the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14). At the end, after the thousand years, "the devil who deceives them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur" (Revelation 20:10).

Here is the contrast that matters most for us. The covering cherub, created blameless, tried to lift himself up to God's place and was cast down. Jesus, who "existing in the form of God, did not

consider being equal with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, having taken the form of a slave" (Philippians 2:6-7). He humbled Himself to the cross, and God highly exalted Him. The way up in God's kingdom is down. Pride says, I will make myself like God. The gospel says, God made Himself like us, to save us.

28:20-23 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, and prophesy against it, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** against you, Sidon, and I will be glorified in your midst; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD, when I execute judgments in it and show Myself holy in it. And I will send pestilence into it and blood into its streets; and the slain shall fall in its midst by the sword **that is** against it all around; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD.*

"Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, and prophesy against it." Sidon was Tyre's older sister city, about twenty miles to the north on the same coast. It was the home of Jezebel, the daughter of the king of the Sidonians, who brought Baal worship into Israel when she married King Ahab (1 Kings 16:31). Sidon had long been a source of idolatry for Israel.

"Look, I am against you, Sidon, and I will be glorified in your midst; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I execute judgments in it and show Myself holy in it." God would show His glory and holiness through judgment. "And I will send pestilence into it and blood into its streets; and the slain shall fall in its midst by the sword that is against it all around." Sidon was conquered by Babylon, and in later centuries it suffered terribly, especially when the Persians destroyed it after a revolt in the middle of the 300s B.C.

Sidon was the last of the six neighbors in chapters 25 to 28: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre and Sidon. Together with Egypt, the subject of the next four chapters, they make seven nations. Seven often stands for completeness in Scripture. God's judgment would reach all around Israel.

28:24-26 *And there shall no longer be for the house of Israel a brier that pricks and a thorn that pains from all **those** around them who despise them; and they shall know that I **am** the Lord GOD. Thus says the Lord GOD: When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they have been dispersed, and show Myself holy among them in the eyes of the nations, and they shall dwell on their soil which I gave to My servant, to Jacob. And they shall dwell on it in security, and they shall build houses and plant vineyards; and they shall dwell in security, when I execute judgments on all who despise them from around them; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD their God.'"*

"And there shall no longer be for the house of Israel a brier that pricks and a thorn that pains from all those around them who despise them." The nations around Israel had been like thorns in their side. Moses warned that if Israel did not drive out the Canaanites, they would become thorns in their sides (Numbers 33:55). God promised that one day those thorns would be removed.

"When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they have been dispersed, and show Myself holy among them in the eyes of the nations, and they shall dwell on their soil which I gave to My servant, to Jacob." This is the first promise of restoration in the oracles against the nations. In the middle of all the judgment, God reminds Israel that His plan for them is not

finished. He will gather them from all the peoples and bring them back to the land He gave to Jacob.

"And they shall dwell on it in security, and they shall build houses and plant vineyards; and they shall dwell in security." Building houses and planting vineyards are pictures of a settled, peaceful life (Isaiah 65:21; Amos 9:14). "When I execute judgments on all who despise them from around them; and they shall know that I am the LORD their God."

When will this happen? The return from Babylon in 538 B.C. gave a taste of it, but Israel did not live in security after that. They were ruled by Persia, Greece and Rome, and in A.D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed again and the people were scattered. I believe this promise looks ahead to the time when Christ returns and God gathers Israel from all the nations to live securely in the land in His kingdom, as Ezekiel will describe in chapters 34 to 37. The words "dwell in security" come again in 34:25-28 and 38:8. God's promises to Jacob have not been canceled. "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29).

Chapter 28 Summary

God spoke to the ruler of Tyre, whose heart was proud because of his wisdom and wealth, and who said, "I am a god." God answered that he was a man and not a god, and that strangers, the ruthless of the nations, would bring him down to the pit to die a disgraceful death in the heart of the seas. Then God told Ezekiel to sing a lament over the king of Tyre, who had been the pattern of perfection, full of wisdom and beauty, in Eden, the garden of God, covered with precious stones, an outstretched cherub that covers, on the holy mountain of God, blameless from the day he was created until unrighteousness was found in him. Through his trade and his pride he sinned, and God cast him from the mountain of God to the ground and made him ashes. Many teachers see Satan behind the king of Tyre here, describing his creation and fall through pride; others read it as the human king in exalted poetry. Either way, the lesson is the danger of pride, which Christ overcame by humbling Himself. God then spoke against Sidon, promising pestilence and the sword. Last, He promised that when He gathers Israel from the nations, they will live securely in their own land with no more thorns around them, and they will know that He is the LORD their God.

Chapter 28 Study Questions

1. What did the ruler of Tyre say about himself, and what was God's answer? (28:2, 9)

2. What gifts had the ruler of Tyre been given, and how did they lead to his pride? (28:3-5; Deuteronomy 8:17-18)

3. What changes between 28:1-10 and 28:11-19?

4. What does 28:13-15 say about the king's place and condition before his fall?

5. What are the two main views about who is described in 28:11-19? Which details support each one?

6. According to 28:15 and 28:17, where did sin come from, and what was its root?

7. How does Philippians 2:6-7 show the opposite of the pride in this chapter?

8. What does God promise Israel in 28:24-26, and when do you think it will be fulfilled in full?

9. Pride often grows from the good gifts God gives us. What gift has God given you that you are tempted to take credit for? How can you give Him the glory for it?

10. Is there an area of your life where you have been acting as if you were "a god," answering to no one? What would humbling yourself before God look like there? (James 4:6)

Chapter 29: Against Pharaoh and Egypt

Scripture

29:1-16 In the tenth year, in the tenth ***month***, on the twelfth of the month, the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against Egypt, all of it. Speak and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great monster lying in the midst of his streams, who has said, "My Nile ***is*** mine, and I made ***it*** for myself." And I will put hooks in your jaws, and I will make the fish of your streams cling to your scales; and I will bring you up from the midst of your streams, and all the fish of your streams shall cling to your scales. And I will abandon you to the wilderness, you and all the fish of your streams; on the surface of the field you shall fall; you shall not be brought in, and you shall not be gathered; to the living things of the earth and to the flying things of the heavens I have given you for food. And all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel. When they took hold of you by the hand, you were crushed and tore every shoulder of theirs; and when they leaned on you, you were broken and made all their hips stand ***still***. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** bringing a sword against you, and I will cut off from you man and animal. And the land of Egypt shall become a desolation and a ruin; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. Because he said, "Nile ***is*** mine, and I made ***it***," therefore look, I ***am*** against you and against your streams, and I will make the land of Egypt ruins of waste, a desolation, from Migdol ***to*** Syene, and to the border of Cush. The foot of man shall not pass through it, and the foot of animal shall not pass through it, and it shall not be inhabited forty years. And I will make the land of Egypt a desolation in the midst of lands made desolate, and its cities in the midst of cities laid waste shall be a desolation forty years; and I will disperse Egypt among the nations and scatter them among the lands. For thus says the Lord GOD: At the end of forty years I will gather Egypt from the peoples where they were dispersed. And I will turn back the captivity of Egypt and bring them back ***to*** the land of Pathros, to the land of their origin; and they shall be there a lowly kingdom. It shall be lowlier than the kingdoms, and it shall not exalt itself again over the nations; and I will make them few, so that they shall not have dominion over the nations. And it shall no longer be a confidence for the house of Israel, bringing iniquity to remembrance when they turn after them; and they shall know that I ***am*** the Lord GOD.'"

29:17-21 And it came about in the twenty-seventh year, in the first ***month***, on the first of the month, ***that*** the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor a great labor against Tyre; every head was made bald, and every shoulder was rubbed bare; and ***there*** were no wages for him and for his army from Tyre for the labor which he labored against it. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** giving to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon the land of Egypt, and he shall carry off its multitude and plunder its spoil and take its plunder as spoil; and it shall be wages for his army. ***As*** his recompense for which he labored, I have given him the land of Egypt, since they acted for Me, declares the Lord GOD. On that day I will make a horn sprout for the house of Israel, and to you I will give an opening of the mouth in their midst; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD."

Chapter 29 Preview

The last and longest set of messages against the nations is against Egypt. Chapters 29 to 32 hold seven messages, six of them dated. Egypt mattered more to Judah than any other nation except Babylon. It was the great power to the south, and Judah's kings kept looking to it for help against Babylon. Zedekiah broke his oath to Nebuchadnezzar because he hoped Egypt would save him (17:15). So when God speaks against Egypt, He is also speaking to every exile who still hoped that Pharaoh's army would rescue Jerusalem.

Chapter 29 has two messages. The first, dated about 587 B.C. while Jerusalem was under siege, pictures Pharaoh as a great monster in the Nile, proud enough to say he made the river himself. God will drag him out with hooks and leave him in the desert. Egypt will be desolate for forty years, then be restored as "a lowly kingdom" that will never again rule the nations (29:15). The second message, given about 571 B.C., is the latest dated word in the book. Nebuchadnezzar had worked his army hard for thirteen years against Tyre and got little for it, so God says He will give him Egypt as his wages. God pays even pagan kings for the work they do for Him.

Chapter 29 Study

29:1-3 *In the tenth year, in the tenth **month**, on the twelfth of the month, the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against Egypt, all of it. Speak and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great monster lying in the midst of his streams, who has said, "My Nile **is** mine, and I made **it** for myself."*

"In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth of the month." That is about 587 B.C., in the winter, a year after the siege of Jerusalem began (24:1) and about six months before the city fell. At about this time, Pharaoh's army had marched out of Egypt, and the Babylonians had lifted the siege for a short time to deal with it (Jeremiah 37:5). People in Jerusalem, and among the exiles, must have hoped that Egypt would save them. Jeremiah said the army would go home (Jeremiah 37:7). Ezekiel says the same thing in his own way.

"Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt." The Pharaoh at this time was Hophra (also known as Apries), who reigned about 589 to 570 B.C. Jeremiah names him (Jeremiah 44:30).

"Look, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great monster lying in the midst of his streams." The word for monster, tannin, can mean a great sea creature, a serpent or a dragon. Here, lying in the streams of the Nile, it is best pictured as a crocodile, the fearsome beast of Egypt's river. The "streams" are the Nile and its many branches and canals in the delta.

"Who has said, My Nile is mine, and I made it for myself." This is Pharaoh's sin. The Nile was the life of Egypt. Without it, Egypt would be desert. Every crop, every city and every boat depended on it. Pharaoh claimed it as his own creation. It was the same pride we saw in the ruler of Tyre (28:2) and that Nebuchadnezzar later showed when he looked over Babylon and said he had built it by his own power (Daniel 4:30). Who really made the Nile? "To the LORD belongs the earth and its fullness" (Psalm 24:1).

29:4-5 *And I will put hooks in your jaws, and I will make the fish of your streams cling to your scales; and I will bring you up from the midst of your streams, and all the fish of your streams shall cling to your scales. And I will abandon you to the wilderness, you and all the fish of your streams; on the surface of the field you shall fall; you shall not be brought in, and you shall not be gathered; to the living things of the earth and to the flying things of the heavens I have given you for food.*

"And I will put hooks in your jaws, and I will make the fish of your streams cling to your scales." Crocodiles were sometimes caught with hooks. The fish clinging to the scales are the people of Egypt and its allies, who depended on Pharaoh and would go down with him. "And I will bring you up from the midst of your streams." The crocodile would be pulled out of the water where it was strong.

"And I will abandon you to the wilderness, you and all the fish of your streams; on the surface of the field you shall fall; you shall not be brought in, and you shall not be gathered." A crocodile out of the water and left in the desert dies. Its body is left for "the living things of the earth and to the flying things of the heavens." To lie unburied was a great disgrace in the ancient world, and for the Egyptians, who took such care with burial, it was the worst of fates.

Hophra did come to a bad end. His own army rebelled, a general named Amasis took the throne, and Hophra was later killed. Jeremiah had said God would give Hophra into the hand of those who sought his life (Jeremiah 44:30).

29:6-7 *And all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I **am** the LORD, because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel. When they took hold of you by the hand, you were crushed and tore every shoulder of theirs; and when they leaned on you, you were broken and made all their hips stand **still**.*

"And all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am the LORD, because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel." A reed is a tall grass that grows along the Nile. It looks like a walking stick, but if you lean on it, it snaps. Over a hundred years earlier, the Assyrian commander had mocked King Hezekiah with the same picture. He said Egypt was "the staff of this crushed reed," and that if a man leaned on it, it would go into his hand and pierce it (Isaiah 36:6).

"When they took hold of you by the hand, you were crushed and tore every shoulder of theirs; and when they leaned on you, you were broken and made all their hips stand ***still***." Israel leaned on Egypt, and Egypt broke and hurt them. Not only did Egypt fail to help, it left Israel worse off.

That is what happens when we lean on anything other than God. A job, a relationship, money, our own cleverness, can look strong. But when the full weight of our life is put on it, it snaps. Isaiah said, "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help," because "they have not looked to the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 31:1). Proverbs says to trust in the LORD with all your heart and not lean on your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5). God is the only staff that will never break.

29:8-12 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** bringing a sword against you, and I will cut off from you man and animal. And the land of Egypt shall become a desolation and a ruin; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD. Because he said, "Nile **is** mine, and I made **it**," therefore look, I **am** against you and against your streams, and I will make the land of Egypt ruins of waste, a desolation, from Migdol **to** Syene, and to the border of Cush. The foot of man shall not pass through it, and the foot of animal shall not pass through it, and it shall not be inhabited forty years. And I will make the land of Egypt a desolation in the midst of lands made desolate, and its cities in the midst of cities laid waste shall be a desolation forty years; and I will disperse Egypt among the nations and scatter them among the lands.*

"Look, I am bringing a sword against you, and I will cut off from you man and animal. And the land of Egypt shall become a desolation and a ruin." God repeats Pharaoh's boast, "Nile is mine, and I made it," and says, "therefore look, I am against you and against your streams, and I will make the land of Egypt ruins of waste, a desolation, from Migdol to Syene, and to the border of Cush." Migdol was in the north of Egypt near the delta. Syene is modern Aswan in the far south. Cush was the land south of Egypt, in what is now Sudan. In other words, all of Egypt.

"The foot of man shall not pass through it, and the foot of animal shall not pass through it, and it shall not be inhabited forty years." "And I will disperse Egypt among the nations and scatter them among the lands."

What were these forty years? This is not easy to answer from history. We know that Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt about 568 B.C. (we will come to that at 29:19), and Jeremiah foretold that he would strike Egypt and carry people away captive (Jeremiah 43:10-12). Babylon's power over the region lasted until about the time Persia rose and Cyrus took Babylon in 539 B.C., and many teachers think the forty years cover roughly that period of humbling. Others note that forty is the number of years Israel wandered in the wilderness (4:6; Numbers 14:34), and see it as a full generation of judgment without trying to fix exact dates. History outside the Bible does not record everything that happened to Egypt in those years, so I believe the honest thing is to say that God promised a real time of desolation and scattering, that Babylon's invasion began it, and that we do not know every detail of how it worked out. Some teachers also believe parts of this prophecy look ahead to Egypt's judgment in the last days (compare Daniel 11:42-43).

29:13-16 *For thus says the Lord GOD: At the end of forty years I will gather Egypt from the peoples where they were dispersed. And I will turn back the captivity of Egypt and bring them back **to** the land of Pathros, to the land of their origin; and they shall be there a lowly kingdom. It shall be lowlier than the kingdoms, and it shall not exalt itself again over the nations; and I will make them few, so that they shall not have dominion over the nations. And it shall no longer be a confidence for the house of Israel, bringing iniquity to remembrance when they turn after them; and they shall know that I **am** the Lord GOD.'"*

"At the end of forty years I will gather Egypt from the peoples where they were dispersed. And I will turn back the captivity of Egypt and bring them back to the land of Pathros, to the land of their origin." Pathros is Upper Egypt, the southern part of the Nile valley, where Egyptian history

began. God would bring them home, as He would for Israel. Even Egypt was not beyond His mercy.

"And they shall be there a lowly kingdom. It shall be lowlier than the kingdoms, and it shall not exalt itself again over the nations; and I will make them few, so that they shall not have dominion over the nations."

This came true. For two thousand years before Ezekiel, Egypt had been one of the greatest powers on earth. After this time it never again ruled an empire. It was ruled by Persia, then by Alexander and the Greek kings who came after him, then by Rome, and by others after them. Egypt survived as a people and a land, unlike Tyre, but it never again ruled the nations.

"And it shall no longer be a confidence for the house of Israel, bringing iniquity to remembrance when they turn after them." The real point for Israel was this: Egypt would no longer be something they could trust in. Every time Israel turned to Egypt for help, it brought their iniquity to God's remembrance, because it showed they were not trusting Him. Once Egypt was humbled, that temptation would be gone. "And they shall know that I am the Lord GOD."

God's plan for Egypt is not only judgment. Isaiah promised a day when Egypt will worship the LORD, and God will say, "Blessed be My people Egypt" (Isaiah 19:25). I believe that will happen in the kingdom of Christ, when the nations come to worship the King in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:16).

29:17-18 *And it came about in the twenty-seventh year, in the first* ***month****, on the first of the month,* ***that*** *the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor a great labor against Tyre; every head was made bald, and every shoulder was rubbed bare; and* ***there*** *were no wages for him and for his army from Tyre for the labor which he labored against it.*

"And it came about in the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, on the first of the month." This is about 571 B.C., sixteen years after the message in 29:1. It is the latest date in the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel placed it here, out of time order, because it is about Egypt.

"Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor a great labor against Tyre; every head was made bald, and every shoulder was rubbed bare." Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre lasted about thirteen years. The soldiers carried baskets of earth and stone on their heads and shoulders to build siege works, until their heads were rubbed bald and their shoulders raw.

"And there were no wages for him and for his army from Tyre for the labor which he labored against it." What does this mean? Nebuchadnezzar did destroy the mainland city and force the island to submit, as 26:7-11 said. But it seems the people of Tyre had moved much of their wealth out by sea, or used it to pay their way to terms. When the siege ended, there was little plunder left. In the ancient world, soldiers were often paid out of the spoils of a city. Nebuchadnezzar's army got almost nothing for thirteen years of hard work.

Some critics say this verse shows Ezekiel's prophecy about Tyre failed. But notice two things. First, chapter 26 itself said that "many nations" would come against Tyre like waves (26:3), and

that "they" would throw its stones into the sea (26:12). Nebuchadnezzar was the first wave, not the last. The rest came later, as we saw with Alexander in 332 B.C. Second, Ezekiel did not hide this verse. A false prophet would have quietly dropped any word that seemed to embarrass him. Ezekiel wrote it down, with the date, because God told him to. That honesty is a mark of a true prophet.

29:19-20 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** giving to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon the land of Egypt, and he shall carry off its multitude and plunder its spoil and take its plunder as spoil; and it shall be wages for his army. **As** his recompense for which he labored, I have given him the land of Egypt, since they acted for Me, declares the Lord GOD.*

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I am giving to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon the land of Egypt, and he shall carry off its multitude and plunder its spoil and take its plunder as spoil; and it shall be wages for his army." God would pay Nebuchadnezzar with Egypt. History confirms that Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt about 568 B.C., in the days of Amasis, the Pharaoh who replaced Hophra.

"As his recompense for which he labored, I have given him the land of Egypt, since they acted for Me, declares the Lord GOD." This is remarkable. Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan king who worshiped Babylon's gods. He did not know he was working for the LORD. But God says, "they acted for Me." When Babylon besieged Tyre, it was carrying out God's judgment. And God does not cheat anyone of his wages. Jeremiah calls Nebuchadnezzar "My servant" (Jeremiah 43:10), not because he was a believer, but because God used him.

God is sovereign over the kings of the earth. He used Assyria as the rod of His anger (Isaiah 10:5), Cyrus as His shepherd (Isaiah 44:28), and Nebuchadnezzar as His servant. That does not excuse their cruelty, which God also judged (Jeremiah 25:12). But it means that nothing, not even the plans of pagan empires, is outside His control. If God is fair even to Nebuchadnezzar, we can trust Him to be fair with us. "For God is not unjust, to forget your work and the labor of love which you have shown toward His name" (Hebrews 6:10).

29:21 *On that day I will make a horn sprout for the house of Israel, and to you I will give an opening of the mouth in their midst; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD."*

"On that day I will make a horn sprout for the house of Israel." A horn in the Bible is a picture of strength, like the horns of a strong bull. To make a horn sprout means to give new strength. "On that day," when Egypt fell, Israel's hope would begin to grow again. The same words are used in Psalm 132:17, "There I will make a horn sprout for David," and Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, praised God for raising up "a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant" (Luke 1:69), speaking of Jesus. Many teachers see a hint of the Messiah here too, the strength God would raise up for Israel. It is at least a promise that Israel's story was not over.

"And to you I will give an opening of the mouth in their midst." Ezekiel had been told he would be unable to speak freely until news of Jerusalem's fall arrived (3:26; 24:27). By 571 B.C. that had long since happened (33:22). So this likely means that when the word about Egypt came true, Ezekiel

would be able to speak with confidence among the exiles, because his words had been proven. "And they shall know that I am the LORD."

Chapter 29 Summary

In about 587 B.C., while Jerusalem was under siege and Egypt's army had briefly marched out, God spoke against Pharaoh, the great monster lying in the Nile, who said the river was his and that he had made it. God would hook him, pull him out with the fish clinging to his scales, and leave him to die in the wilderness. Egypt had been a staff of reed to Israel, breaking and hurting those who leaned on it. God would make Egypt desolate from Migdol to Syene for forty years and scatter its people, then bring them back to Pathros as a lowly kingdom that would never again rule the nations or be a false hope for Israel. In about 571 B.C., the latest date in the book, God said that Nebuchadnezzar's army had labored hard against Tyre for thirteen years with no wages, so God would give him Egypt as his pay, because they had worked for Him. On that day God would make a horn sprout for Israel, and Ezekiel's words would be confirmed among the exiles.

Chapter 29 Study Questions

1. When was the first message of this chapter given, and why would it matter to people in Jerusalem at that time? (29:1; Jeremiah 37:5-7)

2. How does God picture Pharaoh, and what did Pharaoh say about the Nile? (29:3)

3. What would happen to the "great monster" and the fish clinging to his scales? (29:4-5)

4. What does it mean that Egypt was "a staff of reed" to Israel? (29:6-7; Isaiah 36:6)

5. What would Egypt become after its time of desolation, and did that come true? (29:14-15)

6. Why would Egypt "no longer be a confidence for the house of Israel"? (29:16)

7. What happened to Nebuchadnezzar's army at Tyre, and what did God give him as wages? (29:18-20)

8. How does 29:18 fit with the prophecy against Tyre in chapter 26? (26:3, 12)

9. Pharaoh said, "My Nile is mine." What do you tend to think of as yours, that really belongs to God? (Psalm 24:1)

10. What "staff of reed" have you leaned on that let you down? How can you put the full weight of your life on God instead? (Proverbs 3:5)

Chapter 30: The Day of the LORD on Egypt

Scripture

30:1-19 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Wail, "Alas for the day!" For a day ***is*** near, and a day of the LORD ***is*** near; a day of clouds, a time of nations it shall be. And a sword shall come on Egypt, and there shall be anguish in Cush, when the slain fall in Egypt, and they take away its multitude, and its foundations are torn down. Cush and Put and Lud and all the mixed ***people***, and Libya, and the sons of the land of the covenant with them shall fall by the sword. Thus says the LORD: And those who support Egypt shall fall, and the pride of its strength shall come down; from Migdol ***to*** Syene they shall fall in it by the sword, declares the Lord GOD. And they shall be desolate in the midst of lands made desolate, and its cities shall be in the midst of cities laid waste. And they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, when I set fire in Egypt and all its helpers are broken. On that day messengers shall go out from before Me in ships to make secure Cush tremble; and there shall be anguish on them on the day of Egypt; for look, it is coming. Thus says the Lord GOD: And I will put an end to the multitude of Egypt by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. He and his people with him, the ruthless of the nations, shall be brought in to destroy the land; and they shall draw their swords against Egypt and fill the land ***with*** the slain. And I will make the streams dry ground, and I will sell the land into the hand of evil men; and I will make the land and its fullness desolate by the hand of strangers; I, the LORD, have spoken. Thus says the Lord GOD: And I will destroy idols and make worthless idols cease from Memphis; and there shall no longer be a prince from the land of Egypt; and I will put fear in the land of Egypt. And I will make Pathros desolate, and set fire in Zoan, and execute judgments in Thebes. And I will pour out My rage on Pelusium, the stronghold of Egypt, and cut off the multitude of Thebes. And I will set fire in Egypt; Pelusium shall surely writhe, and Thebes shall be ***for*** breaking through, and Memphis ***shall have*** distresses by day. The young men of On and Pi-beseth shall fall by the sword, and they shall go into captivity. And in Tahpanhes the day shall withhold ***its light***, when I break there the yoke bars of Egypt; and the pride of its strength shall cease in it; as for it, a cloud shall cover it, and its daughters shall go into captivity. And I will execute judgments on Egypt, and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD.'"

30:20-26 And it came about in the eleventh year, in the first ***month***, on the seventh of the month, ***that*** the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt I have broken; and look, it has not been bound up to give healings, to put a bandage to bind it, for it to be strong to wield the sword. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and I will break his arms, the strong and the broken, and I will make the sword fall from his hand. And I will disperse Egypt among the nations and scatter them among the lands. And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand; and I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he shall groan the groans of a wounded ***man*** before him. And I will make strong the arms of the king of Babylon, and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, when I put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt. And I will disperse Egypt among the nations and scatter them among the lands; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD."

Chapter 30 Preview

Chapter 30 holds two more messages against Egypt. The first (30:1-19) is not dated. It announces "a day of the LORD" (30:3) for Egypt, a day of clouds and judgment, when the sword of Nebuchadnezzar would fall on Egypt and its allies, and God would set fire to its great cities one by one, from Memphis in the north to Thebes in the south. The second (30:20-26) is dated about 587 B.C., a few months before Jerusalem fell. God says He has already broken one of Pharaoh's arms, and He will break the other, while He strengthens the arms of the king of Babylon and puts His own sword in his hand.

The phrase "the day of the LORD" is one of the great themes of the prophets. It means a time when God steps into history to judge His enemies and set things right. There have been days of the LORD in history, like this one on Egypt, and Scripture also speaks of a final day of the LORD at the end of this age. The judgments of the past are like previews of the judgment to come. They remind us that God rules the nations, that no army can save us when He has spoken, and that the only safe place is with Him.

Chapter 30 Study

30:1-5 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Wail, "Alas for the day!" For a day **is** near, and a day of the LORD **is** near; a day of clouds, a time of nations it shall be. And a sword shall come on Egypt, and there shall be anguish in Cush, when the slain fall in Egypt, and they take away its multitude, and its foundations are torn down. Cush and Put and Lud and all the mixed **people**, and Libya, and the sons of the land of the covenant with them shall fall by the sword.*

"Son of man, prophesy and say." "Wail," and cry, "Alas for the day!" The message begins with a cry of grief.

"For a day is near, and a day of the LORD is near; a day of clouds, a time of nations it shall be." What is the day of the LORD? It is a time when God acts openly in judgment. The prophets used it for God's judgments in their own time, on Israel (7:7-12; Amos 5:18-20), on Babylon (Isaiah 13:6-9) and here on Egypt. They also used it for the great final day when God will judge the whole world and set up His kingdom (Joel 2:31; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Zechariah 14:1-9). In the New Testament, Paul says the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2), and it includes the judgments of the Tribulation and Christ's return. A day of the LORD on Egypt in Ezekiel's time was a real judgment in history, and it was also a small picture of that last day.

"A day of clouds" pictures darkness and gloom, a storm about to break. "A time of nations" probably means a time of judgment for the nations, Egypt and those around her.

"And a sword shall come on Egypt, and there shall be anguish in Cush, when the slain fall in Egypt, and they take away its multitude, and its foundations are torn down." Cush, south of Egypt, would tremble when it saw Egypt fall.

Egypt's allies would fall with it: "Cush and Put and Lud and all the mixed people, and Libya." These were the peoples of Africa and others who served in Egypt's armies. "The mixed people" probably means foreign soldiers hired to fight for Egypt. "And the sons of the land of the covenant with them shall fall by the sword." This last phrase is hard. It may mean peoples who were in a treaty with Egypt. Some teachers think it means the Jews who had fled to Egypt against God's word, as Jeremiah records (Jeremiah 42:13-22; 44:1-14). Jeremiah warned them that the sword they feared would follow them there.

30:6-9 *Thus says the LORD: And those who support Egypt shall fall, and the pride of its strength shall come down; from Migdol **to** Syene they shall fall in it by the sword, declares the Lord GOD. And they shall be desolate in the midst of lands made desolate, and its cities shall be in the midst of cities laid waste. And they shall know that I **am** the LORD, when I set fire in Egypt and all its helpers are broken. On that day messengers shall go out from before Me in ships to make secure Cush tremble; and there shall be anguish on them on the day of Egypt; for look, it is coming.*

"Thus says the LORD: And those who support Egypt shall fall, and the pride of its strength shall come down; from Migdol to Syene they shall fall in it by the sword." As in 29:10, this means from the north of Egypt to the south. "And they shall be desolate in the midst of lands made desolate."

"And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I set fire in Egypt and all its helpers are broken."

"On that day messengers shall go out from before Me in ships to make secure Cush tremble." Cush felt safe, far up the Nile. But messengers would come by boat up the river with the news of Egypt's fall, and Cush would be terrified. Isaiah also pictured messengers going by boat on the Nile to Cush (Isaiah 18:1-2). "And there shall be anguish on them on the day of Egypt; for look, it is coming."

Notice how often this chapter says that Egypt's "helpers" and "those who support Egypt" would fall too. Egypt was the great helper Judah wanted. But Egypt's own helpers would fall with it. When we trust in someone or something other than God, we often find that the one we lean on is leaning on something just as weak.

30:10-12 *Thus says the Lord GOD: And I will put an end to the multitude of Egypt by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. He and his people with him, the ruthless of the nations, shall be brought in to destroy the land; and they shall draw their swords against Egypt and fill the land **with** the slain. And I will make the streams dry ground, and I will sell the land into the hand of evil men; and I will make the land and its fullness desolate by the hand of strangers; I, the LORD, have spoken.*

"And I will put an end to the multitude of Egypt by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon." Here God names the instrument of this day of the LORD: Babylon. "He and his people with him, the ruthless of the nations, shall be brought in to destroy the land." The same words, "the ruthless of the nations," were used for Babylon in 28:7.

"And I will make the streams dry ground." The Nile was Egypt's life. Pharaoh claimed it as his own (29:3). God says He can dry it up. Isaiah 19:5-6 also speaks of the waters of the Nile drying up

in God's judgment on Egypt. Whether this means real drought or pictures the loss of everything the river gave, the point is that the source of Egypt's pride was in God's hand.

"And I will sell the land into the hand of evil men; and I will make the land and its fullness desolate by the hand of strangers; I, the LORD, have spoken." God "sells" the land, the way a master hands over what is his. Egypt belonged to God all along.

30:13-19 *Thus says the Lord GOD: And I will destroy idols and make worthless idols cease from Memphis; and there shall no longer be a prince from the land of Egypt; and I will put fear in the land of Egypt. And I will make Pathros desolate, and set fire in Zoan, and execute judgments in Thebes. And I will pour out My rage on Pelusium, the stronghold of Egypt, and cut off the multitude of Thebes. And I will set fire in Egypt; Pelusium shall surely writhe, and Thebes shall be **for** breaking through, and Memphis **shall have** distresses by day. The young men of On and Pi-beseth shall fall by the sword, and they shall go into captivity. And in Tahpanhes the day shall withhold **its light**, when I break there the yoke bars of Egypt; and the pride of its strength shall cease in it; as for it, a cloud shall cover it, and its daughters shall go into captivity. And I will execute judgments on Egypt, and they shall know that I **am** the LORD.'"*

Now God names Egypt's great cities, one after another, and pronounces judgment on each. It is like a roll call of destruction.

"And I will destroy idols and make worthless idols cease from Memphis." Memphis was the ancient capital of Lower Egypt (the north), full of temples to Egypt's gods. Egypt had more gods than almost any nation on earth. The LORD would show them to be worthless. At the exodus, God had already said, "on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments" (Exodus 12:12). He would do it again. "And there shall no longer be a prince from the land of Egypt." After Egypt fell to Persia in 525 B.C., native Egyptian kings ruled again only for short stretches, and then never again for more than two thousand years. For most of that time Egypt was ruled by Persians, Greeks, Romans and others.

"And I will make Pathros desolate, and set fire in Zoan, and execute judgments in Thebes." Pathros is Upper Egypt (the south). Zoan, also called Tanis, was an important city in the delta in the north. Thebes, called No in Hebrew, was the great capital of Upper Egypt, with the vast temples of the god Amon. Nahum had pointed to the fall of Thebes to Assyria decades earlier (Nahum 3:8-10).

God names more cities in verses 15 to 18: Pelusium, "the stronghold of Egypt," a fortress city on the eastern border that guarded the way into Egypt from the north; Thebes again; Memphis again; "On and Pi-beseth," that is, On (Heliopolis, the city of the sun god) and Pi-beseth (Bubastis), both in the delta; and Tahpanhes, a fortress city on the eastern edge of the delta, where the Jews who fled after Jerusalem's fall settled, and where Jeremiah was taken (Jeremiah 43:7-9).

"And in Tahpanhes the day shall withhold its light, when I break there the yoke bars of Egypt; and the pride of its strength shall cease in it." The yoke bars were the power Egypt used to rule others. "As for it, a cloud shall cover it, and its daughters shall go into captivity." The day of clouds of 30:3 would settle over Egypt.

"And I will execute judgments on Egypt, and they shall know that I am the LORD."

Why name all these cities? Because every one of them was a center of Egypt's pride, wealth and worship. Not one would escape. The list moves all over the land, north and south, east and west. The day of the LORD would leave no corner of Egypt untouched.

30:20-22 *And it came about in the eleventh year, in the first **month**, on the seventh of the month, **that** the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt I have broken; and look, it has not been bound up to give healings, to put a bandage to bind it, for it to be strong to wield the sword. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and I will break his arms, the strong and the broken, and I will make the sword fall from his hand.*

"And it came about in the eleventh year, in the first month, on the seventh of the month." That is about 587 B.C., in the spring, three months after the message of 29:1 and about three months before Jerusalem fell.

"Son of man, the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt I have broken." The arm stands for strength in battle. God had already broken one of Pharaoh's arms. This most likely points to Egypt's failed attempt to rescue Jerusalem. Pharaoh's army had marched out, the Babylonians had turned to meet it, and the Egyptians had gone back home (Jeremiah 37:5-8). "And look, it has not been bound up to give healings, to put a bandage to bind it, for it to be strong to wield the sword." Egypt had not recovered. Its arm was still broken.

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and I will break his arms, the strong and the broken, and I will make the sword fall from his hand." God would break the other arm as well, the strong one. Egypt would not be able to lift a sword at all.

30:23-26 *And I will disperse Egypt among the nations and scatter them among the lands. And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand; and I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he shall groan the groans of a wounded **man** before him. And I will make strong the arms of the king of Babylon, and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD, when I put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt. And I will disperse Egypt among the nations and scatter them among the lands; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD."*

"And I will disperse Egypt among the nations and scatter them among the lands." God repeats this in verse 26. Egypt would suffer what Israel was suffering, scattering among the nations.

"And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand." This is the heart of the message. Babylon was strong because God made it strong. The sword in Nebuchadnezzar's hand was "My sword." "And I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he shall groan the groans of a wounded man before him." Pharaoh, who had claimed to make the Nile, would groan like a wounded soldier on the battlefield.

"And I will make strong the arms of the king of Babylon, and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon

and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt." Three times God says He will put His sword or strength in Babylon's hand. The exiles had to understand that Babylon's victories were not the victories of Babylon's gods. They were the LORD's doing.

What does this say to us? Nations rise and fall by God's hand. "He removes kings and sets up kings" (Daniel 2:21). Empires that seem unbeatable in one generation are broken in the next. The arms of men are strong only as long as God lets them be. Psalm 20:7 says some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the LORD our God. That was the lesson Judah needed. When Pharaoh's arm was broken, Judah had nothing left to lean on but God, and God was all they ever really needed.

Chapter 30 Summary

God told Ezekiel to wail over a coming day of the LORD on Egypt, a day of clouds and judgment for the nations. The sword would come on Egypt, and Cush, Put, Lud, Libya and Egypt's other helpers would fall with it, from Migdol to Syene. Messengers would go up the Nile by ship to terrify Cush. God named Nebuchadnezzar and his ruthless army as the ones who would destroy the land, and said He would dry up the streams and sell the land to strangers. He named Egypt's cities one by one: Memphis with its idols, Pathros, Zoan, Thebes, Pelusium, On, Pi-beseth and Tahpanhes, and said there would be no more prince from Egypt. In about 587 B.C., God said He had already broken one arm of Pharaoh, which had not healed, and He would break the other, while He strengthened the arms of the king of Babylon and put His own sword in his hand. Egypt would be scattered among the nations, and all would know that He is the LORD.

Chapter 30 Study Questions

1. What is "the day of the LORD," and how was it coming on Egypt? (30:3)

2. Who would fall along with Egypt? (30:4-6)

3. Why would Cush tremble, even though it felt secure? (30:9)

4. Whom did God name as the one who would bring this judgment? (30:10-11)

5. Why did God name so many of Egypt's cities? What did they stand for? (30:13-18)

6. What had God already done to Pharaoh's arm, and what does it likely refer to? (30:21; Jeremiah 37:5-8)

7. Whose sword was in the king of Babylon's hand? (30:24-25)

8. How does this chapter show that God rules over the rise and fall of nations? (Daniel 2:21)

9. The day of the LORD on Egypt was a preview of the final day of the LORD. How should knowing that God will judge the world affect the way you live now? (1 Thessalonians 5:2-6)

10. Psalm 20:7 says some trust in chariots and horses. What chariots and horses are you tempted to boast in? What would it look like to boast in the name of the LORD instead?

Chapter 31: Pharaoh the Fallen Cedar

Scripture

31:1-9 And it came about in the eleventh year, in the third ***month***, on the first of the month, ***that*** the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his multitude: Whom are you like in your greatness? Look, Assyria ***was*** a cedar in Lebanon, beautiful of branches, and a forest giving shade, and tall of height; and its treetop was among the thick foliage. The waters made it grow; the deep raised it up, with its rivers going around its planting place, and it sent out its channels to all the trees of the field. Therefore its height was taller than all the trees of the field, and its boughs became great, and its limbs became long, from many waters when it sent ***them*** out. In its boughs every bird of the heavens made nests, and under its limbs every animal of the field gave birth, and in its shade all great nations dwelt. And it was beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its shoots, for its root was by many waters. Cedars in the garden of God did not eclipse it; cypresses were not like its boughs, and plane trees were not like its limbs; no tree in the garden of God was like it in its beauty. I made it beautiful in the abundance of its shoots, and all the trees of Eden which ***were*** in the garden of God envied it.

31:10-18 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you were tall in height, and it set its treetop among the thick foliage, and its heart was lifted up in its height, I will give it into the hand of a mighty one of nations; he shall surely deal with it; according to its wickedness I have driven it out. And strangers, the ruthless ones of nations, cut it down and abandoned it; on the mountains and in all the valleys its shoots have fallen, and its limbs were broken in all the ravines of the land; and all the peoples of the earth went down from its shade and abandoned it. On its fallen trunk every bird of the heavens dwells, and on its limbs every animal of the field is, so that no trees of ***the*** water may be lifted up in their height, and may not set their treetop among the thick foliage, and their mighty ones may not stand in their height, all drinkers of water; for all of them have been given to death, to the lowest earth, in the midst of the sons of man, with those who go down to ***the*** pit. Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day it went down to Sheol I caused mourning; I covered the deep over it, and I withheld its rivers, and many waters were restrained; and I made Lebanon mourn for it, and all the trees of the field ***were*** faint over it. At the sound of its downfall I made nations tremble, when I brought it down to Sheol with those who go down to ***the*** pit; and they were comforted in the lowest earth, all the trees of Eden, the choicest and ***the*** best of Lebanon, all drinkers of water. They also went down with it to Sheol, to the slain of ***the*** sword; and its arm, they dwelt in its shade in the midst of the nations. Whom are you like thus in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? And you shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the lowest earth; in the midst of ***the*** uncircumcised you shall lie, with the slain of ***the*** sword. That ***is*** Pharaoh and all his multitude, declares the Lord GOD."

Chapter 31 Preview

This message came about 587 B.C., two months after the one in 30:20, while Jerusalem was still under siege. God asks Pharaoh a question: "Whom are you like in your greatness?" (31:2). Then He answers with a story about a tree. Assyria, the great empire that ruled the world before Babylon, was like a magnificent cedar of Lebanon, taller than every tree, watered by the deep,

giving shade to all the nations. No tree in the garden of God could compare with it. But its heart was lifted up in its height, so God cut it down, and it fell across the mountains and went down to Sheol, the world of the dead.

The point for Pharaoh was plain. If mighty Assyria fell, so would Egypt. "That is Pharaoh and all his multitude" (31:18). The chapter also reminds us of chapter 17, where God brings low the high tree and raises up the low one, and of the tender shoot God will plant on the mountain of Israel. The great trees of the earth fall. The tree God plants stands.

Chapter 31 Study

31:1-2 *And it came about in the eleventh year, in the third **month**, on the first of the month, **that** the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his multitude: Whom are you like in your greatness?*

"And it came about in the eleventh year, in the third month, on the first of the month." That is about 587 B.C., in early summer, a little over a month before Jerusalem fell.

"Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his multitude: Whom are you like in your greatness?" The "multitude" means Pharaoh's people and armies. Egypt thought of itself as great and unbeatable. God asks a question that makes Pharaoh think: Who do you think you are like? What other great power do you compare yourself to? Then God tells him to look at Assyria.

31:3-5 *Look, Assyria **was** a cedar in Lebanon, beautiful of branches, and a forest giving shade, and tall of height; and its treetop was among the thick foliage. The waters made it grow; the deep raised it up, with its rivers going around its planting place, and it sent out its channels to all the trees of the field. Therefore its height was taller than all the trees of the field, and its boughs became great, and its limbs became long, from many waters when it sent **them** out.*

"Look, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon, beautiful of branches, and a forest giving shade, and tall of height; and its treetop was among the thick foliage." The cedar of Lebanon was the king of trees, tall, strong and long-lived. Assyria was the greatest empire of its day. For two hundred years it ruled from its capital at Nineveh, from Mesopotamia to Egypt. It destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. and besieged Jerusalem in Hezekiah's day.

Some teachers and translations read the word for Assyria here differently, as the name of a kind of tall tree, so that the verse speaks of a cypress or cedar rather than Assyria. But the SLB follows the Hebrew text as it reads, and verse 3 fits well with history: Assyria was the great tree that fell just before Babylon rose.

"The waters made it grow; the deep raised it up, with its rivers going around its planting place." Assyria lay along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and its wealth came from them, as Egypt's came from the Nile. "And it sent out its channels to all the trees of the field." Assyria's power reached out to all the nations around it. "Therefore its height was taller than all the trees of the field." It stood above every other kingdom.

31:6-9 *In its boughs every bird of the heavens made nests, and under its limbs every animal of the field gave birth, and in its shade all great nations dwelt. And it was beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its shoots, for its root was by many waters. Cedars in the garden of God did not eclipse it; cypresses were not like its boughs, and plane trees were not like its limbs; no tree in the garden of God was like it in its beauty. I made it beautiful in the abundance of its shoots, and all the trees of Eden which* ***were*** *in the garden of God envied it.*

"In its boughs every bird of the heavens made nests, and under its limbs every animal of the field gave birth, and in its shade all great nations dwelt." Like the great tree in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 4:10-12), the birds and animals picture the many peoples who lived under Assyria's rule and protection. Even great nations rested in its shade.

"And it was beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its shoots, for its root was by many waters." "Cedars in the garden of God did not eclipse it." Here Ezekiel uses the picture of Eden, the garden of God, as the most beautiful garden imaginable. The trees there are the other kingdoms of the earth. None of them could match the beauty of Assyria. "And all the trees of Eden which were in the garden of God envied it."

Now notice a small phrase in verse 9: "I made it beautiful in the abundance of its shoots." God made Assyria great. Its power did not come from itself. Paul says there is no authority except from God (Romans 13:1). Every nation that rises does so because God allows it, and He can bring it down again.

31:10-11 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you were tall in height, and it set its treetop among the thick foliage, and its heart was lifted up in its height, I will give it into the hand of a mighty one of nations; he shall surely deal with it; according to its wickedness I have driven it out.*

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you were tall in height, and it set its treetop among the thick foliage, and its heart was lifted up in its height." Notice the switch from "you" to "it." God is speaking to Pharaoh about Assyria, and the two run together. Pharaoh is meant to see himself in the tree.

"And its heart was lifted up in its height." Here again is the sin of pride, the same sin as Tyre (28:2, 17) and Pharaoh himself (29:3). Isaiah recorded Assyria's boast: by the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom (Isaiah 10:13). Assyria forgot that it was only an axe in God's hand (Isaiah 10:15).

"I will give it into the hand of a mighty one of nations; he shall surely deal with it." The mighty one of the nations was Babylon. In 612 B.C., the Babylonians and Medes destroyed Nineveh, Assyria's capital, just as Nahum had prophesied. By 609 B.C. the last remains of the Assyrian army were gone. Pharaoh Neco had actually marched north to help Assyria in that last stand, and King Josiah of Judah was killed trying to stop him (2 Kings 23:29). So Egypt had seen Assyria fall with its own eyes. "According to its wickedness I have driven it out."

31:12-14 *And strangers, the ruthless ones of nations, cut it down and abandoned it; on the mountains and in all the valleys its shoots have fallen, and its limbs were broken in all the ravines of the land; and all the peoples of the earth went down from its shade and abandoned it. On its fallen trunk every bird of the heavens dwells, and on its limbs every animal of the field is, so that no trees of* ***the*** *water may be lifted up in their height, and may not set their treetop among the thick foliage, and their mighty ones may not stand in their height, all drinkers of water; for all of them have been given to death, to the lowest earth, in the midst of the sons of man, with those who go down to* ***the*** *pit.*

"And strangers, the ruthless ones of nations, cut it down and abandoned it; on the mountains and in all the valleys its shoots have fallen, and its limbs were broken in all the ravines of the land." The great tree fell, and its branches were scattered over the land. "And all the peoples of the earth went down from its shade and abandoned it." The nations that had sheltered under Assyria left it when it fell. No one stood by it.

"On its fallen trunk every bird of the heavens dwells, and on its limbs every animal of the field is." The same birds and animals that once nested in it now perch on its fallen trunk, like scavengers on a carcass.

"So that no trees of the water may be lifted up in their height." Here is the purpose. God brought down Assyria as a lesson for every other proud nation. No tree should think it can grow so high that it is beyond His reach. "For all of them have been given to death, to the lowest earth, in the midst of the sons of man, with those who go down to the pit." However great a nation or a man becomes, death comes to all. The pit, the grave, is where every proud power ends.

31:15-17 *Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day it went down to Sheol I caused mourning; I covered the deep over it, and I withheld its rivers, and many waters were restrained; and I made Lebanon mourn for it, and all the trees of the field* ***were*** *faint over it. At the sound of its downfall I made nations tremble, when I brought it down to Sheol with those who go down to* ***the*** *pit; and they were comforted in the lowest earth, all the trees of Eden, the choicest and* ***the*** *best of Lebanon, all drinkers of water. They also went down with it to Sheol, to the slain of* ***the*** *sword; and its arm, they dwelt in its shade in the midst of the nations.*

"On the day it went down to Sheol I caused mourning." Sheol is the Hebrew word for the place of the dead, the grave and the world beyond it. In the Old Testament, it is where all the dead go, both righteous and wicked, though Scripture shows that their conditions there are very different (Luke 16:22-26). Here Ezekiel uses it to picture a fallen empire going down to join the dead nations of the past.

"I covered the deep over it, and I withheld its rivers, and many waters were restrained." The waters that made the tree great were stopped. "And I made Lebanon mourn for it, and all the trees of the field were faint over it." The whole world felt the loss.

"At the sound of its downfall I made nations tremble, when I brought it down to Sheol with those who go down to the pit." If Assyria could fall, who was safe? "And they were comforted in the lowest earth, all the trees of Eden, the choicest and the best of Lebanon, all drinkers of water." The

other kingdoms that had already fallen to the grave were "comforted" when Assyria joined them. It is a strange picture, almost like the dead taking grim comfort that even the greatest had come down to their level. Isaiah 14:9-11 pictures the dead kings in Sheol rising to greet the fallen king of Babylon, saying, You too have become weak like us.

"They also went down with it to Sheol, to the slain of the sword; and its arm, they dwelt in its shade in the midst of the nations." Assyria's allies, its "arm," who had lived in its shade, went down with it.

31:18 *Whom are you like thus in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? And you shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the lowest earth; in the midst of* ***the*** *uncircumcised you shall lie, with the slain of* ***the*** *sword. That* ***is*** *Pharaoh and all his multitude, declares the Lord GOD."*

"Whom are you like thus in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden?" God asks Pharaoh the same question as in verse 2, and now Pharaoh knows the answer. He is like Assyria. And he will end like Assyria. "And you shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the lowest earth; in the midst of the uncircumcised you shall lie, with the slain of the sword." The Egyptians took great pride in their burials and their tombs. To lie among the uncircumcised and the slain was the deepest dishonor. "That is Pharaoh and all his multitude, declares the Lord GOD."

What does this chapter teach us? First, every earthly power, however great, is temporary. Assyria seemed like it would stand forever. It was gone within a few years. Egypt would follow, and so would Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. Daniel saw all these kingdoms as a statue that would be crushed by a stone cut without hands, which became a mountain and filled the whole earth (Daniel 2:34-35, 44). That stone is the kingdom of Christ.

Second, God hates pride, whether in an empire or in a single heart. "Before breaking is pride, and before stumbling, haughtiness of spirit" (Proverbs 16:18). The higher we lift ourselves, the farther we fall.

Third, compare this tree with the one in 17:22-24. Assyria's tree was planted by many waters, grew high and proud, and was cut down. God's tender shoot is planted by God Himself on the mountain of Israel, and it becomes a majestic cedar where every bird finds shelter, forever. The world's great trees fall. The tree God plants, the kingdom of His Son, will never fall. Whose shade are you resting in?

Chapter 31 Summary

In about 587 B.C., God asked Pharaoh whom he was like in his greatness, and answered with the story of Assyria. Assyria was like a great cedar of Lebanon, watered by the deep, taller than every tree, with every bird nesting in its branches and all the great nations living in its shade, so beautiful that the trees of Eden envied it, because God had made it so. But its heart was lifted up in its height, so God gave it into the hand of a mighty one of the nations, Babylon, which cut it down in 612 to 609 B.C. Its branches fell across the land, the nations left its shade, and the birds and beasts settled on its fallen trunk. God did this so that no other tree would lift itself up, since all go down to death. When Assyria went down to Sheol, God made the nations mourn and tremble, and

the fallen kingdoms below were comforted. Pharaoh would end the same way, brought down to lie among the uncircumcised and the slain. That is Pharaoh and all his multitude.

Chapter 31 Study Questions

1. When was this message given, and what question does God ask Pharaoh? (31:1-2)

2. How is Assyria pictured, and what made it grow so great? (31:3-5)

3. Who lived in the shade of the great tree? (31:6)

4. Who made the tree beautiful? Why does that matter? (31:9; Romans 13:1)

5. What was the tree's sin, and who cut it down? (31:10-12)

6. Why did God bring the tree down, according to 31:14?

7. What is Sheol, and what happened when the tree went down there? (31:15-17)

8. How does the fall of the great tree compare with the tender shoot of 17:22-24 and the stone of Daniel 2:34-35, 44?

9. Assyria forgot that its greatness came from God. In what areas of your life are you tempted to forget where your strengths came from? (Proverbs 16:18)

10. The nations left Assyria's shade when it fell. Whose shade are you resting in? How does Psalm 91:1 encourage you?

Chapter 32: A Lament over Pharaoh

Scripture

32:1-16 And it came about in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first of the month, ***that*** the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, take up a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt, and you shall say to him: You have been likened ***to*** a young lion of nations, and you ***were*** like the sea monster in the seas; and you burst forth in your rivers, and you made the waters turbid with your feet, and you fouled their rivers. Thus says the Lord GOD: And I will spread My net over you with a company of many peoples, and they shall bring you up in My net. And I will abandon you on the land; on the surface of the field I will throw you; and I will cause every bird of the heavens to settle on you, and I will satisfy the animals of all the earth from you. And I will put your flesh on the mountains, and I will fill the valleys ***with*** your height. And I will make the land drink your outflow, from your blood, to the mountains; and the ravines shall be filled from you. And when I extinguish you, I will cover ***the*** heavens and darken their stars; the sun I will cover with the cloud, and the moon shall not make its light shine. All the luminaries of light in the heavens I will darken over you, and I will put darkness over your land, declares the Lord GOD. And I will disturb the heart of many peoples, when I bring your breaking among the nations, to lands which you have not known. And I will make many peoples appalled over you, and their kings shall shudder ***with*** shuddering over you, when I brandish My sword before their faces; and they shall tremble at every moment, each man for his life, on the day of your downfall. For thus says the Lord GOD: The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon you. By the swords of mighty men I will make your multitude fall, the ruthless ones of nations, all of them; and they shall devastate the pride of Egypt, and all its multitude shall be destroyed. And I will destroy all its livestock from beside many waters; and the foot of man shall not make them turbid again, and the hooves of livestock shall not make them turbid. Then I will make their waters settle, and I will make their rivers go like oil, declares the Lord GOD. When I make the land of Egypt a desolation, and the land ***is*** made desolate of its fullness, when I strike down all who dwell in it, and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. It ***is*** a lamentation, and they shall chant it; the daughters of the nations shall chant it; over Egypt and over all its multitude they shall chant it, declares the Lord GOD."

32:17-32 And it came about in the twelfth year, on the fifteenth of the month, ***that*** the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, wail over the multitude of Egypt, and bring it down, it and the daughters of majestic nations, to the earth of the lowest parts, with those who go down to ***the*** pit. Than whom are you more lovely? Go down, and be laid with ***the*** uncircumcised. In the midst of the slain of ***the*** sword they shall fall; a sword has been given; draw it down, and all its multitudes. The mighty ones of the mighty men shall speak to him from the midst of Sheol with his helpers: they have gone down, they lie, the uncircumcised, the slain of ***the*** sword. Assyria ***is*** there and all its company; its graves ***are*** around it; all of them ***are*** slain, fallen by the sword, whose graves have been put in the remotest parts of ***the*** pit; and its company was around its grave; all of them ***are*** slain, fallen by the sword, who put terror in the land of the living. Elam ***is*** there and all its multitude around its grave; all of them ***are*** slain, fallen by the sword, who went down uncircumcised to the earth of the lowest parts, who put their terror in the land of the living; and they have borne their disgrace with those who go down to ***the*** pit. In the midst of ***the*** slain

they have made a bed for it with all its multitude; its graves ***are*** around it; all of them ***are*** uncircumcised, slain of ***the*** sword; for their terror was put in the land of the living, and they have borne their disgrace with those who go down to ***the*** pit; in the midst of ***the*** slain it has been put. Meshech, Tubal, and all its multitude ***are*** there; its graves ***are*** around it; all of them ***are*** uncircumcised, pierced of ***the*** sword, for they put their terror in the land of the living. And they do not lie with the mighty men, the fallen from ***the*** uncircumcised, who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war; and they put their swords under their heads, and their iniquities were on their bones; for the terror of mighty men ***was*** in the land of the living. And you, in the midst of ***the*** uncircumcised you shall be broken, and you shall lie with the slain of ***the*** sword. Edom ***is*** there, its kings and all its princes, who have been put in their might with the slain of ***the*** sword; they shall lie with ***the*** uncircumcised and with those who go down to ***the*** pit. The chiefs of the north ***are*** there, all of them, and every Sidonian, who went down with the slain in their terror, being ashamed of their might; and they lay uncircumcised with the slain of ***the*** sword, and they have borne their disgrace with those who go down to ***the*** pit. Pharaoh shall see them, and he shall be comforted over all his multitude, the slain of ***the*** sword, Pharaoh and all his army, declares the Lord GOD. For I have put My terror in the land of the living, and he shall be laid in the midst of ***the*** uncircumcised with the slain of ***the*** sword, Pharaoh and all his multitude, declares the Lord GOD."

Chapter 32 Preview

Chapter 32 holds the last two messages against Egypt and closes the whole section of messages to the nations (chapters 25 to 32). Both are dated in the twelfth year of the exile, about 585 B.C. By then Jerusalem had fallen, and the news was reaching the exiles (33:21 is dated in the same year). Egypt had failed Judah completely. Now God tells Ezekiel to sing two funeral songs over Pharaoh.

In the first (32:1-16), Pharaoh thinks he is a young lion among the nations, but he is really a monster thrashing in the river, muddying the waters. God will catch him in His net, throw him on the land for the birds and beasts, and darken the sun, moon and stars over Egypt. In the second (32:17-32), Ezekiel follows Pharaoh down into Sheol, the world of the dead, and finds the great nations of the past already lying there: Assyria, Elam, Meshech and Tubal, Edom, the princes of the north and the Sidonians. All of them once spread terror in the land of the living. Now they lie among the slain, and Pharaoh will join them. It is one of the most solemn chapters in the Bible, a reminder that every earthly power ends in the grave, and only God's kingdom lasts.

Chapter 32 Study

32:1-2 *And it came about in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first of the month,* ***that*** *the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, take up a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt, and you shall say to him: You have been likened* ***to*** *a young lion of nations, and you* ***were*** *like the sea monster in the seas; and you burst forth in your rivers, and you made the waters turbid with your feet, and you fouled their rivers.*

"And it came about in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first of the month." That is about 585 B.C., in early spring, several months after Jerusalem fell.

"Son of man, take up a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt." This is a funeral song, sung while Pharaoh was still alive.

"You have been likened to a young lion of nations." Pharaoh liked to see himself as a lion, the proud king of beasts among the nations. "And you were like the sea monster in the seas." God gives another picture, the same one as in 29:3, the great crocodile or monster in the Nile. "And you burst forth in your rivers, and you made the waters turbid with your feet, and you fouled their rivers." Pharaoh was not a noble lion. He was a beast thrashing around in the water and stirring up mud. Egypt's meddling in the affairs of other nations, especially Judah, had only made things worse. It muddied everything it touched.

32:3-6 *Thus says the Lord GOD: And I will spread My net over you with a company of many peoples, and they shall bring you up in My net. And I will abandon you on the land; on the surface of the field I will throw you; and I will cause every bird of the heavens to settle on you, and I will satisfy the animals of all the earth from you. And I will put your flesh on the mountains, and I will fill the valleys **with** your height. And I will make the land drink your outflow, from your blood, to the mountains; and the ravines shall be filled from you.*

"And I will spread My net over you with a company of many peoples, and they shall bring you up in My net." Hunters caught great river creatures with nets. God's net would be thrown by "many peoples," the armies of Babylon and its allies. It is "My net." Babylon's army was God's tool.

"And I will abandon you on the land; on the surface of the field I will throw you." As in 29:5, the monster would be dragged out of the water and left to die. "And I will cause every bird of the heavens to settle on you, and I will satisfy the animals of all the earth from you." Verses 5 and 6 describe the huge carcass covering the mountains and valleys, and the land soaking up its blood. The picture is meant to be gruesome. It shows how great Egypt's fall would be and how much death the war would bring.

32:7-10 *And when I extinguish you, I will cover **the** heavens and darken their stars; the sun I will cover with the cloud, and the moon shall not make its light shine. All the luminaries of light in the heavens I will darken over you, and I will put darkness over your land, declares the Lord GOD. And I will disturb the heart of many peoples, when I bring your breaking among the nations, to lands which you have not known. And I will make many peoples appalled over you, and their kings shall shudder **with** shuddering over you, when I brandish My sword before their faces; and they shall tremble at every moment, each man for his life, on the day of your downfall.*

"And when I extinguish you, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; the sun I will cover with the cloud, and the moon shall not make its light shine. All the luminaries of light in the heavens I will darken over you, and I will put darkness over your land."

Why darken the sun, moon and stars? First, this is the language the prophets use for the day of the LORD, when God's judgment falls and the whole world seems to go dark (Isaiah 13:10; Joel 2:31). It is the same language Jesus used for the signs right after the Tribulation, when "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light" (Matthew 24:29). When a great nation falls under God's judgment, it is as if the lights of heaven go out over it.

Second, it would have struck the Egyptians in a special way. Their chief god was Ra, the sun. Pharaoh was called the son of Ra. To darken the sun over Egypt was to show that the LORD rules even the lights that Egypt worshiped. God had done it once before, in the ninth plague, when "there was darkness of gloom in all the land of Egypt three days" (Exodus 10:22).

"And I will disturb the heart of many peoples, when I bring your breaking among the nations, to lands which you have not known." News of Egypt's fall would reach far-off lands. "And I will make many peoples appalled over you, and their kings shall shudder with shuddering over you, when I brandish My sword before their faces." If Egypt fell, what nation could stand? "They shall tremble at every moment, each man for his life, on the day of your downfall."

32:11-16 *For thus says the Lord GOD: The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon you. By the swords of mighty men I will make your multitude fall, the ruthless ones of nations, all of them; and they shall devastate the pride of Egypt, and all its multitude shall be destroyed. And I will destroy all its livestock from beside many waters; and the foot of man shall not make them turbid again, and the hooves of livestock shall not make them turbid. Then I will make their waters settle, and I will make their rivers go like oil, declares the Lord GOD. When I make the land of Egypt a desolation, and the land* ***is*** *made desolate of its fullness, when I strike down all who dwell in it, and they shall know that I* ***am*** *the LORD. It* ***is*** *a lamentation, and they shall chant it; the daughters of the nations shall chant it; over Egypt and over all its multitude they shall chant it, declares the Lord GOD."*

"For thus says the Lord GOD: The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon you." God names the net: Babylon. "By the swords of mighty men I will make your multitude fall, the ruthless ones of nations, all of them; and they shall devastate the pride of Egypt, and all its multitude shall be destroyed."

"And I will destroy all its livestock from beside many waters; and the foot of man shall not make them turbid again, and the hooves of livestock shall not make them turbid." Pharaoh had muddied the waters (32:2). When he and his herds were gone, the waters would be still. "Then I will make their waters settle, and I will make their rivers go like oil." Oil flows smoothly and quietly. The Nile would flow on, calm and clear, with no one left to stir it up. It is a picture of an empty land, a silence after judgment.

"When I make the land of Egypt a desolation, and the land is made desolate of its fullness, when I strike down all who dwell in it, and they shall know that I am the LORD."

"It is a lamentation, and they shall chant it; the daughters of the nations shall chant it." In the ancient world, women were often the professional mourners who sang at funerals (Jeremiah 9:17-20). The women of the nations would sing this song over Egypt. "Over Egypt and over all its multitude they shall chant it, declares the Lord GOD."

32:17-21 *And it came about in the twelfth year, on the fifteenth of the month, **that** the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, wail over the multitude of Egypt, and bring it down, it and the daughters of majestic nations, to the earth of the lowest parts, with those who go down to **the** pit. Than whom are you more lovely? Go down, and be laid with **the** uncircumcised. In the midst of the slain of **the** sword they shall fall; a sword has been given; draw it down, and all its multitudes. The mighty ones of the mighty men shall speak to him from the midst of Sheol with his helpers: they have gone down, they lie, the uncircumcised, the slain of **the** sword.*

"And it came about in the twelfth year, on the fifteenth of the month." The month is not given. It was probably two weeks after the message in 32:1, or in the first month of that year. This is the last of the messages against the nations.

"Son of man, wail over the multitude of Egypt, and bring it down, it and the daughters of majestic nations, to the earth of the lowest parts, with those who go down to the pit." Ezekiel's wailing is itself a kind of prophetic act. By singing the funeral song, he announces the burial.

"Than whom are you more lovely? Go down, and be laid with the uncircumcised." Egypt thought itself more beautiful than everyone else. God says: Are you really better than them? Go down and lie with them. To be "laid with the uncircumcised" meant to be buried in shame among the dishonored dead (28:10; 31:18).

"In the midst of the slain of the sword they shall fall; a sword has been given; draw it down, and all its multitudes."

"The mighty ones of the mighty men shall speak to him from the midst of Sheol with his helpers." The great warriors already in Sheol greet Pharaoh as he arrives. "They have gone down, they lie, the uncircumcised, the slain of the sword." It is a grim welcome.

Is this a literal description of what the afterlife is like? I do not believe Ezekiel is giving us a map of the world of the dead. This is a funeral song, written in poetry, and it uses the picture of the nations lying in their graves together to make a point. Isaiah 14:9-11 uses a similar picture for the king of Babylon. But the picture rests on something real. Death is real, Sheol is real, and every person and nation will face God's judgment. "It is appointed to men to die once, and after this judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

32:22-26 *Assyria **is** there and all its company; its graves **are** around it; all of them **are** slain, fallen by the sword, whose graves have been put in the remotest parts of **the** pit; and its company was around its grave; all of them **are** slain, fallen by the sword, who put terror in the land of the living. Elam **is** there and all its multitude around its grave; all of them **are** slain, fallen by the sword, who went down uncircumcised to the earth of the lowest parts, who put their terror in the land of the living; and they have borne their disgrace with those who go down to **the** pit. In the midst of **the** slain they have made a bed for it with all its multitude; its graves **are** around it; all of them **are** uncircumcised, slain of **the** sword; for their terror was put in the land of the living, and they have borne their disgrace with those who go down to **the** pit; in the midst of **the** slain it has been put. Meshech, Tubal, and all its multitude **are** there; its graves **are** around it; all of them **are** uncircumcised, pierced of **the** sword, for they put their terror in the land of the living.*

Now Ezekiel names the nations already lying in Sheol, one by one. Each is described with the same grim refrain: slain, fallen by the sword, who spread terror in the land of the living.

"Assyria is there and all its company; its graves are around it; all of them are slain, fallen by the sword." Assyria, the great tree of chapter 31, had fallen only about twenty-five years before. "Whose graves have been put in the remotest parts of the pit." Assyria had once been the terror of the world, "who put terror in the land of the living." Now it lay in the deepest part of the pit.

"Elam is there and all its multitude around its grave." Elam was a kingdom east of Babylon, in what is now western Iran, famous for its archers (Jeremiah 49:35). It had fought against Assyria and been crushed, and later it was conquered by Babylon. "All of them are slain, fallen by the sword, who went down uncircumcised to the earth of the lowest parts, who put their terror in the land of the living; and they have borne their disgrace with those who go down to the pit."

"Meshech, Tubal, and all its multitude are there." These were peoples of the north, in what is now Turkey, known as fierce warriors. We met them as traders in 27:13, and they will appear again in 38:2. "All of them are uncircumcised, pierced of the sword, for they put their terror in the land of the living."

Notice the phrase that comes again and again: "who put terror in the land of the living." These nations ruled by fear. They terrorized others. But in the end, they all lay in the same place, under the same judgment. Every tyrant who rules by terror ends in the grave, and God's judgment.

32:27-28 *And they do not lie with the mighty men, the fallen from **the** uncircumcised, who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war; and they put their swords under their heads, and their iniquities were on their bones; for the terror of mighty men **was** in the land of the living. And you, in the midst of **the** uncircumcised you shall be broken, and you shall lie with the slain of **the** sword.*

"And they do not lie with the mighty men, the fallen from the uncircumcised, who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war; and they put their swords under their heads." This verse seems to compare two kinds of burial. Some ancient warriors were buried with honor, with their weapons laid beside them and their swords under their heads, as a mark of respect. Meshech and Tubal would not even have that. They would be buried in disgrace. "And their iniquities were on

their bones; for the terror of mighty men was in the land of the living." Their sins went with them to the grave.

Some translations read the verse as a question, Do they not lie with the fallen mighty men of old? Either way, the point is that none of their might could save them.

"And you, in the midst of the uncircumcised you shall be broken, and you shall lie with the slain of the sword." God turns to Pharaoh again. Egypt would lie among them.

32:29-32 *Edom **is** there, its kings and all its princes, who have been put in their might with the slain of **the** sword; they shall lie with **the** uncircumcised and with those who go down to **the** pit. The chiefs of the north **are** there, all of them, and every Sidonian, who went down with the slain in their terror, being ashamed of their might; and they lay uncircumcised with the slain of **the** sword, and they have borne their disgrace with those who go down to **the** pit. Pharaoh shall see them, and he shall be comforted over all his multitude, the slain of **the** sword, Pharaoh and all his army, declares the Lord GOD. For I have put My terror in the land of the living, and he shall be laid in the midst of **the** uncircumcised with the slain of **the** sword, Pharaoh and all his multitude, declares the Lord GOD."*

"Edom is there, its kings and all its princes, who have been put in their might with the slain of the sword." Edom, which gloated over Judah's fall (25:12-14), would lie there too. "The chiefs of the north are there, all of them, and every Sidonian." The princes of the north were probably the rulers of Syria and the lands north of Israel, and the Sidonians were Tyre's neighbors (28:20-23). "Who went down with the slain in their terror, being ashamed of their might."

Notice the list. Assyria and Elam far to the east, Meshech and Tubal to the north, Edom to the south, Sidon and the northern princes to the northwest. Most of the nations Ezekiel has spoken against in chapters 25 to 32 are there, and others besides. All the powers that surrounded and threatened Israel would come to the same end.

"Pharaoh shall see them, and he shall be comforted over all his multitude." What kind of comfort is this? Only the bitter comfort of knowing he is not alone in his ruin. It is no real comfort at all.

"For I have put My terror in the land of the living." Here is the last word. These nations had spread their terror in the land of the living. But in the end, it is God's terror, His awesome power and judgment, that rules the land of the living. "And he shall be laid in the midst of the uncircumcised with the slain of the sword, Pharaoh and all his multitude, declares the Lord GOD."

So ends the long section of messages against the nations. What do these eight chapters teach us?

First, God is the Lord of all the earth, not just of Israel. Every nation answers to Him. Second, pride is the root sin of the nations: Tyre said, I am a god; Pharaoh said, My Nile is mine. Third, God sees how the nations treat His people, and He judges those who mock and harm them. Fourth, none of the powers Judah trusted in could save. Egypt was a broken reed, and Tyre's wealth sank in the sea. And fifth, every earthly empire, however terrifying, ends in the grave.

But that is not the end of the book. Chapter 33 will bring the news that Jerusalem has fallen, and from there Ezekiel's message turns to hope: a new heart, a Good Shepherd, dry bones that live, and a kingdom that will never end. The nations go down to the pit. But God has promised Israel that He will bring them up out of their graves (37:12-13). And for all of us, Jesus Christ has gone down into death and come up again. He has "the keys of Hades and of Death" (Revelation 1:18). The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever (Revelation 11:15).

Chapter 32 Summary

In about 585 B.C., after Jerusalem had fallen, God told Ezekiel to sing two funeral songs over Pharaoh. In the first, Pharaoh thought he was a young lion among the nations, but he was a monster muddying the rivers. God would catch him in His net through many peoples, throw him on the land for birds and beasts, and darken the sun, moon and stars over Egypt. Nations far and near would tremble when the sword of the king of Babylon struck Egypt, and Egypt's rivers would flow quietly like oil because no one would be left to stir them. In the second song, Ezekiel wailed over Egypt and sent it down to Sheol to be laid with the uncircumcised. There the great powers that had spread terror in the land of the living already lay among the slain: Assyria, Elam, Meshech and Tubal, Edom, the princes of the north and the Sidonians. Pharaoh would see them and take a bitter comfort, and he and all his multitude would lie among them, because God has put His own terror in the land of the living. This closes Ezekiel's messages against the nations.

Chapter 32 Study Questions

1. When were these two messages given, and what had happened to Jerusalem by then? (32:1, 17; 33:21)

2. How did Pharaoh see himself, and how did God describe him? (32:2)

3. Whose net would catch Pharaoh, and who would throw it? (32:3, 11-12)

4. Why would God darken the sun, moon and stars over Egypt? How does this connect with the day of the LORD and Matthew 24:29? (32:7-8)

5. What would happen to Egypt's waters when Pharaoh was gone? (32:13-14)

6. Which nations does Ezekiel find already in Sheol? (32:22-30)

7. What phrase is repeated about these nations again and again, and what does it say about how they ruled? (32:23-27)

8. What kind of "comfort" would Pharaoh have, and what is the last word God says about terror in the land of the living? (32:31-32)

9. Every one of these nations ended in the grave. How does knowing that "it is appointed to men to die once, and after this judgment" (Hebrews 9:27) change how you think about your own life?

10. Looking back over chapters 25 to 32, what have you learned about trusting God instead of the powers of this world? What is one thing you can do this week to put that into practice?

Chapter 33: The Watchman and the News of Jerusalem's Fall

Scripture

33:1-20 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, speak to the sons of your people, and you shall say to them: A land, when I bring a sword upon it, and the people of the land take a man, one from their borders, and set him for themselves as a watchman, and he sees the sword coming upon the land, and he blows on the trumpet and warns the people, and the one who hears hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his head. He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be on him. And he who took warning delivered his soul. And the watchman, if he sees the sword coming and does not blow on the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes away a soul from them, he is taken away in his iniquity, and his blood I will require from the hand of the watchman. And you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; and you shall hear a word from My mouth, and you shall warn them from Me. When I say to the wicked ***man***, 'O wicked ***man***, you shall surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked ***man*** from his way, that wicked ***man*** shall die in his iniquity, and his blood I will require from your hand. And you, if you warn the wicked ***man*** from his way to turn back from it, and he does not turn back from his way, he shall die in his iniquity, and you have delivered your soul. And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel: Thus you have spoken, saying, 'Surely our transgressions and our sins ***are*** on us, and in them we are wasting away; and how shall we live?' Say to them, '***As*** I live, declares the Lord GOD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked ***man***, but in a wicked ***man*** turning back from his way, and ***that*** he live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! And why will you die, O house of Israel?' And you, son of man, say to the sons of your people: The righteousness of the righteous ***man*** shall not deliver him on the day of his transgression; and ***as for*** the wickedness of the wicked ***man***, he shall not stumble by it on the day he turns back from his wickedness; and a righteous ***man*** shall not be able to live by it on the day he sins. When I say to the righteous ***man***, 'He shall surely live,' and he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, all his ***acts of*** righteousness shall not be remembered; and in his injustice which he has done, in it he shall die. And when I say to the wicked ***man***, 'You shall surely die,' and he turns back from his sin and does justice and righteousness, ***if*** a wicked ***man*** returns a pledge, repays robbery, walks in the statutes of life so as not to do injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All his sins which he has sinned shall not be remembered against him; he has done justice and righteousness; he shall surely live. And the sons of your people say, 'The way of the Lord is not right'; and ***as for*** them, their way is not right. When a righteous ***man*** turns back from his righteousness and does injustice, and he shall die in them. And when a wicked ***man*** turns back from his wickedness and does justice and righteousness, by them he shall live. And you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Each man according to his ways I will judge you, O house of Israel."

33:21-33 And it came about in the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth ***month***, on the fifth of the month, ***that*** the escapee from Jerusalem came to me, saying, "The city has been struck." And the hand of the LORD had been upon me in the evening, before the escapee came; and He opened my

mouth by the time he came to me in the morning; and my mouth was opened, and I was no longer mute. And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, those who dwell in these waste places on the soil of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was one, and he possessed the land; and we ***are*** many; to us the land has been given for a possession.' Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: You eat with the blood, and you lift up your eyes to your idols, and you shed blood; and shall you possess the land? You have stood on your sword; you have done abomination, and each man has defiled the wife of his neighbor; and shall you possess the land?' Thus you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: ***As*** I live, surely those who ***are*** in the waste places shall fall by the sword, and him who ***is*** on the surface of the field I will give to the animals to eat him, and those who ***are*** in the strongholds and in the caves shall die by pestilence. And I will make the land a desolation and a waste, and the pride of its strength shall cease, and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, with no one passing through. And they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, when I make the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations which they have done.' And you, son of man, the sons of your people who are speaking together about you beside the walls and in the doorways of the houses, and one speaks with one, each man with his brother, saying, 'Come now, and hear what the word ***is*** that comes out from the LORD.' And they come to you as a people comes, and they sit before you ***as*** My people, and they hear your words, and they do not do them; for ***with*** lustful desires in their mouth they are doing, ***and*** their heart is going after their unjust gain. And look, you ***are*** to them like a song of lustful desires, beautiful of voice and doing well ***at*** playing; and they hear your words, and they are not doing them. And when it comes, look, it is coming, and they shall know that a prophet has been in their midst."

Chapter 33 Preview

This chapter is the hinge of the book. For thirty-two chapters Ezekiel has warned that Jerusalem would fall. Now God gives him his watchman charge a second time, almost word for word as in chapter 3, and then the news arrives. A man who escaped from Jerusalem walks into the camp of the exiles and says, "The city has been struck" (33:21). The night before he came, God opened Ezekiel's mouth, and the long silence of the prophet was over.

Between the charge and the news stands one of the most tender verses in the Old Testament. The people finally admit that their sins are crushing them, and they ask, "how shall we live?" God answers with an oath: He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and He pleads with them to turn back and live (33:11). The chapter ends with two warnings. The survivors in the ruined land were still sinning and still claiming the land. And the exiles had started to treat Ezekiel like a good singer: pleasant to listen to, easy to ignore.

Chapter 33 Study

33:1-6 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, speak to the sons of your people, and you shall say to them: A land, when I bring a sword upon it, and the people of the land take a man, one from their borders, and set him for themselves as a watchman, and he sees the sword coming upon the land, and he blows on the trumpet and warns the people, and the one who hears hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his head. He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be on him. And he who took warning delivered his soul. And the watchman, if he sees the sword coming and does not blow on the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes away a soul from them, he is taken away in his iniquity, and his blood I will require from the hand of the watchman.*

God begins with a picture every ancient city understood. When an enemy army was coming against a land, "the people of the land take a man, one from their borders, and set him for themselves as a watchman." His job was simple. If "he sees the sword coming upon the land," he "blows on the trumpet and warns the people."

From there it is up to the people. If a man hears the trumpet and ignores it, and the sword takes him, "his blood shall be on his head." He had his warning. But "he who took warning delivered his soul." The trumpet saved everyone who listened to it.

And if the watchman sees the sword coming and keeps quiet? The people who die are still "taken away in his iniquity." They were sinners, and the judgment was just. But God says, "his blood I will require from the hand of the watchman." A silent watchman shares the guilt of the deaths he could have warned against.

Notice verse 2: "when I bring a sword upon it." Babylon was only the instrument. The judgment was the LORD's.

33:7-9 *And you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; and you shall hear a word from My mouth, and you shall warn them from Me. When I say to the wicked* ***man****, 'O wicked* ***man****, you shall surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked* ***man*** *from his way, that wicked* ***man*** *shall die in his iniquity, and his blood I will require from your hand. And you, if you warn the wicked* ***man*** *from his way to turn back from it, and he does not turn back from his way, he shall die in his iniquity, and you have delivered your soul.*

Now God applies the picture to Ezekiel: "And you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; and you shall hear a word from My mouth, and you shall warn them from Me." These words repeat 3:17-19 almost exactly.

Why say it again? Because Ezekiel's message was about to turn from the fall of Jerusalem to hope and restoration. But the office stays the same. Each exile still had to hear and turn. The hope of a future restoration did not cancel the need to repent today.

As in chapter 3, I believe this passage is about Ezekiel's office and his accountability as a prophet to Israel in his day, not a teaching that believers in Christ can lose their salvation. The "death"

first in view was the death that came in God's judgments on the nation, and it is the death that waits for anyone who dies in his sin. The principle still carries over to us, as we saw in 3:21 (Acts 20:26-27).

33:10 *And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel: Thus you have spoken, saying, 'Surely our transgressions and our sins **are** on us, and in them we are wasting away; and how shall we live?'*

God tells Ezekiel to repeat back to the people what they have been saying: "Surely our transgressions and our sins are on us, and in them we are wasting away; and how shall we live?"

This is new. For years the exiles had blamed their fathers (18:2) and accused God of being unfair (18:25). Now, with the news of Jerusalem's fall about to break, they are finally saying the truth. Our sins are on us. We are wasting away under them.

Conviction of sin is the first step toward God. Despair is a step away from Him. The exiles were close to giving up. Many people today are in the same place: they feel the weight of what they have done and cannot see any way out. God's answer comes in the next verse.

33:11 *Say to them, '**As** I live, declares the Lord GOD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked **man**, but in a wicked **man** turning back from his way, and **that** he live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! And why will you die, O house of Israel?'*

"As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but in a wicked man turning back from his way, and that he live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! And why will you die, O house of Israel?"

God begins with an oath: "As I live." He swears by His own life, because there is no one greater to swear by (Hebrews 6:13). What follows is His sworn word about His own heart.

And what is His heart? "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked." God is a righteous Judge. He will judge sin, and Ezekiel has spent thirty-two chapters showing that. But judgment is not what He delights in. He takes no joy in watching a sinner die. What gives Him pleasure is "a wicked man turning back from his way," and the result, "that he live." God said the same in 18:23 and 18:32, and the people needed to hear it now more than ever.

The Hebrew word for turn, shuv, is the Old Testament's great word for repentance. It means to turn around, to go back the other way. Repentance is not just feeling sorry. It is turning from sin and turning to God. God says it twice: "Turn back, turn back." He is not calmly stating terms. He is pleading.

Then comes the question: "And why will you die, O house of Israel?" It is the question of a Father watching His children walk toward a cliff. You do not have to die. Why will you not come?

The New Testament shows us the same heart. Peter says the Lord is patient toward us, "not wishing any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Paul says God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Jesus wept over

Jerusalem and said He had longed to gather her children together, "and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37). The God of Ezekiel and the God of the gospel are the same God.

And the way to live is now open wider than Ezekiel could see. The exiles were told to turn and live. We are told to turn and believe in the One who died for the wicked. God did more than say He takes no pleasure in the death of the sinner. He sent His Son to die in the sinner's place (Romans 5:8). If you feel like the exiles did, crushed by your sins and wondering how you can live, this verse is for you. God is not waiting to destroy you. He is calling you home.

33:12-13 *And you, son of man, say to the sons of your people: The righteousness of the righteous* ***man*** *shall not deliver him on the day of his transgression; and* ***as for*** *the wickedness of the wicked* ***man****, he shall not stumble by it on the day he turns back from his wickedness; and a righteous* ***man*** *shall not be able to live by it on the day he sins. When I say to the righteous* ***man****, 'He shall surely live,' and he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, all his* ***acts of*** *righteousness shall not be remembered; and in his injustice which he has done, in it he shall die.*

"The righteousness of the righteous man shall not deliver him on the day of his transgression." A man's past record of good living will not save him if he turns to sin. On the other hand, the wicked man "shall not stumble by it on the day he turns back from his wickedness." A man's past sin does not have to destroy him if he turns from it.

Verse 13 names the trap. A man hears God say, "He shall surely live," and "he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice." He thinks his good record has earned him a little room to sin. God says no: "all his acts of righteousness shall not be remembered; and in his injustice which he has done, in it he shall die."

This is the same teaching as 3:20 and 18:24. God judges a person by the path he is on, not by a balance sheet of good and bad deeds. Trusting in our own righteousness has never saved anyone. Old Testament believers were saved by faith, as Abraham was (Genesis 15:6), and real faith shows itself in a life that turns from sin.

33:14-16 *And when I say to the wicked* ***man****, 'You shall surely die,' and he turns back from his sin and does justice and righteousness,* ***if*** *a wicked* ***man*** *returns a pledge, repays robbery, walks in the statutes of life so as not to do injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All his sins which he has sinned shall not be remembered against him; he has done justice and righteousness; he shall surely live.*

Now the other side. When God says to the wicked man, "You shall surely die," and "he turns back from his sin and does justice and righteousness," then "he shall surely live; he shall not die."

God gives examples of what turning looks like: he "returns a pledge, repays robbery, walks in the statutes of life so as not to do injustice." A pledge was something a poor man handed over as security for a loan, often his coat (Exodus 22:26-27). A man who has truly turned makes things right. Zacchaeus did this when he met Jesus and paid back four times what he had taken (Luke 19:8-9).

And here is the grace: "All his sins which he has sinned shall not be remembered against him." God does not keep the old record on file to pull out later. When He forgives, He forgets in the sense that He never holds those sins against us again (Jeremiah 31:34; Psalm 103:12). No one is too far gone to turn and live.

33:17-20 *And the sons of your people say, 'The way of the Lord is not right'; and **as for** them, their way is not right. When a righteous **man** turns back from his righteousness and does injustice, and he shall die in them. And when a wicked **man** turns back from his wickedness and does justice and righteousness, by them he shall live. And you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Each man according to his ways I will judge you, O house of Israel."*

The exiles said, "The way of the Lord is not right." They heard all of this and complained that God was unfair. God turns the charge around: "and as for them, their way is not right."

Verses 18 and 19 sum up the teaching once more. The righteous man who turns to injustice "shall die in them." The wicked man who turns to righteousness "by them he shall live." Then God closes: "Each man according to his ways I will judge you, O house of Israel."

We sometimes talk the same way. We want God to grade us on our past or on how we compare to others. God looks at where each of us stands with Him now. That is not unfair. It is what gives hope to the worst sinner and keeps the best man from trusting in himself.

33:21-22 *And it came about in the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth **month**, on the fifth of the month, **that** the escapee from Jerusalem came to me, saying, "The city has been struck." And the hand of the LORD had been upon me in the evening, before the escapee came; and He opened my mouth by the time he came to me in the morning; and my mouth was opened, and I was no longer mute.*

"And it came about in the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth of the month, that the escapee from Jerusalem came to me, saying, The city has been struck."

This is about 585 B.C. Jerusalem had fallen to Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., and the temple and the city were burned (2 Kings 25:8-10). The trip from Jerusalem to Babylon took about four months (Ezra 7:9), so the news came months after the city fell. Scholars differ on exactly how many months, depending on how the years are counted.

The whole first half of the book has been building toward this moment. The false prophets said Jerusalem would stand. Ezekiel had said for years that it would fall. Now it had happened, and God had told him in 24:26-27 that on that day his mouth would be opened.

And it was: "the hand of the LORD had been upon me in the evening, before the escapee came; and He opened my mouth by the time he came to me in the morning; and my mouth was opened, and I was no longer mute." The silence that began at his call (3:26) was over. From now on Ezekiel could speak freely, and the message he would speak was mostly hope.

Think about that morning for the exiles. Their city was gone and their temple was ashes. And on that very morning, God opened the mouth of His prophet to begin telling them about a good

Shepherd, a new heart, dry bones that live, and a temple where God would dwell forever. God does not leave His people in the ashes.

33:23-26 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, those who dwell in these waste places on the soil of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was one, and he possessed the land; and we **are** many; to us the land has been given for a possession.' Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: You eat with the blood, and you lift up your eyes to your idols, and you shed blood; and shall you possess the land? You have stood on your sword; you have done abomination, and each man has defiled the wife of his neighbor; and shall you possess the land?'*

The first message after the news is not comfort. It is a warning to the Jews still living among the ruins in Judah. "Those who dwell in these waste places on the soil of Israel" had a slogan. They pointed to Abraham: he was only one man, and God gave him the land. We are many, so surely the land is ours.

It sounds like faith, but it was not. Abraham received the land by promise, and he believed God (Genesis 15:6-7). These people wanted the promise without the God who made it. So God asks what kind of people they were. "You eat with the blood," which the law forbade (Leviticus 17:10-14). "You lift up your eyes to your idols, and you shed blood." They had "stood on your sword," living by violence. "Each man has defiled the wife of his neighbor." Twice God asks, "and shall you possess the land?"

Jeremiah tells us what happened there: the governor Gedaliah was murdered, and the people left in the land defied God's word and fled to Egypt (Jeremiah 40-44).

It is possible to quote God's promises and still live in open rebellion against Him. John the Baptist told the crowds not to say "We have Abraham as father," but to bear fruit worthy of repentance (Matthew 3:8-9).

33:27-29 *Thus you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: **As** I live, surely those who **are** in the waste places shall fall by the sword, and him who **is** on the surface of the field I will give to the animals to eat him, and those who **are** in the strongholds and in the caves shall die by pestilence. And I will make the land a desolation and a waste, and the pride of its strength shall cease, and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, with no one passing through. And they shall know that I **am** the LORD, when I make the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations which they have done.'*

God swears again, "As I live," and this time it is an oath of judgment. The people in the ruins would fall by the sword, those in the open fields would be eaten by wild animals, and those hiding "in the strongholds and in the caves shall die by pestilence." The land they claimed would become "a desolation and a waste," with "no one passing through."

Why such a hard word after Jerusalem had already fallen? Because the fall of the city had not changed their hearts. God gives the reason: "they shall know that I am the LORD, when I make the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations which they have done."

33:30-32 *And you, son of man, the sons of your people who are speaking together about you beside the walls and in the doorways of the houses, and one speaks with one, each man with his brother, saying, 'Come now, and hear what the word **is** that comes out from the LORD.' And they come to you as a people comes, and they sit before you **as** My people, and they hear your words, and they do not do them; for **with** lustful desires in their mouth they are doing, **and** their heart is going after their unjust gain. And look, you **are** to them like a song of lustful desires, beautiful of voice and doing well **at** playing; and they hear your words, and they are not doing them.*

Now God turns to the exiles around Ezekiel. With his mouth opened and his words proven true, Ezekiel had become popular. People were talking about him "beside the walls and in the doorways of the houses," saying to one another, "Come now, and hear what the word is that comes out from the LORD."

They came. They sat in front of him like God's people. "And they hear your words, and they do not do them." Their mouths spoke of love, but "their heart is going after their unjust gain."

Then God says something every preacher should read slowly: "you are to them like a song of lustful desires, beautiful of voice and doing well at playing." To the exiles, Ezekiel was entertainment. They enjoyed his voice the way people enjoy a good love song. They came back week after week. But "they hear your words, and they are not doing them."

Is that us? It is possible to love good preaching and enjoy a Bible study, and still not obey. James warns us to be "doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). Listening is not the same as obeying (Matthew 7:24-27).

33:33 *And when it comes, look, it is coming, and they shall know that a prophet has been in their midst."*

"And when it comes, look, it is coming, and they shall know that a prophet has been in their midst."

The exiles had just seen one of Ezekiel's prophecies come true. More would follow, and then they would know he had not been a singer of pleasant songs but God's prophet. God's Word will prove true, every part of it. The question is whether we will have obeyed it before it does.

Chapter 33 Summary

God gave Ezekiel his watchman charge a second time: a watchman who warns is clear, and one who keeps silent shares the guilt of those who die. When the exiles admitted that their sins were crushing them and asked how they could live, God swore by His own life that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but in the wicked turning back and living, and He pleaded with them to turn. He judges each person by the path he is on now: past goodness does not save the man who turns to sin, and past sin does not condemn the man who turns from it. In about 585 B.C. an escapee arrived with the news that Jerusalem had fallen, and the night before, God opened Ezekiel's mouth. God warned the survivors in Judah that their claim to the land meant nothing

while they lived in sin, and He warned the exiles that they treated Ezekiel like a pleasant singer, hearing his words but not doing them.

Chapter 33 Study Questions

1. What is a watchman's job, and what happens if he does not blow the trumpet? (33:2-6)

2. What did the exiles finally admit about their sins, and what question did they ask? (33:10)

3. What does God swear about His own heart in 33:11? What does He plead with the people to do?

4. Why will a righteous man's past not save him if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice? (33:12-13)

5. What does a wicked man who truly turns do, and what happens to his sins? (33:14-16)

6. What news did the escapee bring, and what happened to Ezekiel the night before? (33:21-22; 24:26-27)

7. Why did God say the people left in the land would not possess it? (33:24-26)

8. How did the exiles treat Ezekiel's preaching? (33:30-32)

9. How do 2 Peter 3:9 and Romans 5:8 show the same heart God showed in 33:11? Have you ever felt too far gone for God to forgive?

10. Are there words of God you enjoy hearing but have not been doing? What is one thing you can obey this week? (James 1:22)

Chapter 34: The Shepherds of Israel and the Good Shepherd

Scripture

34:1-16 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and you shall say to them, to the shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe ***to*** the shepherds of Israel who have been shepherding themselves! Should not the shepherds shepherd the flock? You eat the fat, and you clothe yourselves ***with*** the wool; you slaughter the fat ***ones***; the flock you do not shepherd. The weak you have not strengthened, and the sick you have not healed, and the broken you have not bound up, and the strayed you have not brought back, and the lost you have not sought; and with force you have ruled them, and with harshness. And they have been scattered because ***there was*** no shepherd, and they have become food for every animal of the field, and they have been scattered. My flock wanders over all the mountains and on every high hill; and over all the surface of the earth My flock has been scattered, and there is no one searching and no one seeking. Therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ***As*** I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because My flock has become prey, and My flock has become food for every animal of the field, because ***there is*** no shepherd, and My shepherds have not searched for My flock, and the shepherds have shepherded themselves, and My flock they have not shepherded, therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** against the shepherds, and I will require My flock from their hand, and I will make them cease from shepherding ***the*** flock, and the shepherds shall not shepherd themselves again; and I will deliver My flock from their mouth, and they shall not be food for them. For thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I, I Myself, will search for My flock and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is in the midst of his scattered sheep, so I will seek out My flock, and I will deliver them from all the places where they were scattered there on a day of cloud and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the lands, and I will bring them to their own ground; and I will shepherd them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the habitable places of the land. In good pasture I will shepherd them, and on the mountains of the height of Israel shall be their pastureland; there they shall lie down in good pastureland, and ***in*** rich pasture they shall graze on the mountains of Israel. I Myself will shepherd My flock, and I Myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. The lost I will seek, and the strayed I will bring back, and the broken I will bind up, and the sick I will strengthen; and the fat and the strong I will destroy; I will shepherd it with justice.

34:17-31 And you, O My flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** judging between sheep and sheep, between the rams and the male goats. ***Is it too*** little for you ***that*** you graze the good pasture, and the rest of your pastures you trample with your feet, and ***that*** you drink the clear waters, and the rest you foul with your feet? And My flock grazes ***on*** what your feet have trampled, and drinks what your feet have fouled. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: Look, I, I Myself, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you push with side and with shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, until you have scattered them abroad, I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. And I will raise up over them one shepherd, and he shall shepherd them, My servant David; he

shall shepherd them, and he shall be a shepherd for them. And I, the LORD, will be God to them, and My servant David ***will be*** prince in their midst; I, the LORD, have spoken. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and I will make evil animals cease from the land; and they shall dwell in the wilderness in security, and sleep in the forests. And I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing; and I will bring down the rain in its season; they shall be rains of blessing. And the tree of the field shall give its fruit, and the land shall give its produce, and they shall be on their own ground in security; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and deliver them from the hand of those who made them serve. And they shall no longer be plunder for the nations, and the animal of the land shall not devour them; and they shall dwell in security, and no one shall make ***them*** afraid. And I will raise up for them a planting place of renown, and they shall no longer be taken away by famine in the land, and they shall no longer bear the disgrace of the nations. And they shall know that I, the LORD their God, ***am*** with them, and they, the house of Israel, ***are*** My people, declares the Lord GOD. And you ***are*** My flock, the flock of My pasture; you ***are*** men; I ***am*** your God, declares the Lord GOD.'"

Chapter 34 Preview

Now that Jerusalem has fallen, God names the people most to blame: the shepherds of Israel. In the ancient world kings and rulers were often called shepherds, because their job was to feed, guard and lead the people. Israel's kings had done the opposite. They fed themselves, ruled with force, and let the flock scatter until wild animals ate them.

So God says He will do the shepherding Himself. He will search for His scattered sheep, bring them home to the mountains of Israel, heal the sick and bind up the broken. He will also judge between sheep and sheep, because some of the flock were bullies too. Then He promises one Shepherd over them, "My servant David" (34:23), and a covenant of peace in which Israel lives safely in its own land. This is one of the great chapters behind Jesus' words, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11).

Chapter 34 Study

34:1-2 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and you shall say to them, to the shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe **to** the shepherds of Israel who have been shepherding themselves! Should not the shepherds shepherd the flock?*

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel." Who are the shepherds? In Ezekiel's day the word meant the kings, princes and leaders of the nation (Jeremiah 23:1-2). David himself had been a shepherd boy before God made him king, and God said to him, "You will shepherd My people Israel" (2 Samuel 5:2). A shepherd-king was supposed to care for the people the way a good shepherd cares for sheep.

"Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have been shepherding themselves! Should not the shepherds shepherd the flock?" That one question sums up the whole charge. Leaders are given

their place for the sake of the people, not the other way around. Israel's leaders had turned the flock into their own food supply.

34:3-4 *You eat the fat, and you clothe yourselves **with** the wool; you slaughter the fat **ones**; the flock you do not shepherd. The weak you have not strengthened, and the sick you have not healed, and the broken you have not bound up, and the strayed you have not brought back, and the lost you have not sought; and with force you have ruled them, and with harshness.*

"You eat the fat, and you clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fat ones; the flock you do not shepherd." A shepherd does get milk and wool from his flock. That is fair. But these men took the best for themselves and gave nothing back. They used the people.

Then God lists what they failed to do: "The weak you have not strengthened, and the sick you have not healed, and the broken you have not bound up, and the strayed you have not brought back, and the lost you have not sought." These are the ordinary duties of a shepherd, and the leaders of Israel had ignored the weakest people in the nation.

"And with force you have ruled them, and with harshness." The same Hebrew word for harshness describes how Pharaoh's taskmasters treated Israel in Egypt (Exodus 1:13-14). Israel's own kings had become like Pharaoh to their people.

This passage still speaks to anyone who leads God's people. Peter, who had been told by Jesus to feed His sheep (John 21:15-17), told the elders to shepherd the flock of God willingly, not for shameful gain and not by lording it over them (1 Peter 5:2-3). A leader in the church is a servant first.

34:5-6 *And they have been scattered because **there was** no shepherd, and they have become food for every animal of the field, and they have been scattered. My flock wanders over all the mountains and on every high hill; and over all the surface of the earth My flock has been scattered, and there is no one searching and no one seeking.*

"And they have been scattered because there was no shepherd." The exile was the result. Without real leadership, the people fell apart, and the nations around them, pictured as "every animal of the field," devoured them.

"My flock wanders over all the mountains and on every high hill." The mountains and high hills were where Israel worshiped idols (6:13). The sheep were not only lost geographically. They were lost spiritually. "And there is no one searching and no one seeking."

Notice how often God calls them "My flock." The kings acted as if the people belonged to them. God says they belong to Him, and those who lead them will answer to Him.

34:7-10 *Therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: **As** I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because My flock has become prey, and My flock has become food for every animal of the field, because **there is** no shepherd, and My shepherds have not searched for My flock, and the shepherds have shepherded themselves, and My flock they have not shepherded, therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** against the shepherds, and I will require My flock from their hand, and I will make them cease from shepherding **the** flock, and the shepherds shall not shepherd themselves again; and I will deliver My flock from their mouth, and they shall not be food for them.*

Twice God says, "O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD." Then He swears an oath, "As I live," and repeats the charge: His flock became prey because "the shepherds have shepherded themselves, and My flock they have not shepherded."

The sentence is plain: "Look, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock from their hand." God will hold them accountable for every sheep, the way a hired shepherd had to account for his master's flock (Genesis 31:39). "I will make them cease from shepherding the flock." The kingship of Judah ended when Zedekiah was taken to Babylon in 586 B.C. No son of David has sat on the throne in Jerusalem since. And God adds, "I will deliver My flock from their mouth." The leaders who should have protected the sheep had become the wolves.

34:11-12 *For thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I, I Myself, will search for My flock and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is in the midst of his scattered sheep, so I will seek out My flock, and I will deliver them from all the places where they were scattered there on a day of cloud and thick darkness.*

Now the chapter turns. "For thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I, I Myself, will search for My flock and seek them out."

"I, I Myself." God would not simply hire better shepherds. He would come Himself (Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 40:11).

"As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is in the midst of his scattered sheep, so I will seek out My flock." God would gather them "from all the places where they were scattered there on a day of cloud and thick darkness." The fall of Jerusalem was that dark day.

Jesus told a story about a shepherd who left the ninety-nine to look for the one lost sheep, and carried it home on his shoulders rejoicing (Luke 15:4-7). He also said of Himself, "the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which has been lost" (Luke 19:10). When Jesus came seeking the lost, He was doing what God promised in Ezekiel 34.

34:13-15 *And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the lands, and I will bring them to their own ground; and I will shepherd them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the habitable places of the land. In good pasture I will shepherd them, and on the mountains of the height of Israel shall be their pastureland; there they shall lie down in good pastureland, and* ***in*** *rich pasture they shall graze on the mountains of Israel. I Myself will shepherd My flock, and I Myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD.*

"And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the lands, and I will bring them to their own ground." This is a promise about a real people and a real land. God would bring Israel back to "the mountains of Israel," the same mountains Ezekiel prophesied against in chapter 6, now turned into "good pasture."

This was fulfilled in part when some of the exiles returned under Cyrus in 538 B.C. (Ezra 1). But the promise speaks of gathering Israel "from the lands," from all the places of their scattering, and of a time when they will never again be plunder for the nations (34:28). That has never yet been true of Israel's history. I believe its full fulfillment waits for the day Christ returns and gathers Israel to its land in His kingdom (Matthew 24:31; Romans 11:26).

"I Myself will shepherd My flock, and I Myself will make them lie down." Sheep only lie down when they are fed and feel safe, as in Psalm 23. God promises both.

34:16 *The lost I will seek, and the strayed I will bring back, and the broken I will bind up, and the sick I will strengthen; and the fat and the strong I will destroy; I will shepherd it with justice.*

"The lost I will seek, and the strayed I will bring back, and the broken I will bind up, and the sick I will strengthen." Put this verse next to verse 4. Point for point, God does exactly what the bad shepherds refused to do. Where they failed, He will not fail.

Then comes a surprise: "and the fat and the strong I will destroy; I will shepherd it with justice." The fat and strong sheep are those who grew rich by crushing the weak, as the next verses explain. The good Shepherd is tender with the hurting and firm with the bullies. His care for the flock includes justice.

Are you one of the broken or the strayed? He does not wait for you to fix yourself. He comes looking.

34:17-19 *And you, O My flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I* ***am*** *judging between sheep and sheep, between the rams and the male goats.* ***Is it too*** *little for you* ***that*** *you graze the good pasture, and the rest of your pastures you trample with your feet, and* ***that*** *you drink the clear waters, and the rest you foul with your feet? And My flock grazes* ***on*** *what your feet have trampled, and drinks what your feet have fouled.*

"And you, O My flock." Now God speaks to the sheep themselves. "Look, I am judging between sheep and sheep, between the rams and the male goats."

Not all of Israel's troubles came from the kings. Some of the people did the same thing on a smaller scale. God asks, "Is it too little for you that you graze the good pasture, and the rest of your

pastures you trample with your feet?" The strong sheep ate their fill and then ruined the rest of the grass. They drank the clear water and then "the rest you foul with your feet." The weak sheep were left with trampled grass and muddy water.

Some people are not content to take the best for themselves. They ruin what is left. God sees how the strong treat the weak, even among His own people.

34:20-22 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: Look, I, I Myself, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you push with side and with shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, until you have scattered them abroad, I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.*

"Look, I, I Myself, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep." The strong ones pushed "with side and with shoulder" and thrust at the weak "with your horns, until you have scattered them abroad." God promises, "I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be prey."

Jesus used the same picture when He spoke of His return. When the Son of Man comes in His glory, the nations will be gathered before Him, "and He will separate them from one another, just as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:32). The good Shepherd is also the Judge. He saves His flock, and He judges those who harm it.

34:23 *And I will raise up over them one shepherd, and he shall shepherd them, My servant David; he shall shepherd them, and he shall be a shepherd for them.*

"And I will raise up over them one shepherd, and he shall shepherd them, My servant David; he shall shepherd them, and he shall be a shepherd for them."

David had been dead for about four hundred years when Ezekiel wrote this. So who is this "one shepherd"? I believe He is the Messiah, the promised Son of David, Jesus Christ. The prophets often called the coming King by the name of His forefather David, because He would be the true heir to David's throne. Jeremiah said Israel would serve "David their king, whom I will raise up for them" (Jeremiah 30:9). Hosea said that at the end of the days Israel would seek "the LORD their God and David their king" (Hosea 3:5). God had promised David that his house and kingdom would last forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

The New Testament tells us who the Son of David is. The angel told Mary that God would give her Son "the throne of David His father" and that He would reign over the house of Jacob forever (Luke 1:32-33). Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). He is the great Shepherd of the sheep (Hebrews 13:20).

Notice the words "one shepherd." Since about 930 B.C. Israel had been split into two kingdoms with two lines of kings. This Shepherd would rule over all of them together, as chapter 37 will show with the two sticks. Jesus spoke of the day when "there will be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16).

God also calls Him "My servant." The King is also the Servant who does the Father's will (Isaiah 42:1; Mark 10:45).

34:24 *And I, the LORD, will be God to them, and My servant David **will be** prince in their midst; I, the LORD, have spoken.*

"And I, the LORD, will be God to them, and My servant David will be prince in their midst; I, the LORD, have spoken."

The LORD will be their God, and His Servant David will be "prince in their midst." The word prince, nasi', means a leader or ruler lifted up among the people. Here it describes the King living among His people, not far off in a palace.

When will this happen? Jesus is the good Shepherd now, and every believer, Jew or Gentile, belongs to His flock today. But this promise is made to Israel as a nation, gathered in its own land under one King. I believe it will be fulfilled when Christ returns to the earth in glory and sits on the throne of David in His thousand-year kingdom (Revelation 20:4-6). At that time Israel will look on Him whom they pierced and mourn for Him (Zechariah 12:10), and He will reign as King over them. The promise to David has not been canceled. It is waiting for its King to come back.

34:25-26 *And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and I will make evil animals cease from the land; and they shall dwell in the wilderness in security, and sleep in the forests. And I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing; and I will bring down the rain in its season; they shall be rains of blessing.*

"And I will make with them a covenant of peace." The Hebrew word for peace, shalom, means more than the absence of war. It means wholeness, well-being and safety. God would "make evil animals cease from the land," so that Israel could "dwell in the wilderness in security, and sleep in the forests." Sheep sleeping safely in a forest is a picture of perfect safety.

This echoes the blessings God promised in the law for an obedient Israel (Leviticus 26:4-6). Israel never fully enjoyed them because they never fully obeyed. Now God promises to give them freely. Isaiah describes the same kingdom (Isaiah 11:6-9).

"And I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing." His hill is Zion, the place of His temple. "I will bring down the rain in its season; they shall be rains of blessing." In a dry land rain meant life. God promises the right rain at the right time.

34:27-29 *And the tree of the field shall give its fruit, and the land shall give its produce, and they shall be on their own ground in security; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and deliver them from the hand of those who made them serve. And they shall no longer be plunder for the nations, and the animal of the land shall not devour them; and they shall dwell in security, and no one shall make **them** afraid. And I will raise up for them a planting place of renown, and they shall no longer be taken away by famine in the land, and they shall no longer bear the disgrace of the nations.*

The land itself will respond: "the tree of the field shall give its fruit, and the land shall give its produce." And Israel will be "on their own ground in security."

"They shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and deliver them from the hand of those who made them serve." A yoke was the wooden bar laid across the neck of an ox. Israel had worn the yoke of foreign nations again and again.

"And they shall no longer be plunder for the nations." Israel has been plunder for the nations many times in its history. God says a day is coming when no one will make them afraid. He will raise up "a planting place of renown," a land famous for its fruit, and "they shall no longer bear the disgrace of the nations."

34:30-31 *And they shall know that I, the LORD their God, **am** with them, and they, the house of Israel, **are** My people, declares the Lord GOD. And you **are** My flock, the flock of My pasture; you **are** men; I **am** your God, declares the Lord GOD.'"*

The chapter ends with the heart of the covenant: "they shall know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and they, the house of Israel, are My people."

And the last verse: "And you are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men; I am your God." God explains His own picture. The sheep are people, and the Shepherd is God. He is with them, and they belong to Him.

Every believer can rest in that same relationship today. We were like sheep going astray, but we have returned to the Shepherd of our souls (1 Peter 2:25). The promises of this chapter belong to Israel and will be kept to Israel. But the Shepherd who makes them is the same Shepherd who laid down His life for us.

Chapter 34 Summary

God condemned the shepherds of Israel, its kings and leaders, because they fed themselves instead of the flock, ignored the weak, sick, broken and lost, and ruled with harshness, so that the people were scattered and devoured. God declared that He was against them and would take His flock out of their hands. Then He promised to be the Shepherd Himself: to search for His sheep, gather them from the lands, bring them to the mountains of Israel, and heal and care for them. He would also judge between sheep and sheep, saving the weak from the strong who trampled and pushed them. He promised to raise up one Shepherd over them, "My servant David," the Messiah, Jesus Christ the Son of David, who will reign as Prince among His people when He returns. God promised a covenant of peace, safety in the land, rains of blessing and freedom from the nations, and He ended with the words, "you are My flock."

Chapter 34 Study Questions

1. Who were the shepherds of Israel, and what was the main charge against them? (34:2-3)

2. List the things the shepherds failed to do for the flock. (34:4)

3. What happened to the sheep because there was no shepherd? (34:5-6)

4. What does God promise to do Himself? Compare 34:16 with 34:4. (34:11-16)

5. How did the strong sheep treat the weak sheep, and what did God promise to do about it? (34:17-22)

6. Who is "My servant David," and how do Luke 1:32-33 and John 10:11 help us answer? (34:23-24)

7. What blessings come with the covenant of peace? (34:25-29)

8. How does Jesus' story of the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7) show God keeping the promise of 34:11-12?

9. If you lead others in any way, in a family, a church or at work, which duties of a good shepherd do you find hardest? (34:4; 1 Peter 5:2-3)

10. Have you ever felt like one of the broken or lost sheep? What does it mean to you that the Shepherd comes looking? (34:16)

Chapter 35: Against Mount Seir

Scripture

35:1-15 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it, and you shall say to it, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** against you, O Mount Seir, and I will stretch out My hand against you, and I will make you a desolation and a waste. Your cities I will make a ruin, and you shall be a desolation; and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. Because you have had a perpetual enmity, and you gave over the sons of Israel to the hands of the sword at the time of their disaster, at the time of the iniquity of the end, therefore, ***as*** I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely I will make you ***into*** blood, and blood shall pursue you; since you have not hated blood, blood shall pursue you. And I will make Mount Seir into a devastation and a desolation, and I will cut off from it the one who passes through and the one who returns. And I will fill its mountains ***with*** its slain; your hills and your valleys and all your ravines, those slain by ***the*** sword shall fall in them. Perpetual desolations I will make you, and your cities shall not return; and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. Because you said, "The two nations and the two lands shall be mine, and we will possess it," and the LORD was there, therefore, ***as*** I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will act according to your anger and according to your jealousy which you showed out of your hatred against them; and I will make Myself known among them when I judge you. And you shall know that I, the LORD, have heard all your insults which you have spoken against the mountains of Israel, saying, "They are desolate; they have been given to us for devouring." And you magnified yourselves against Me with your mouth, and multiplied your words against Me; I Myself have heard. Thus says the Lord GOD: When all the earth rejoices, I will make you a desolation. As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate, so I will do to you; you shall be a desolation, O Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD.'"

Chapter 35 Preview

In the middle of the chapters of hope, Ezekiel turns once more to judgment, this time on Mount Seir. Seir was the mountain country south and east of the Dead Sea, the home of Edom, the descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother. Ezekiel already spoke briefly against Edom in 25:12-14. Why come back to it here?

Because Edom wanted Israel's land. When Jerusalem fell, Edom rejoiced, helped the Babylonians, and said the land of Israel and Judah would now be theirs (35:10). Chapter 36 will promise that the mountains of Israel will be restored to God's people. Chapter 35 first answers the enemy who tried to take them. The two chapters belong together: Mount Seir will become a desolation, and the mountains of Israel will bloom again.

Chapter 35 Study

35:1-4 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it, and you shall say to it, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** against you, O Mount Seir, and I will stretch out My hand against you, and I will make you a desolation and a waste. Your cities I will make a ruin, and you shall be a desolation; and you shall know that I **am** the LORD.*

"Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it." To set his face was to turn toward a place and speak against it, as Ezekiel did with the mountains of Israel in 6:2.

God's word is short and hard: "Look, I am against you, O Mount Seir, and I will stretch out My hand against you, and I will make you a desolation and a waste. Your cities I will make a ruin."

Who was Edom? Esau, the older twin, sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:29-34), and later hated Jacob for taking his blessing (Genesis 27:41). Esau's descendants settled in the hill country of Seir (Genesis 36:8). Though the two nations were brothers, Edom refused to let Israel pass through its land after the exodus (Numbers 20:14-21), fought against Israel's kings, and stood against Judah again and again.

And the purpose of the judgment is the same as everywhere in Ezekiel: "you shall know that I am the LORD."

35:5-6 *Because you have had a perpetual enmity, and you gave over the sons of Israel to the hands of the sword at the time of their disaster, at the time of the iniquity of the end, therefore, **as** I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely I will make you **into** blood, and blood shall pursue you; since you have not hated blood, blood shall pursue you.*

"Because you have had a perpetual enmity." Edom's hatred was old and it never let go. It went back to Esau and it ran through the centuries.

At the worst moment of Judah's history, Edom made it worse. "You gave over the sons of Israel to the hands of the sword at the time of their disaster, at the time of the iniquity of the end." When Jerusalem fell, Edom did not help its brother. It handed over those who tried to escape. Obadiah describes the same thing: Edom stood at the crossroads to cut down the fugitives and rejoiced in the day of Judah's ruin (Obadiah 10-14). Psalm 137:7 remembers how Edom cheered on the destruction of Jerusalem, calling for the city to be laid bare to its foundation.

So God answers in kind. "I will make you into blood, and blood shall pursue you; since you have not hated blood, blood shall pursue you." Edom loved bloodshed, so bloodshed would follow it. There is also a play on words here. The name Edom sounds like the Hebrew word for red, adom, and the word for blood is dam. Esau was red when he was born and sold his birthright for red stew (Genesis 25:25, 30). The red nation that loved blood would be overtaken by blood.

Holding a grudge for generations is a terrible thing. It poisoned Edom's whole history. Jesus calls us to forgive from the heart (Matthew 18:35), and Paul tells us not to take revenge but to leave

room for God's justice (Romans 12:19). Bitterness that is passed down from parents to children can destroy a family or a people.

35:7-9 *And I will make Mount Seir into a devastation and a desolation, and I will cut off from it the one who passes through and the one who returns. And I will fill its mountains **with** its slain; your hills and your valleys and all your ravines, those slain by **the** sword shall fall in them. Perpetual desolations I will make you, and your cities shall not return; and you shall know that I **am** the LORD.*

God repeats the sentence with more detail. Mount Seir will become "a devastation and a desolation," with no one passing through. Its mountains, hills, valleys and ravines will be filled with its slain. "Perpetual desolations I will make you, and your cities shall not return."

Edom's "perpetual enmity" (35:5) will be answered by "perpetual desolations." The punishment fits the sin.

History bears this out. After the exile, Edom was pushed out of its old land by Arab peoples, the Nabateans, and its remnant moved into southern Judah, where the area became known as Idumea. In the second century B.C. the Jewish ruler John Hyrcanus conquered the Idumeans and forced them to become Jews. Herod the Great, who tried to kill the baby Jesus, came from an Idumean family. After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Edomites disappear from history as a people. The old cities of Edom lie in ruins today.

35:10-11 *Because you said, "The two nations and the two lands shall be mine, and we will possess it," and the LORD was there, therefore, **as** I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will act according to your anger and according to your jealousy which you showed out of your hatred against them; and I will make Myself known among them when I judge you.*

Now we come to the heart of Edom's sin. "Because you said, The two nations and the two lands shall be mine, and we will possess it." The two nations were Israel and Judah. With both of them in ruins, Edom thought the whole land was up for grabs.

And then come four short words that change everything: "and the LORD was there." Edom thought the land was empty. It was not. The people were gone, the temple was burned, the glory had departed, but the land still belonged to the LORD. He had not given up His claim. Edom was not grabbing an empty field. It was trying to steal from God.

The book will end with the name of the city, "The LORD Is There" (48:35). Even now, in the ruins, God says the same thing. His people may be scattered, but He has not given up what is His.

"Therefore, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will act according to your anger and according to your jealousy which you showed out of your hatred against them." God will treat Edom the way Edom treated Israel. "And I will make Myself known among them when I judge you." Israel would see God's justice and know He had not forgotten them.

35:12-13 *And you shall know that I, the LORD, have heard all your insults which you have spoken against the mountains of Israel, saying, "They are desolate; they have been given to us for devouring." And you magnified yourselves against Me with your mouth, and multiplied your words against Me; I Myself have heard.*

"And you shall know that I, the LORD, have heard all your insults which you have spoken against the mountains of Israel." Edom said, "They are desolate; they have been given to us for devouring." They mocked a fallen brother and licked their lips over his land.

But God says something deeper: "you magnified yourselves against Me with your mouth, and multiplied your words against Me; I Myself have heard." When Edom spoke against God's people and God's land, it was speaking against God. The same is true today. Those who scorn God's people scorn Him (Zechariah 2:8; Acts 9:4).

God hears every word. Nothing said in pride or hatred is lost on Him. That should make us careful with our own words (Matthew 12:36).

35:14-15 *Thus says the Lord GOD: When all the earth rejoices, I will make you a desolation. As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate, so I will do to you; you shall be a desolation, O Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD.'"*

"When all the earth rejoices, I will make you a desolation." The day will come when the whole earth rejoices in God's reign, and Edom will have no part in it.

The final verse explains the sentence: "As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate, so I will do to you; you shall be a desolation, O Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it."

Edom rejoiced at Israel's ruin. Edom would be ruined. It is a solemn warning against gloating when others fall, even our enemies. Proverbs says, "When your enemy falls, do not rejoice," for the LORD sees it and is displeased (Proverbs 24:17-18).

In the prophets Edom also stands for the nations that hate God and His people in the last days (Isaiah 34:5-6; 63:1-6). God promised Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who disdains you I will curse" (Genesis 12:3). Edom's history shows that God keeps that promise.

Chapter 35 Summary

God told Ezekiel to prophesy against Mount Seir, the land of Edom, Esau's descendants. Because Edom had a perpetual hatred for Israel and handed Judah's people over to the sword when Jerusalem fell, God would give Edom over to blood and make its land a perpetual desolation. Edom claimed that the two nations of Israel and Judah and their lands would become its own, but the LORD was there: the land still belonged to Him. God heard every insult Edom spoke against the mountains of Israel, and He counted them as words spoken against Himself. As Edom rejoiced over Israel's desolation, so Mount Seir and all Edom would be made desolate, and they would know that He is the LORD.

Chapter 35 Study Questions

1. Who were the people of Mount Seir, and how were they related to Israel? (35:2-3; Genesis 25:25-26; 36:8)

2. What does "perpetual enmity" mean, and how did Edom show it when Jerusalem fell? (35:5; Obadiah 10-14)

3. How does the judgment on Edom match its sin? (35:6, 9, 15)

4. What did Edom say about the two nations and their lands? (35:10)

5. What do the words "and the LORD was there" teach us about the land of Israel? (35:10)

6. Why did God say Edom's words were spoken against Him? (35:12-13)

7. How has God kept His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 through the history of Edom?

8. Edom's hatred went back to Esau and Jacob. How can bitterness be passed down in families today? (Matthew 18:35; Hebrews 12:15)

9. Have you ever been glad when someone you disliked fell? What does Proverbs 24:17-18 say about that?

10. God hears every word we say (35:13; Matthew 12:36). What change could you make this week in how you speak about others?

Chapter 36: A New Heart and a New Spirit

Scripture

36:1-15 "And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and you shall say, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD: Because the enemy has said against you, 'Aha!' and, 'The ancient high places have become a possession for us,' therefore prophesy, and you shall say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Because, yes, because they made ***you*** desolate and crushed you from all around, so that you became a possession for the rest of the nations, and you have been taken up on the lip of ***the*** tongue and ***in*** the slander of ***the*** people, therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD: Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, and to the desolate waste places and to the forsaken cities, which have become plunder and a mockery to the rest of the nations which ***are*** all around; therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Surely in the fire of My jealousy I have spoken against the rest of the nations and against Edom, all of it, who gave My land to themselves as a possession with the joy of all ***their*** heart, with scorn of soul, so that its pastureland ***should be*** for plunder. Therefore prophesy concerning the soil of Israel, and you shall say to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I have spoken in My jealousy and in My rage, because you have borne the disgrace of ***the*** nations. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I Myself have lifted up My hand: surely the nations which ***are*** all around you, they shall bear their disgrace. And you, O mountains of Israel, you shall put forth your branches and bear your fruit for My people Israel, for they have drawn near to come. For look, I ***am*** for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. And I will multiply man on you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities shall be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. And I will multiply on you man and livestock, and they shall multiply and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited as in your former times, and I will do more good ***to you*** than at your beginnings; and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. And I will cause man to walk on you, My people Israel; and they shall possess you, and you shall be an inheritance for them, and you shall not again bereave them anymore. Thus says the Lord GOD: Because they are saying to you, 'You ***are*** a devourer of man, and you have been a bereaver of your nations,' therefore you shall not devour man anymore, and you shall not bereave your nations anymore, declares the Lord GOD. And I will not let you hear the disgrace of the nations anymore, and you shall not bear the reproach of ***the*** peoples anymore, and you shall not make your nations stumble anymore, declares the Lord GOD."

36:16-38 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, the house of Israel ***was*** dwelling on their own ground, and they made it unclean by their way and by their doings; like the uncleanness of menstruation their way was before Me. And I poured out My rage on them for the blood which they had poured out on the land, and with their idols they had made it unclean. And I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered among the lands; according to their way and according to their doings I judged them. And they came to the nations where they went, and they profaned My holy name, when it was said of them, 'These ***are*** the people of the LORD, and they have come out of His land.' And I had pity on My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Not for your sake am I acting, O house of Israel, but for My holy name, which you

have profaned among the nations where you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when I am sanctified through you before their eyes. And I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own ground. And I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And My Spirit I will put within you, and I will bring about that you walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments and do ***them***. And you shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be a people to Me, and I will be God to you. And I will save you from all your uncleannesses; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not put famine on you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you shall no longer receive the reproach of famine among the nations. And you shall remember your evil ways and your deeds which ***were*** not good, and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sake am I acting, declares the Lord GOD; let it be known to you. Be ashamed and be humiliated for your ways, O house of Israel. Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. And the desolate land shall be tilled, instead of its being a desolation in the eyes of everyone who passes by. And they shall say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted and desolate and broken-down cities are fortified ***and*** inhabited.' And the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the broken-down ***places***, I have planted the desolate ***land***; I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do ***it***. Thus says the Lord GOD: This also I will let Myself be sought by the house of Israel to do for them: I will multiply them like the flock ***with*** men. Like the flock of holy ***offerings***, like the flock of Jerusalem at its appointed times, so the wasted cities shall be full of flocks of men; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD."

Chapter 36 Preview

In chapter 6 Ezekiel prophesied against the mountains of Israel because they were covered with idols. In chapter 35 he prophesied against Mount Seir because Edom wanted those mountains for itself. Now he speaks to the mountains of Israel again, and this time the message is all hope. The nations mocked them. God will make them fruitful, fill them with people and give them back to Israel.

The second half of the chapter goes deeper. Why did Israel go into exile? Because they made the land unclean. Why will God bring them back? Not because they deserve it, but for the sake of His holy name. And when He brings them back, He will do what no law or prophet could do: sprinkle clean water on them, give them a new heart and a new spirit, and put His own Spirit within them (36:25-27). This is the promise that stands behind Jesus' words to Nicodemus about being born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5).

Chapter 36 Study

36:1-3 *"And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and you shall say, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD: Because the enemy has said against you, 'Aha!' and, 'The ancient high places have become a possession for us,' therefore prophesy, and you shall say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Because, yes, because they made* ***you*** *desolate and crushed you from all around, so that you became a possession for the rest of the nations, and you have been taken up on the lip of* ***the*** *tongue and* ***in*** *the slander of* ***the*** *people,*

"And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel." The mountains stand for the whole land.

The enemy had said, "Aha!" and claimed, "The ancient high places have become a possession for us." That is Edom's boast from the last chapter. The nations had made Israel desolate, crushed it "from all around," and made it a byword: "taken up on the lip of the tongue and in the slander of the people." Israel's ruin was the joke of the neighborhood.

36:4-7 *therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD: Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, and to the desolate waste places and to the forsaken cities, which have become plunder and a mockery to the rest of the nations which* ***are*** *all around; therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Surely in the fire of My jealousy I have spoken against the rest of the nations and against Edom, all of it, who gave My land to themselves as a possession with the joy of all* ***their*** *heart, with scorn of soul, so that its pastureland* ***should be*** *for plunder. Therefore prophesy concerning the soil of Israel, and you shall say to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I have spoken in My jealousy and in My rage, because you have borne the disgrace of* ***the*** *nations. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I Myself have lifted up My hand: surely the nations which* ***are*** *all around you, they shall bear their disgrace.*

God now speaks to every part of the land: "to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, and to the desolate waste places and to the forsaken cities." Every ruined corner of the land matters to Him.

"Surely in the fire of My jealousy I have spoken against the rest of the nations and against Edom." God's jealousy is not petty envy. It is the zeal of a husband for his wife, the fierce love that will not let what is His be taken. Edom and the nations took God's land "with the joy of all their heart, with scorn of soul."

"I Myself have lifted up My hand." Lifting up the hand was the sign of an oath. God swears that "the nations which are all around you, they shall bear their disgrace."

36:8-12 *And you, O mountains of Israel, you shall put forth your branches and bear your fruit for My people Israel, for they have drawn near to come. For look, I **am** for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. And I will multiply man on you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities shall be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. And I will multiply on you man and livestock, and they shall multiply and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited as in your former times, and I will do more good **to you** than at your beginnings; and you shall know that I **am** the LORD. And I will cause man to walk on you, My people Israel; and they shall possess you, and you shall be an inheritance for them, and you shall not again bereave them anymore.*

"And you, O mountains of Israel, you shall put forth your branches and bear your fruit for My people Israel, for they have drawn near to come." The land is told to get ready. Its people are on the way home.

"For look, I am for you." To Mount Seir God said He was against it (35:3). To the mountains of Israel He says, "I am for you."

God promises that the land will be "tilled and sown," the cities "inhabited," and the waste places "rebuilt." He will multiply "man and livestock," and then adds, "I will do more good to you than at your beginnings." Israel's future will be better than its past.

"And you shall not again bereave them anymore." To bereave is to lose children. The land had been a place where Israel's people died, by famine, sword and exile. That will end.

These promises were partly kept when the exiles came home under Cyrus in 538 B.C. and the land was farmed again. But "all the house of Israel, all of it" (36:10) never came back then, and the land has been bereaved many times since. I believe the full promise waits for the kingdom, when Israel is gathered from all the nations and dwells in its land forever (37:25).

36:13-15 *Thus says the Lord GOD: Because they are saying to you, 'You **are** a devourer of man, and you have been a bereaver of your nations,' therefore you shall not devour man anymore, and you shall not bereave your nations anymore, declares the Lord GOD. And I will not let you hear the disgrace of the nations anymore, and you shall not bear the reproach of **the** peoples anymore, and you shall not make your nations stumble anymore, declares the Lord GOD."*

The nations said to the land, "You are a devourer of man, and you have been a bereaver of your nations." The spies said something like that long ago (Numbers 13:32).

God says that reputation is over. "You shall not devour man anymore." He will not let the land "hear the disgrace of the nations anymore." The word "anymore" comes again and again in these verses. God is describing a final restoration, not one more cycle of rise and fall.

36:16-19 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, the house of Israel **was** dwelling on their own ground, and they made it unclean by their way and by their doings; like the uncleanness of menstruation their way was before Me. And I poured out My rage on them for the blood which they had poured out on the land, and with their idols they had made it unclean. And I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered among the lands; according to their way and according to their doings I judged them.*

Now God explains why the exile happened. "The house of Israel was dwelling on their own ground, and they made it unclean by their way and by their doings."

The comparison in verse 17 comes from the law of clean and unclean. Under the law, certain things made a person ceremonially unclean, meaning unfit to come to the tabernacle or temple until they were cleansed (Leviticus 15:19-24). God uses that picture to say that Israel's sin had made the land itself unfit for His presence. Their sins were blood they had poured out and idols they had worshiped.

So "I poured out My rage on them," and "I dispersed them among the nations," It was not cruelty. It was justice. "According to their way and according to their doings I judged them."

36:20-21 *And they came to the nations where they went, and they profaned My holy name, when it was said of them, 'These **are** the people of the LORD, and they have come out of His land.' And I had pity on My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went.*

Then something worse happened. When Israel went into exile, "they profaned My holy name." How? Not only by their sins, but by their very presence among the nations. The nations looked at them and said, "These are the people of the LORD, and they have come out of His land."

Do you hear the mockery? Their God must be weak, since He could not keep His own people in His own land.

"And I had pity on My holy name." God cared about His name, not out of vanity, but because the nations' knowledge of the true God was at stake.

This is a sobering thought for believers. When those who bear God's name live badly, the world blames God. Paul quoted this idea against those who taught the law but did not keep it: the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you (Romans 2:24).

36:22-23 *Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Not for your sake am I acting, O house of Israel, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I **am** the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when I am sanctified through you before their eyes.*

"Not for your sake am I acting, O house of Israel, but for My holy name." This is one of the most humbling verses in the Bible. Why will God restore Israel? Not because they had earned it, but for the sake of His own name.

That is how grace works. God does not save anyone because they deserve it. He saves because of who He is. If our salvation depended on our worth, none of us would be saved. Because it depends on His name, it is sure.

"And I will sanctify My great name." To sanctify is to set apart as holy. God will show the world that His name is holy and great. "The nations shall know that I am the LORD," and how will they know? "When I am sanctified through you before their eyes." The same people who brought shame on His name will become the display of His glory.

36:24 *And I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own ground.*

"And I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own ground."

The order matters. First God brings Israel back to the land. Then, in the next verses, He cleanses them and gives them a new heart. The physical return comes before the spiritual renewal. Chapter 37 will show the same order: first the bones come together, then the breath enters them.

"From all the lands" is wider than the return from Babylon. Many dispensational teachers see the return of Jewish people to the land in the last century, and the founding of the modern state of Israel in 1948, as the start of this regathering, while most of the nation still does not believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Scripture does not give us a timetable, and we should be careful. But God said He would gather Israel from all the lands, and He has not forgotten that promise.

36:25 *And I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols I will cleanse you.*

"And I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols I will cleanse you."

Ezekiel was a priest, and he uses a priest's picture. Under the law, a person who became unclean could be cleansed by sprinkled water. The water of purification mixed with the ashes of a red heifer was sprinkled on those who had touched the dead (Numbers 19:9, 17-19). The Levites were sprinkled when they were set apart for service (Numbers 8:7).

But notice who does the sprinkling. "I will sprinkle." No priest could wash a heart. God Himself will cleanse His people "from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols." David prayed for this kind of washing: "You will wash me, and I will be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:7).

Is this water baptism? Not directly. Ezekiel is speaking of a cleansing that God does inside a person, pictured by the water rites of the law. In the New Testament, the same cleansing is described as "the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5), and the writer of Hebrews speaks of having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience (Hebrews 10:22). Baptism is the outward sign that follows. The inner cleansing is God's work.

36:26 *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.*

"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh."

In the Bible, the heart is not just the place of feelings. It is the center of the whole person: the mind, the will and the desires. Jesus said that evil thoughts and every kind of sin come out of the heart (Matthew 15:19). Israel's problem had always been the heart. God had given them His law, His prophets and His temple, but their hearts were stone.

A heart of stone is hard, cold and dead. You can pour water on a stone all day and it will not soak in. That was Israel. That is every human heart without God (Jeremiah 17:9; Ephesians 2:1).

God does not promise to soften the old heart a little. He promises to "remove" it and give a new one. "A heart of flesh" is a living heart, one that can feel, hear and respond to God. And with it comes "a new spirit," a new inner life and a new direction.

God already promised this in 11:19. In 18:31 He told the people, "make for yourselves a new heart." Here we learn how that happens. The command shows us what we need. The promise shows us that only God can give it.

36:27 *And My Spirit I will put within you, and I will bring about that you walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments and do **them**.*

"And My Spirit I will put within you, and I will bring about that you walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments and do them."

This is the high point of the chapter. God will not only give a new spirit. He will put "My Spirit," His own Holy Spirit, inside His people. Under the old covenant, the Spirit came on certain people for certain tasks: judges, kings and prophets. Here God promises His Spirit within all His people.

And look at what the Spirit does: "I will bring about that you walk in My statutes." Obedience is no longer forced from the outside. It grows from the inside. God does not lower His standard. He gives His people the power to keep it. Paul says the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us "who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4).

When Jesus told Nicodemus, "unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5), He likely had this passage in mind. Water and Spirit come together here, in 36:25-27. That is why Jesus told Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, that he should have understood these things (John 3:10). The new birth is Ezekiel's promise coming true.

These verses are part of the new covenant that Jeremiah announced, made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, when God would put His law within them and write it on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34). God will keep this promise to Israel as a nation. Paul says that "all Israel will be saved," when the Deliverer comes from Zion and turns ungodliness from Jacob (Romans 11:26-27). At the same time, every person who trusts in Christ, Jew or Gentile, receives

the blessings of this promise now: the washing away of sin, a new heart, and the Holy Spirit living within (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:13-14).

Have you been born again, made new from the inside by the Spirit of God? You cannot make yourself a new heart. But you can come to the One who gives it.

36:28-30 *And you shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be a people to Me, and I will be God to you. And I will save you from all your uncleannesses; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not put famine on you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you shall no longer receive the reproach of famine among the nations.*

"And you shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be a people to Me, and I will be God to you." The covenant promise is repeated, and it is tied to the land God gave to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God will also bless the land. "I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not put famine on you." The fruit of the trees and the produce of the field will multiply, "so that you shall no longer receive the reproach of famine among the nations." Famine had been one of God's judgments on Israel (5:16-17). It will be gone.

36:31-32 *And you shall remember your evil ways and your deeds which **were** not good, and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sake am I acting, declares the Lord GOD; let it be known to you. Be ashamed and be humiliated for your ways, O house of Israel.*

"And you shall remember your evil ways and your deeds which were not good, and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight." Notice when this happens. It is after God has cleansed them and blessed them. Grace does not make us proud. It makes us see how much we were forgiven.

God says again, "Not for your sake am I acting." He repeats it so they will not miss it. "Be ashamed and be humiliated for your ways, O house of Israel." This is the shame that leads to worship, not to despair. Paul felt it when he called himself the foremost of sinners, saved by mercy (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

36:33-36 *Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. And the desolate land shall be tilled, instead of its being a desolation in the eyes of everyone who passes by. And they shall say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted and desolate and broken-down cities are fortified **and** inhabited.' And the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the broken-down **places**, I have planted the desolate **land**; I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do **it**.*

"On the day I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited." The cleansing of the people and the rebuilding of the land go together.

The desolate land will be tilled, and people passing by will say, "This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden." Isaiah says the same: the LORD will make her wilderness like Eden and her desert like the garden of the LORD (Isaiah 51:3).

"And the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the broken-down places." "I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do it." God signs His name to the promise.

36:37-38 *Thus says the Lord GOD: This also I will let Myself be sought by the house of Israel to do for them: I will multiply them like the flock **with** men. Like the flock of holy **offerings**, like the flock of Jerusalem at its appointed times, so the wasted cities shall be full of flocks of men; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD."*

"This also I will let Myself be sought by the house of Israel to do for them." In 14:3 and 20:3, God refused to be consulted by the elders because of their idols. Now He will let Himself be sought. Israel will pray, and He will answer.

"I will multiply them like the flock with men." Ezekiel the priest remembered Jerusalem at the great feasts, full of sheep brought for the sacrifices. "Like the flock of holy offerings, like the flock of Jerusalem at its appointed times, so the wasted cities shall be full of flocks of men." "And they shall know that I am the LORD."

Chapter 36 Summary

God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the mountains of Israel, which the nations, especially Edom, had mocked and claimed. In His jealousy God swore that the nations would bear their own disgrace, and that the mountains of Israel would bear fruit, be tilled and filled with people, and never again bereave Israel of its children. Then God explained that Israel had made the land unclean with blood and idols, so He scattered them, and among the nations they profaned His holy name. For the sake of His name, not for their sake, He would gather them from all the lands and bring them home. He would sprinkle clean water on them and cleanse them from their idols, give them a new heart and a new spirit, take away the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh, and put His own Spirit within them so that they would walk in His ways. This promise stands behind Jesus' teaching on the new birth (John 3:5), and it will be fulfilled for Israel as a nation, while all who believe in Christ share its blessings now. The land would become like the garden of Eden, and the nations would know that the LORD had done it.

Chapter 36 Study Questions

1. What had the nations said about the mountains of Israel? (36:2-3)

2. What did God promise the mountains of Israel? (36:8-12)

3. Why did God scatter Israel among the nations? (36:17-19)

4. How did Israel profane God's name among the nations? (36:20-21)

5. For whose sake did God say He would restore Israel? Why does that matter? (36:22, 32)

6. In what order does God promise to restore Israel in 36:24-27?

7. What is the difference between a heart of stone and a heart of flesh? (36:26)

8. What will God's Spirit do in His people? How does Romans 8:4 say the same? (36:27)

9. How does 36:25-27 help explain what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:5-10? Have you been born of the Spirit?

10. When God cleanses Israel, they will remember their evil ways (36:31). How does remembering what God has forgiven you change the way you worship Him?

Chapter 37: The Valley of Dry Bones

Scripture

37:1-14 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it ***was*** full ***of*** bones. And He made me pass by them all around, all around; and look, ***they were*** very many on the surface of the valley; and look, ***they were*** very dry. And He said to me, "Son of man, shall these bones live?" And I said, "O Lord GOD, You, You know." And He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and you shall say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Look, I am bringing breath into you, and you shall live. And I will put sinews on you, and I will bring up flesh over you, and I will cover you over with skin, and I will put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD.'" And I prophesied as I was commanded; and there was a sound as I prophesied, and look, a rattling, and the bones drew near, bone to its bone. And I looked, and look, sinews ***were*** on them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them over from above; and breath, ***there was*** none in them. And He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and you shall say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these killed ones, that they may live.'" And I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a very, very great army. And He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are all the house of Israel. Look, they are saying, 'Our bones have dried up, and our hope has perished; we have been cut off, ***as for*** us.' Therefore prophesy, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I am opening your graves, and I will bring you up from your graves, O My people, and I will bring you into the soil of Israel. And you shall know that I ***am*** the LORD, when I open your graves and when I bring you up from your graves, O My people. And I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will set you down on your own ground; and you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will do ***it***, declares the LORD.'"

37:15-28 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, 'For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions'; and take one stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and all the house of Israel, his companions.' And bring them near, one to one, for yourself into one stick, and they shall become one in your hand. And when the sons of your people speak to you, saying, 'Will you not tell us what these ***are*** to you?' speak to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I am taking the stick of Joseph, which ***is*** in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and I will make them one stick, and they shall be one in My hand.' And the sticks on which you write shall be in your hand before their eyes. And speak to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I am taking the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from all around, and I will bring them into their own ground. And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king for all of them; and they shall no longer be two nations, and they shall no longer be divided into two kingdoms anymore. And they shall no longer make themselves unclean with their idols and with their detestable things and with all their transgressions; and I will save them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and I will cleanse them; and they shall be a people to Me, and I will be God to them. And My servant David ***will be*** king over them, and there shall be one

shepherd for all of them; and they shall walk in My judgments, and keep My statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell on the land which I gave to My servant, to Jacob, in which your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell on it, they and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant ***will be*** prince for them forever. And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will set them ***in place*** and multiply them, and I will put My sanctuary in their midst forever. And My tabernacle shall be over them; and I will be God to them, and they shall be a people to Me. And the nations shall know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.'"

Chapter 37 Preview

This is the best-known vision in Ezekiel. The Spirit sets the prophet down in a valley full of bones, very many and very dry. God asks, "Son of man, shall these bones live?" Ezekiel prophesies, and the bones come together, bone to bone. Sinews, flesh and skin cover them, but there is no breath in them. He prophesies again, the breath comes in, and they stand up, a very great army. God explains the vision Himself: "these bones are all the house of Israel" (37:11). He will open their graves, bring them into their land, and put His Spirit in them.

The second half of the chapter is a sign act. Ezekiel takes two sticks, one for Judah and one for Joseph, and joins them in his hand. The two kingdoms that split after Solomon will become one nation again, under one King, "My servant David," with God's sanctuary in their midst forever. The chapter gathers up the promises of chapters 34 and 36 and points ahead to the temple vision of chapters 40 to 48.

Chapter 37 Study

37:1-2 *The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it **was** full **of** bones. And He made me pass by them all around, all around; and look, **they were** very many on the surface of the valley; and look, **they were** very dry.*

"The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the midst of the valley." This was a vision, like the visions of chapters 1 and 8 to 11. The Spirit carried Ezekiel there, and the place may be the same plain where he saw God's glory in 3:22-23.

"And it was full of bones." God "made me pass by them all around, all around." Ezekiel walked among them. For a priest, this was a terrible place. Touching the dead made a person unclean (Numbers 19:11-16). He was surrounded by death.

Two things are stressed. The bones were "very many," and they were "very dry." These were not people who had just died. They had been dead a long time, bleached by the sun, scattered across the valley floor like the remains of an army slain in battle and never buried. No one could look at this valley and imagine life coming back.

37:3 *And He said to me, "Son of man, shall these bones live?" And I said, "O Lord GOD, You, You know."*

"And He said to me, Son of man, shall these bones live?"

What would you have said? Humanly, the answer was obvious. Dry bones do not live. But Ezekiel had seen too much of God to say no. He answered, "O Lord GOD, You, You know."

That is a wise answer. Ezekiel did not claim to know what God would do. He did not say it was impossible either. He put the question back in God's hands. When we face something that looks hopeless, a marriage, a wayward child, a nation, our own hard heart, this is a good place to begin. I cannot see how this could live, Lord, but You know.

37:4-6 *And He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and you shall say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Look, I am bringing breath into you, and you shall live. And I will put sinews on you, and I will bring up flesh over you, and I will cover you over with skin, and I will put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I **am** the LORD.'"*

God tells him what to say: "O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD."

It must have felt strange to preach to bones. Yet Ezekiel had been preaching to spiritually dead people for years. God's word does not depend on the hearer's ability to respond. It carries its own life.

The promise is detailed. "Look, I am bringing breath into you, and you shall live." Then God lists the steps: "I will put sinews on you, and I will bring up flesh over you, and I will cover you over with skin, and I will put breath in you, and you shall live."

The Hebrew word for breath here is ruach. It can mean breath, wind or spirit, depending on the context, and this chapter uses all three meanings. The same word is "breath" in verses 5 to 10, "the four winds" in verse 9, and "My Spirit" in verse 14. God is making a point with that word. The breath that gives life to the bones is the wind of God, and it is the Spirit of God.

This should remind us of Genesis 2:7, when God formed the man from the dust and breathed into him the breath of life. Only God gives life.

37:7-8 *And I prophesied as I was commanded; and there was a sound as I prophesied, and look, a rattling, and the bones drew near, bone to its bone. And I looked, and look, sinews **were** on them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them over from above; and breath, **there was** none in them.*

"And I prophesied as I was commanded; and there was a sound as I prophesied, and look, a rattling, and the bones drew near, bone to its bone."

Picture the scene. Ezekiel speaks, and the whole valley begins to rattle as bones find their match. Then "sinews were on them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them over from above."

But there is one thing missing: "and breath, there was none in them." The valley is full of bodies, whole but still dead.

That is an important detail. The restoration happens in two stages. First the bodies are put back together. Then the breath comes. A nation can be gathered and rebuilt and still be spiritually dead. Many dispensational teachers see this as a picture of Israel today: gathered again in the land in large numbers, a real nation once more, yet mostly without faith in Jesus as Messiah. I believe that is a fair reading of the order in this vision, as long as we do not try to set dates. The bones are coming together. The breath is still to come.

37:9-10 *And He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and you shall say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these killed ones, that they may live.'" And I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a very, very great army.*

"Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man." And the message is, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these killed ones, that they may live."

Notice that God calls them "these killed ones." These bones were the dead of a slaughter. Israel had been killed by the sword, by famine and by exile, as Ezekiel had warned.

Ezekiel prophesied again, "and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a very, very great army."

Jesus spoke of the Spirit as the wind that blows where it wishes (John 3:8). He also breathed on His disciples and said, Receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). The life that comes from God's Spirit is what turns dry bones into a living people.

37:11 *And He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are all the house of Israel. Look, they are saying, 'Our bones have dried up, and our hope has perished; we have been cut off, **as for** us.'*

Now God explains the vision. We do not have to guess what it means. "Son of man, these bones are all the house of Israel."

This is the key to the whole passage. The bones are Israel, the whole nation, both north and south, as the two sticks will make clear. And God tells Ezekiel what the people were saying: "Our bones have dried up, and our hope has perished; we have been cut off, as for us."

That was how the exiles felt after the news of 33:21. Their city and temple were gone, and their king was blind in a Babylonian prison. As a nation, they felt as dead as those bones.

God took their own words, "Our bones have dried up," and turned them into a vision of hope. Their feeling was true: they were dead. But God raises the dead.

37:12-13 *Therefore prophesy, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I am opening your graves, and I will bring you up from your graves, O My people, and I will bring you into the soil of Israel. And you shall know that I* ***am*** *the LORD, when I open your graves and when I bring you up from your graves, O My people.*

"Look, I am opening your graves, and I will bring you up from your graves, O My people, and I will bring you into the soil of Israel."

Here the picture shifts from a battlefield to graves. The graves stand for the nations where Israel had been scattered and buried, as it were, in exile. God will open them and bring His people out. Then He will "bring you into the soil of Israel." This is a plain promise about a real people and a real land.

Notice the tender words: "O My people." They had felt cut off. God says they still belong to Him.

"And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves." Bringing Israel back from the nations would be like raising the dead, and it would show the world who the LORD is.

Does this passage teach the bodily resurrection of the dead? Its main point is the national restoration of Israel. That is how God Himself explains it. But the picture would mean nothing if God could not raise the dead. Daniel says plainly that many who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake (Daniel 12:2), and Jesus said all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out (John 5:28-29). The God who can raise a nation from its grave can also raise each believer from his.

37:14 *And I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will set you down on your own ground; and you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will do* ***it****, declares the LORD.'"*

"And I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will set you down on your own ground; and you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it, declares the LORD."

This verse ties the vision to 36:27. The breath in the bones is God's own Spirit. Israel's restoration will not only be political. It will be spiritual. They will be in their land, and they will be alive to God.

I believe this has not yet been fulfilled, and that it will be. The return from Babylon in 538 B.C. brought back a small remnant, but it was not the whole house of Israel, and it did not bring the outpouring of God's Spirit on the nation. Zechariah says that in the last days God will pour out on the house of David and on Jerusalem "a spirit of grace and supplications," and "they will look to Me, to Him whom they have pierced" (Zechariah 12:10). Paul says a hardening in part has come on Israel "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in," and then "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:25-26). That is the day when the breath comes into the bones. It will come when Jesus Christ returns.

Some teachers read this vision as fulfilled only in the return from Babylon. Others see it fulfilled spiritually in the church, where people dead in sin are made alive in Christ. It is true that God makes dead sinners alive (Ephesians 2:4-5), and we can rightly use this chapter to praise Him for

that. But God Himself said, "these bones are all the house of Israel," and He promised to bring them "into the land of Israel." I take Him at His word.

What does this mean for us now? It means no one is too dead for God. If you feel that your hope has perished, that you are cut off, remember this valley. God's Word and God's Spirit still bring the dead to life. "I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it."

37:15-17 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, 'For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions'; and take one stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and all the house of Israel, his companions.' And bring them near, one to one, for yourself into one stick, and they shall become one in your hand.*

Now comes a second message, acted out with two sticks. On one stick Ezekiel writes, "For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions." On the other he writes, "For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and all the house of Israel, his companions."

These two sticks stand for the two kingdoms. After Solomon died, about 930 B.C., the nation split. The southern kingdom, Judah, kept David's line and Jerusalem. The northern kingdom, often called Ephraim after its leading tribe, or Joseph, Ephraim's father, had its own kings. The north fell to Assyria in 722 B.C., and the south to Babylon in 586 B.C.

"And bring them near, one to one, for yourself into one stick, and they shall become one in your hand." Ezekiel held the two sticks end to end, so that in his hand they looked like one. What had been two would become one.

37:18-20 *And when the sons of your people speak to you, saying, 'Will you not tell us what these **are** to you?' speak to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I am taking the stick of Joseph, which **is** in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and I will make them one stick, and they shall be one in My hand.' And the sticks on which you write shall be in your hand before their eyes.*

The people would ask, "Will you not tell us what these are to you?" His sign acts always got people talking (12:9; 24:19).

God gives the answer: "Look, I am taking the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and I will make them one stick, and they shall be one in My hand."

In Ezekiel's hand the sticks were joined, but it is God's hand that truly joins them. He would heal a division that had lasted for over three hundred years.

People sometimes speak of the ten lost tribes. But God never lost them. Many from the northern tribes had moved south to Judah long before (2 Chronicles 11:16; 30:11), and in Jesus' day, Anna the prophetess was from the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36). God knows every tribe, and He will gather them all.

37:21-22 *And speak to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I am taking the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from all around, and I will bring them into their own ground. And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king for all of them; and they shall no longer be two nations, and they shall no longer be divided into two kingdoms anymore.*

"Look, I am taking the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from all around, and I will bring them into their own ground." The promise of 36:24 comes again.

"And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king for all of them; and they shall no longer be two nations, and they shall no longer be divided into two kingdoms anymore."

That has never happened since 930 B.C. It will happen when Christ reigns.

37:23 *And they shall no longer make themselves unclean with their idols and with their detestable things and with all their transgressions; and I will save them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and I will cleanse them; and they shall be a people to Me, and I will be God to them.*

"And they shall no longer make themselves unclean with their idols and with their detestable things and with all their transgressions." The new nation will be a cleansed nation. "I will save them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and I will cleanse them."

Then comes the covenant promise again: "and they shall be a people to Me, and I will be God to them." The unity of the nation comes from its cleansing. People are truly joined together only when they are first joined to God.

37:24-25 *And My servant David **will be** king over them, and there shall be one shepherd for all of them; and they shall walk in My judgments, and keep My statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell on the land which I gave to My servant, to Jacob, in which your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell on it, they and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant **will be** prince for them forever.*

"And My servant David will be king over them, and there shall be one shepherd for all of them." This ties back to 34:23-24. As I said there, I believe "My servant David" is the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of David, who will sit on David's throne and reign over the house of Jacob forever (Luke 1:32-33).

"And they shall walk in My judgments, and keep My statutes, and do them." This is the work of the Spirit in 36:27.

Verse 25 says the land will be theirs "forever," and "they and their sons and their sons' sons" will live in it. And "David My servant will be prince for them forever." The word forever comes again and again in these last verses. This is not a short revival that fades. It is the everlasting kingdom God promised to David (2 Samuel 7:16).

37:26-28 *And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will set them **in place** and multiply them, and I will put My sanctuary in their midst forever. And My tabernacle shall be over them; and I will be God to them, and they shall be a people to Me. And the nations shall know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.'"*

"And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them." The covenant of peace from 34:25 is now called everlasting.

"And I will put My sanctuary in their midst forever. And My tabernacle shall be over them." A sanctuary is a holy place where God dwells. The tabernacle was the tent where God's presence lived among Israel in the wilderness. God promises to live among His people again, and this time forever. Chapters 40 to 48 will describe that sanctuary in detail.

Here is the answer to chapters 8 to 11. There, Israel's sin drove God's glory out of His house. Here, God promises to put His sanctuary in their midst and never leave.

John says that when the Word became flesh, He "dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The word John uses means He pitched His tent among us, He tabernacled with us. And at the very end of the Bible, a loud voice says, "Look, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them" (Revelation 21:3). God's plan from the beginning has been to live with His people.

"And the nations shall know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever." God's promises to Israel stand (Romans 11:29).

Chapter 37 Summary

The Spirit of the LORD set Ezekiel down in a valley full of very many and very dry bones, and God asked whether they could live. Ezekiel answered that God knew. At God's command he prophesied to the bones, and they came together, bone to bone, with sinews, flesh and skin, but no breath. He prophesied to the breath, and it came from the four winds into them, and they stood up, a very great army. God explained that the bones were the whole house of Israel, who said their hope had perished, and He promised to open their graves among the nations, bring them into the land of Israel, and put His Spirit in them so they would live. Then Ezekiel joined two sticks, one for Judah and one for Joseph and Ephraim, into one in his hand: God would gather Israel, make them one nation under one King, His servant David, the Messiah, cleanse them from idols, and make an everlasting covenant of peace with them, with His sanctuary in their midst forever.

Chapter 37 Study Questions

1. Describe the valley Ezekiel saw. What two things are stressed about the bones? (37:1-2)

2. How did Ezekiel answer God's question, "shall these bones live?" (37:3)

3. What happened when Ezekiel prophesied the first time, and what was still missing? (37:7-8)

4. What are the three meanings of the Hebrew word ruach in this chapter, and why does that matter? (37:5, 9, 14)

5. How does God Himself explain the bones and the graves? (37:11-12)

6. What do the two sticks stand for, and what does joining them mean? (37:16-22)

7. Who is "My servant David," and how long will He reign? (37:24-25; Luke 1:32-33)

8. What does God promise to put in the midst of His people forever? How do John 1:14 and Revelation 21:3 show the same plan? (37:26-28)

9. Is there a situation in your life that looks like a valley of dry bones? How can you pray, like Ezekiel, "You know"? (37:3)

10. God's Word and Spirit brought the bones to life. How have you seen God bring life to something, or someone, that seemed dead? (Ephesians 2:4-5)

Chapter 38: Gog of the Land of Magog

Scripture

38:1-13 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and you shall say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. And I will turn you around, and put hooks in your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed ***in*** perfection, a great company ***with*** large shield and shield, all of them wielding swords; Persia, Cush, and Put with them, all of them ***with*** shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops, the house of Togarmah, the remotest parts of the north, and all its troops, many peoples with you. Be prepared, and prepare yourself, you and all your company that are assembled about you, and you shall be a guard for them. After many days you shall be mustered; in the latter part of the years you shall come into a land restored from ***the*** sword, gathered from many peoples, on the mountains of Israel, which had been a continual waste; and it has been brought out from the peoples, and they shall dwell in security, all of them. And you shall go up; like the storm you shall come; like the cloud to cover the land you shall be, you and all your troops, and many peoples with you. Thus says the Lord GOD: And it shall come about on that day ***that*** things shall come up on your heart, and you shall devise an evil plan, and you shall say, "I will go up against a land of open villages; I will come to those who are at rest, who dwell in security, all of them dwelling without a wall, and they have no bars and gates," to seize spoil and to take plunder, to turn your hand against the inhabited waste places, and against a people gathered from nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell at the navel of the earth. Sheba and Dedan and the traders of Tarshish and all its young lions shall say to you, "Have you come to seize spoil? Have you assembled your company to take plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take livestock and goods, to seize great spoil?"'

38:14-23 Therefore prophesy, son of man, and you shall say to Gog, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: On that day, when My people Israel dwell in security, will you not know ***it***? And you shall come from your place, from the remotest parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding horses, a great company and a numerous army. And you shall come up against My people Israel like the cloud to cover the land; at the end of the days it shall be, and I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog. Thus says the Lord GOD: ***Are*** you he of whom I spoke in former days by the hand of My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days ***for*** years that I would bring you against them? And it shall come about on that day, on the day Gog comes against the soil of Israel, declares the Lord GOD, ***that*** My rage shall come up in My anger. And in My jealousy, in the fire of My wrath, I have spoken: Surely on that day there shall be a great quaking on the soil of Israel. And the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and the animals of the field and every moving thing that moves on the ground, and all mankind who ***are*** on the surface of the ground, shall quake before Me; and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the earth. And I will call for a sword against him on all My mountains, declares the Lord GOD; the sword of each man shall be against his brother. And I will enter into judgment with him with pestilence and with blood; and an overflowing rain and hailstones, fire

and sulfur I will rain on him and on his troops and on the many peoples who ***are*** with him. And I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD.'"

Chapter 38 Preview

Chapter 37 ended with Israel back in its land, one nation, with God's sanctuary in its midst. Chapters 38 and 39 describe one last great attack on that restored people. A leader named Gog, from the land of Magog, gathers a huge army of nations from the far north and from the south and east, and comes against Israel "in the latter part of the years" (38:8), when the people are living in security in unwalled villages. He comes to plunder. But God says He is the one bringing Gog, and He will destroy his army on the mountains of Israel with an earthquake, confusion, plague, hail, fire and sulfur, so that the nations will know that He is the LORD.

This is one of the hard sections of Ezekiel. Bible teachers who agree that this is a future event still disagree about exactly when it happens and who the nations are today. I will give the main views fairly and try not to say more than the text says. I will not set dates, and I will not name any modern nation as certain.

Chapter 38 Study

38:1-3 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and you shall say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I* ***am*** *against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.*

"Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him."

Who is Gog? Scripture does not tell us anything about him outside these chapters and Revelation 20:8. He is a person, a ruler, because God speaks to him directly and tells him what he will think and plan (38:10). Gog may be his name or a title. We do not know.

Magog is his land. In Genesis 10:2, Magog, Meshech and Tubal are listed among the sons of Japheth, Noah's son, along with Gomer, and Togarmah is a son of Gomer (Genesis 10:3). These were ancient peoples who settled north of Israel. In Ezekiel's day, Meshech and Tubal were peoples in the region of Asia Minor, the area that is now Turkey, and Ezekiel names them in 27:13 and 32:26 as traders and warriors. Magog was somewhere in the far north as well, perhaps around the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Scholars are not certain of its exact place.

The words "chief prince" need a short explanation. The Hebrew word ro'sh normally means head or chief. The SLB reads it that way: Gog is "the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal." Other translations read Rosh as the name of a place or people, making Gog the prince of a land or people called Rosh, as well as of Meshech and Tubal. Both readings are possible from the Hebrew, and good scholars hold each one. Some teachers have linked Rosh with Russia, and Meshech and Tubal with Moscow and Tobolsk, because the names sound alike. Most scholars today, including

many conservative ones, do not think the sound-alike links can be proven. I do not think we should build on them.

What we can say plainly is this: Gog leads a coalition from "the remotest parts of the north" (38:6, 15). In the Bible, north means the direction from which Israel's great invaders usually came, since armies traveled the fertile route around the desert. "Look, I am against you, O Gog."

38:4-6 *And I will turn you around, and put hooks in your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed **in** perfection, a great company **with** large shield and shield, all of them wielding swords; Persia, Cush, and Put with them, all of them **with** shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops, the house of Togarmah, the remotest parts of the north, and all its troops, many peoples with you.*

"And I will turn you around, and put hooks in your jaws, and I will bring you out." This is the language of a hunter or fisherman dragging a captured animal. God told Pharaoh the same thing (29:4). Gog thinks he is making his own plans, but God is leading him where He wants him.

Gog's army is huge and well armed: "horses and horsemen, all of them clothed in perfection, a great company with large shield and shield, all of them wielding swords." Ezekiel describes it with the weapons of his own day, the only weapons his hearers could picture.

His allies come from every side. "Persia, Cush, and Put with them." Ancient Persia lay to the east, in the land that is now Iran. Cush was the land south of Egypt along the upper Nile. Put was in North Africa, usually placed west of Egypt. Then "Gomer and all its troops, the house of Togarmah, the remotest parts of the north." Gomer and Togarmah were northern peoples, also usually placed in Asia Minor. "Many peoples with you."

Notice the pattern. The armies come from the north, the east and the south. Israel is surrounded. It is a picture of the nations of the world gathered against God's people.

38:7-9 *Be prepared, and prepare yourself, you and all your company that are assembled about you, and you shall be a guard for them. After many days you shall be mustered; in the latter part of the years you shall come into a land restored from **the** sword, gathered from many peoples, on the mountains of Israel, which had been a continual waste; and it has been brought out from the peoples, and they shall dwell in security, all of them. And you shall go up; like the storm you shall come; like the cloud to cover the land you shall be, you and all your troops, and many peoples with you.*

"Be prepared, and prepare yourself, you and all your company." God almost mocks Gog. Get ready. Gather your armies. It will not help you.

Then comes the key verse for timing: "After many days you shall be mustered; in the latter part of the years you shall come into a land restored from the sword, gathered from many peoples, on the mountains of Israel, which had been a continual waste." The land had been waste for a long time. Its people had been "brought out from the peoples," and now "they shall dwell in security, all of them."

So the attack comes after Israel has been gathered back to its land from many nations. It is not the invasion by Babylon, which came before the exile. And nothing in Israel's history after the return from Babylon matches this event: a gathering of northern and distant nations destroyed on the mountains of Israel by God's direct hand. I believe it is still future.

When does it happen? Bible teachers who hold a pre-tribulation, premillennial view, as I do, agree that it is future and that it comes in the last days, but they place it differently:

- Some place it before the seven-year Tribulation begins, perhaps soon after Christ takes His church to be with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). The seven years of burning the weapons (39:9) would then run through the Tribulation.
- Some place it early in the Tribulation, or near its midpoint, when Israel is living in a false security under the covenant the coming ruler makes with "the many" (Daniel 9:27). On this view, Gog's defeat may open the way for the Antichrist to break that covenant and seize power.
- Some place it at the end of the Tribulation and connect it with the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:16; 19:17-21), since both end with a feast for the birds (39:17-20).

Each view has strengths and problems. The text says Israel will "dwell in security, all of them" (38:8), which fits a time of apparent peace better than the end of the Tribulation, when Jesus said the people of Judea would be fleeing to the mountains (Matthew 24:15-21). That is why many prefer an earlier date. I lean toward one of those earlier views, before the Tribulation or early in it. But Scripture does not tell us the year or the month, and I will not try to.

Revelation 20:8 also uses the names "Gog and Magog," for a rebellion at the end of the thousand years, when Satan is released and gathers the nations "in the four corners of the earth." Most premillennial teachers see that as a different and later event. Ezekiel's Gog comes from the north before Israel's long rest; Revelation's Gog and Magog come from the whole earth after the thousand years and are destroyed by fire from heaven (Revelation 20:9). John seems to use the old names the way we might name a later battle after a famous earlier one. Amillennial teachers see Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 20 as the same final battle, pictured in symbols.

"And you shall go up; like the storm you shall come; like the cloud to cover the land you shall be." The army is so large it is like a storm cloud covering the whole land.

38:10-13 *Thus says the Lord GOD: And it shall come about on that day **that** things shall come up on your heart, and you shall devise an evil plan, and you shall say, "I will go up against a land of open villages; I will come to those who are at rest, who dwell in security, all of them dwelling without a wall, and they have no bars and gates," to seize spoil and to take plunder, to turn your hand against the inhabited waste places, and against a people gathered from nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell at the navel of the earth. Sheba and Dedan and the traders of Tarshish and all its young lions shall say to you, "Have you come to seize spoil? Have you assembled your company to take plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take livestock and goods, to seize great spoil?"'*

"And it shall come about on that day that things shall come up on your heart, and you shall devise an evil plan." God brings Gog, but the evil is Gog's own. God does not put the wicked plan in Gog's heart. Gog thinks it up himself, and God uses it for His own purpose, as He did with Joseph's brothers (Genesis 50:20).

Gog's plan is simple greed. "I will go up against a land of open villages; I will come to those who are at rest, who dwell in security, all of them dwelling without a wall, and they have no bars and gates." In the ancient world, a town without walls was a town that felt safe. Gog sees an easy target.

He comes "to seize spoil and to take plunder," against "a people gathered from nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell at the navel of the earth." The navel of the earth means the center, the place God set at the middle of the nations (5:5). Israel sits at the crossroads of three continents.

Other nations watch. "Sheba and Dedan and the traders of Tarshish and all its young lions" ask Gog, "Have you come to seize spoil?" Sheba and Dedan were trading peoples of Arabia. Tarshish was a far-off seaport to the west, often placed in Spain. These traders do not stop Gog. They only ask what he is after. It may be a protest, or it may be the question of merchants hoping to profit from the loot. Either way, no one defends Israel. God alone will do that.

38:14-16 *Therefore prophesy, son of man, and you shall say to Gog, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: On that day, when My people Israel dwell in security, will you not know **it**? And you shall come from your place, from the remotest parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding horses, a great company and a numerous army. And you shall come up against My people Israel like the cloud to cover the land; at the end of the days it shall be, and I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog.*

"On that day, when My people Israel dwell in security, will you not know it?" Gog will notice that Israel is unprotected and will take his chance.

He will come "from the remotest parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding horses, a great company and a numerous army." Again God says the time is "at the end of the days."

Then God reveals His real purpose: "I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog." Notice "My land" and "My people." Gog thinks he is attacking a weak nation. He is attacking the LORD's land and the LORD's people. And God will use Gog's attack to show the whole world who He is.

38:17 *Thus says the Lord GOD: **Are** you he of whom I spoke in former days by the hand of My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days **for** years that I would bring you against them?*

"Are you he of whom I spoke in former days by the hand of My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for years that I would bring you against them?"

No earlier prophet names Gog. But many of them spoke of a great enemy from the north and of a final gathering of nations against Jerusalem that God would defeat (Jeremiah 4:6; Joel 2:20; 3:1-2; Zephaniah 3:8; Zechariah 14:2-3). God says Gog is part of what they saw. His attack has been in God's plan for a long time. Nothing about it takes God by surprise.

38:18-20 *And it shall come about on that day, on the day Gog comes against the soil of Israel, declares the Lord GOD, **that** My rage shall come up in My anger. And in My jealousy, in the fire of My wrath, I have spoken: Surely on that day there shall be a great quaking on the soil of Israel. And the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and the animals of the field and every moving thing that moves on the ground, and all mankind who **are** on the surface of the ground, shall quake before Me; and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the earth.*

"And it shall come about on that day, on the day Gog comes against the soil of Israel, declares the Lord GOD, that My rage shall come up in My anger." God Himself goes to war.

"Surely on that day there shall be a great quaking on the soil of Israel." The earthquake will be so great that "the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and the animals of the field" and "all mankind who are on the surface of the ground, shall quake before Me." Mountains will be thrown down, cliffs will fall, and "every wall shall fall to the earth." The whole creation trembles when God rises to defend His people (Haggai 2:6; Revelation 16:18).

38:21-23 *And I will call for a sword against him on all My mountains, declares the Lord GOD; the sword of each man shall be against his brother. And I will enter into judgment with him with pestilence and with blood; and an overflowing rain and hailstones, fire and sulfur I will rain on him and on his troops and on the many peoples who **are** with him. And I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD.'"*

"And I will call for a sword against him on all My mountains." Gog's army will turn on itself: "the sword of each man shall be against his brother." God did this before, when Gideon's three hundred blew their trumpets and the Midianites killed one another (Judges 7:22), and when Jehoshaphat's enemies destroyed each other (2 Chronicles 20:22-23).

Then God adds judgment from heaven: "pestilence and with blood; and an overflowing rain and hailstones, fire and sulfur." It is like the hail on Egypt (Exodus 9:23-24) and the fire and sulfur on Sodom (Genesis 19:24). Israel does not win this battle with its own army. God wins it alone.

The chapter ends with God's purpose once more: "And I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am the LORD."

That is the heart of these chapters. They are not mainly a puzzle about modern politics. They are about God showing the world that He is holy, that He keeps His promises to Israel, and that no army on earth can stand against Him. For believers today, that is a deep comfort. The nations rage, but the LORD reigns (Psalm 2:1-6).

Chapter 38 Summary

God told Ezekiel to prophesy against Gog of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, a ruler of the far north. God would put hooks in his jaws and bring him out with a huge army, joined by Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, Togarmah and many peoples. In the latter years, after Israel had been gathered from the nations and was living in security in unwalled villages, Gog would devise an evil plan to plunder them, while the traders of Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish looked on. Pre-tribulation premillennial teachers agree this is a future event, but place it before the Tribulation, early in it or near its midpoint, or at its end; Revelation 20:8 uses the names for a later rebellion after the thousand years. God said He was bringing Gog against His land so that the nations would know Him. On that day He would shake the land with a great earthquake, turn Gog's soldiers against each other, and rain plague, hail, fire and sulfur on them, and He would make Himself known to many nations as the LORD.

Chapter 38 Study Questions

1. Who is Gog, and what peoples does he rule or lead? (38:2-3; Genesis 10:2-3)

2. What does God's picture of hooks in Gog's jaws tell us about who is really in control? (38:4)

3. Which nations join Gog, and from what directions do they come? (38:5-6, 15)

4. What is Israel's condition when Gog comes? (38:8, 11-12)

5. Why does Gog come, and whose plan is it? (38:10-12, 16)

6. What are the main views on when this invasion takes place? Why do many teachers place it before the end of the Tribulation? (38:8; Daniel 9:27)

7. How is the Gog and Magog of Revelation 20:7-9 different from Ezekiel's Gog?

8. How will God defeat Gog's army, and what will the nations learn? (38:19-23)

9. Why do you think God tells us about events like this ahead of time, without giving us dates? (Matthew 24:36, 42)

10. When the news is full of wars and threats, how does this chapter help you trust God? (Psalm 2:1-6)

Chapter 39: The Defeat of Gog

Scripture

39:1-16 "And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and you shall say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I ***am*** against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. And I will turn you around and lead you on, and I will bring you up from the remotest parts of the north, and I will bring you against the mountains of Israel. And I will strike your bow from your left hand, and I will make your arrows fall from your right hand. On the mountains of Israel you shall fall, you and all your troops and the peoples who ***are*** with you; to birds of prey, birds of every wing, and ***to*** the animals of the field I have given you for food. On the surface of the field you shall fall, for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD. And I will send fire on Magog and on those who dwell in the coastlands in security; and they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD. And My holy name I will make known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not let My holy name be profaned anymore; and the nations shall know that I, the LORD, ***am*** holy in Israel. Look, it is coming, and it shall be done, declares the Lord GOD; that ***is*** the day of which I have spoken. And those who dwell in the cities of Israel shall go out and burn and kindle ***fires*** with weapons, shield and large shield, with bow and with arrows, and with hand-staff and with spear; and they shall kindle fire with them seven years. And they shall not carry wood from the field, and shall not cut ***it*** from the forests, for with the weapons they shall kindle fire; and they shall despoil those who despoiled them, and plunder those who plundered them, declares the Lord GOD. And it shall come about on that day ***that*** I will give to Gog a place there, a grave in Israel, the valley of those who pass through, east of the sea; and it shall block those who pass through; and they shall bury Gog and all his multitude there, and they shall call ***it*** the valley of Hamon-gog. And the house of Israel shall bury them, in order to cleanse the land, seven months. And all the people of the land shall bury ***them***, and it shall become a name for them, the day I am glorified, declares the Lord GOD. And they shall set apart men of continual ***duty***, passing through the land, burying those who pass through, those who remain on the surface of the land, to cleanse it; at the end of seven months they shall search. And those who pass through shall pass through the land, and one shall see a bone of man, and he shall build a marker beside it, until the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamon-gog. And also the name of ***the*** city ***is*** Hamonah. And they shall cleanse the land.'

39:17-29 And you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD: Say to the birds of every wing and to every animal of the field, 'Assemble and come; gather yourselves from all around to My sacrifice which I am sacrificing for you, a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel; and you shall eat flesh and drink blood. The flesh of mighty men you shall eat, and the blood of the princes of the earth you shall drink, of rams, lambs, and male goats, bulls, fatlings of Bashan, all of them. And you shall eat fat to satiety and drink blood to drunkenness from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. And you shall be satisfied at My table ***with*** horse and charioteer, mighty man and every man of war, declares the Lord GOD.' And I will set My glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see My judgment which I have executed and My hand which I have laid on them. And the house of Israel shall know that I ***am*** the LORD their God from that day and onward. And the nations shall know that for their iniquity the house of Israel went into exile, because they acted unfaithfully against Me, and I hid My face from them and gave them into the hand of their

adversaries, and they fell by the sword, all of them. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I have dealt with them, and I hid My face from them. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will turn back the captivity of Jacob, and I will have compassion on all the house of Israel, and I will be jealous for My holy name. And they shall bear their disgrace and all their unfaithfulness with which they acted unfaithfully against Me, when they dwell on their own ground in security, and no one makes ***them*** afraid, when I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, and I am sanctified through them in the eyes of the many nations. And they shall know that I ***am*** the LORD their God, in that I sent them into exile to the nations, and I will gather them to their own ground, and I will not leave any of them there anymore. And I will not hide My face from them anymore, for I have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD."

Chapter 39 Preview

Chapter 39 tells the story of Gog's defeat a second time, with new details. God disarms Gog and his armies on the mountains of Israel. The weapons left behind are so many that Israel burns them for fuel for seven years. The dead are so many that it takes seven months to bury them, in a valley that will be called the valley of Hamon-gog, the multitude of Gog. God calls the birds and wild animals to a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel.

Then the chapter turns, and the last verses sum up everything from chapter 33 on. The nations will understand that Israel went into exile because of its sin, not because God was weak. And God will bring back all of Israel from the nations, leave none of them behind, and pour out His Spirit on them. He will never hide His face from them again (39:29).

Chapter 39 Study

39:1-6 *"And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and you shall say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I **am** against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. And I will turn you around and lead you on, and I will bring you up from the remotest parts of the north, and I will bring you against the mountains of Israel. And I will strike your bow from your left hand, and I will make your arrows fall from your right hand. On the mountains of Israel you shall fall, you and all your troops and the peoples who **are** with you; to birds of prey, birds of every wing, and **to** the animals of the field I have given you for food. On the surface of the field you shall fall, for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD. And I will send fire on Magog and on those who dwell in the coastlands in security; and they shall know that I **am** the LORD.*

"Look, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal." God repeats the opening of 38:3. "And I will turn you around and lead you on, and I will bring you up from the remotest parts of the north, and I will bring you against the mountains of Israel." Once again God is in charge. Gog marches, but God leads him.

"And I will strike your bow from your left hand, and I will make your arrows fall from your right hand." An archer held the bow in his left hand and drew the arrow with his right. God knocks both out of his hands. Gog is disarmed before he can shoot.

"On the mountains of Israel you shall fall, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you." The land Gog came to plunder becomes his grave. The birds of prey and the wild animals will eat the fallen.

"And I will send fire on Magog and on those who dwell in the coastlands in security." The judgment reaches beyond the battlefield, to Gog's homeland and to his allies in distant lands who thought they were safe. "And they shall know that I am the LORD."

39:7-8 *And My holy name I will make known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not let My holy name be profaned anymore; and the nations shall know that I, the LORD,* ***am*** *holy in Israel. Look, it is coming, and it shall be done, declares the Lord GOD; that* ***is*** *the day of which I have spoken.*

"And My holy name I will make known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not let My holy name be profaned anymore."

In 36:20-23 God said that Israel's exile profaned His name among the nations, and that He would act to make His name holy again. Gog's defeat is part of that. When the nations see God destroy the armies that came against Israel, they will know "that I, the LORD, am holy in Israel." No one will be able to say again that the God of Israel is too weak to protect His people.

"Look, it is coming, and it shall be done, declares the Lord GOD; that is the day of which I have spoken." God speaks as if it has already happened. When God says something will happen, it is as good as done.

39:9-10 *And those who dwell in the cities of Israel shall go out and burn and kindle* ***fires*** *with weapons, shield and large shield, with bow and with arrows, and with hand-staff and with spear; and they shall kindle fire with them seven years. And they shall not carry wood from the field, and shall not cut* ***it*** *from the forests, for with the weapons they shall kindle fire; and they shall despoil those who despoiled them, and plunder those who plundered them, declares the Lord GOD.*

"And those who dwell in the cities of Israel shall go out and burn and kindle fires with weapons." Shields, bows, arrows, clubs and spears will be gathered and used as fuel, "and they shall kindle fire with them seven years."

The weapons are so many that the people "shall not carry wood from the field, and shall not cut it from the forests." In a land where wood was scarce, this was a great gift. God turns the weapons of war into fuel for daily life. Isaiah pictures swords beaten into plowshares in the kingdom (Isaiah 2:4). Here the weapons of Israel's enemies become firewood.

"And they shall despoil those who despoiled them, and plunder those who plundered them." Gog came to take plunder (38:12). Instead, Israel takes his.

Ezekiel describes weapons of wood and leather that could be burned. Modern weapons are made of other things. Some teachers think the weapons will be ones that can be burned, or that Ezekiel is speaking of any kind of war material in the terms of his own day, as he did with horses and

shields. The point is clear either way: the defeat will be so complete that its remains will last for years.

The seven years also bear on the question of timing from chapter 38. If Gog comes before the Tribulation or early in it, the burning fills those years. If he comes near the middle, it carries over into the kingdom. Scripture does not settle it, and we should hold our views with humility.

39:11-16 *And it shall come about on that day **that** I will give to Gog a place there, a grave in Israel, the valley of those who pass through, east of the sea; and it shall block those who pass through; and they shall bury Gog and all his multitude there, and they shall call **it** the valley of Hamon-gog. And the house of Israel shall bury them, in order to cleanse the land, seven months. And all the people of the land shall bury **them**, and it shall become a name for them, the day I am glorified, declares the Lord GOD. And they shall set apart men of continual **duty**, passing through the land, burying those who pass through, those who remain on the surface of the land, to cleanse it; at the end of seven months they shall search. And those who pass through shall pass through the land, and one shall see a bone of man, and he shall build a marker beside it, until the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamon-gog. And also the name of **the** city **is** Hamonah. And they shall cleanse the land.'*

"I will give to Gog a place there, a grave in Israel, the valley of those who pass through, east of the sea." The sea is likely the Dead Sea, and the valley may be one of the valleys that run down to it from the east. It "shall block those who pass through," because the graves will fill it. "And they shall call it the valley of Hamon-gog." Hamon means multitude. It is the valley of the multitude of Gog.

"And the house of Israel shall bury them, in order to cleanse the land, seven months." Under the law, dead bodies made the land and the people unclean (Numbers 19:11-16; Deuteronomy 21:22-23). God's land must be clean. All the people will help, and "it shall become a name for them, the day I am glorified."

Even after seven months, the work is not finished. Men will be set apart for "continual duty, passing through the land" to find any bones that remain. When a traveler sees "a bone of man, and he shall build a marker beside it," the buriers will come and take it to the valley. Nothing unclean is left in the land.

"And also the name of the city is Hamonah," which also means multitude. There will be a town near the valley whose very name remembers what God did. "And they shall cleanse the land."

The care in these verses is striking. God's people are to be holy, and His land is to be clean. The God who defeats His enemies also cares about the purity of the place where He will dwell. The next chapters, about the new temple, will show that same concern for holiness.

39:17-20 *And you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD: Say to the birds of every wing and to every animal of the field, 'Assemble and come; gather yourselves from all around to My sacrifice which I am sacrificing for you, a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel; and you shall eat flesh and drink blood. The flesh of mighty men you shall eat, and the blood of the princes of the earth you shall drink, of rams, lambs, and male goats, bulls, fatlings of Bashan, all of them. And you shall eat fat to satiety and drink blood to drunkenness from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. And you shall be satisfied at My table* ***with*** *horse and charioteer, mighty man and every man of war, declares the Lord GOD.'*

God tells Ezekiel to call "the birds of every wing" and "every animal of the field": "Assemble and come; gather yourselves from all around to My sacrifice which I am sacrificing for you."

This is a hard picture, and I will be brief. God speaks of the slain army as a "great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel," and He invites the birds and animals to eat. The mighty men, the princes of the earth, are described as if they were the animals offered at a feast: "rams, lambs, and male goats, bulls, fatlings of Bashan." Bashan was famous for its fat cattle (Amos 4:1). The proud warriors who came to devour Israel become food themselves.

It is the language of judgment, and it is meant to shock. It shows how complete God's victory is and how serious it is to fight against Him. Revelation 19:17-18 uses the same picture at Christ's return, when an angel calls the birds "to the supper of the great God." Whether these are the same event or two events described with the same picture, the lesson is the same. Those who set themselves against God and His people will fall.

39:21-24 *And I will set My glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see My judgment which I have executed and My hand which I have laid on them. And the house of Israel shall know that I* ***am*** *the LORD their God from that day and onward. And the nations shall know that for their iniquity the house of Israel went into exile, because they acted unfaithfully against Me, and I hid My face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they fell by the sword, all of them. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I have dealt with them, and I hid My face from them.*

Now the chapter turns from the battle to its meaning. "And I will set My glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see My judgment which I have executed and My hand which I have laid on them."

"And the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and onward." From that day on, Israel will never again doubt who their God is.

Then God explains the whole history of the exile so that the nations understand it: "the nations shall know that for their iniquity the house of Israel went into exile, because they acted unfaithfully against Me, and I hid My face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries." The nations had thought Israel's God was weak. Now they will understand that He sent Israel away Himself, because of their sin. "According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I have dealt with them."

To hide the face means to turn away in displeasure, to withdraw favor and help. God warned Israel through Moses that He would hide His face if they turned to other gods (Deuteronomy 31:17-18). He did. But that was not the end of the story.

39:25-29 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will turn back the captivity of Jacob, and I will have compassion on all the house of Israel, and I will be jealous for My holy name. And they shall bear their disgrace and all their unfaithfulness with which they acted unfaithfully against Me, when they dwell on their own ground in security, and no one makes* ***them*** *afraid, when I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, and I am sanctified through them in the eyes of the many nations. And they shall know that I* ***am*** *the LORD their God, in that I sent them into exile to the nations, and I will gather them to their own ground, and I will not leave any of them there anymore. And I will not hide My face from them anymore, for I have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD."*

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will turn back the captivity of Jacob, and I will have compassion on all the house of Israel, and I will be jealous for My holy name."

These last verses look beyond Gog to the whole restoration. "Now" is the turning point. God will "turn back the captivity," bringing His people home and restoring their fortunes. He will have compassion "on all the house of Israel," not just a remnant from Judah.

Verse 26 says that "they shall bear their disgrace and all their unfaithfulness" when they live securely in their land. That means they will remember their sin and be humbled by it, as in 36:31, even while they enjoy God's blessing. Grace does not erase the memory of what we were saved from. It makes us thankful.

"When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, and I am sanctified through them in the eyes of the many nations." Then comes a promise that goes beyond any return in history: "I will gather them to their own ground, and I will not leave any of them there anymore." Not one Israelite will be left behind among the nations. The return from Babylon in 538 B.C. brought back only part of the people. This verse speaks of every one.

And the last verse: "And I will not hide My face from them anymore, for I have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD."

God hid His face because of sin. He will never hide it again, because He will have poured out His Spirit on His people. This is the promise of 36:27 and 37:14. Joel gives the same promise: "I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh" (Joel 2:28). Peter said that what happened at Pentecost was what Joel spoke of (Acts 2:16-17), a first fulfillment, when the Spirit was poured out on the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. The full outpouring on the whole house of Israel is still to come, when they look on Him whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10) and the Deliverer comes from Zion (Romans 11:26).

For every believer now, this is a sweet truth. Those who belong to Christ have the Spirit of God living in them, and God does not hide His face from His own. Nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39).

Chapter 39 Summary

God repeated His word against Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: He would lead him to the mountains of Israel, strike the bow and arrows from his hands, and make him and his armies fall there, and He would send fire on Magog and the distant coastlands. In this way God would make His holy name known in Israel and among the nations. Israel would burn the enemy's weapons as fuel for seven years and take plunder from those who came to plunder them. They would spend seven months burying Gog's multitude in the valley of Hamon-gog to cleanse the land, with men searching the land for any bones that remained. God called the birds and animals to a great sacrifice of the fallen army, a picture of complete judgment like Revelation 19:17-18. Then the nations would understand that Israel went into exile for its sin, and God promised to restore the captivity of Jacob, have compassion on all Israel, gather every one of them to their land, and never hide His face from them again, because He would pour out His Spirit on the house of Israel.

The thing meant to harm me most was my own sin. God has turned even that into something He uses for good. Ezekiel 39 shows weapons of war turned into firewood. My worst failures now help me understand others who are struggling.

Chapter 39 Study Questions

1. What does God do to Gog's bow and arrows, and what does that show? (39:1-3)

2. Why does God say He will defeat Gog? (39:6-7)

3. How long will Israel burn the weapons, and what will they not need to do because of it? (39:9-10)

4. What is the valley of Hamon-gog, and why do the people bury the dead for seven months? (39:11-14)

5. How does the care for cleansing the land in 39:14-16 show God's holiness?

6. What will the nations finally understand about why Israel went into exile? (39:23-24)

7. What does it mean for God to hide His face, and why will He never hide it from Israel again? (39:23, 29; Deuteronomy 31:17-18)

8. How do Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:16-17 relate to the promise of 39:29?

9. Israel would remember its unfaithfulness even while living in blessing (39:26). Why is it good for us to remember what God has saved us from?

10. God turned the weapons of war into firewood for His people. Is there something meant to harm you that God has turned into good? (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28)

Chapter 40: The Vision of the New Temple

Scripture

40:1-16 In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at ***the*** beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was struck down, on this very day the hand of the LORD was on me, and He brought me there. In visions of God He brought me to the land of Israel, and He set me down on a very high mountain, and on it ***was something*** like the structure of a city on the south. And He brought me there, and look, a man, his appearance ***was*** like the appearance of bronze, and a cord of linen ***was*** in his hand, and the reed of measurement; and he ***was*** standing in the gate. And the man spoke to me, "Son of man, see with your eyes, and with your ears hear, and set your heart on all that I am showing you, for in order to show you, you have been brought here. Tell all that you are seeing to the house of Israel." And look, a wall ***was*** on the outside of the house, all around, all around; and in the hand of the man ***was*** the reed of measurement, approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits) by the cubit and a handbreadth. And he measured the breadth of the structure, approximately 10.5 feet (one reed), and the height, approximately 10.5 feet (one reed). And he went to the gate whose face ***was in*** the direction toward the east, and he went up on its steps, and he measured the threshold of the gate, approximately 10.5 feet (one reed) ***in*** breadth, and the one threshold, approximately 10.5 feet (one reed) ***in*** breadth. And the chamber ***was*** approximately 10.5 feet (one reed) ***in*** length and approximately 10.5 feet (one reed) ***in*** breadth; and between the chambers ***were*** approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits); and the threshold of the gate beside the porch of the gate from the inside ***was*** approximately 10.5 feet (one reed). And he measured the porch of the gate from the inside, approximately 10.5 feet (one reed). And he measured the porch of the gate, approximately 14 feet (eight cubits), and its pillars, approximately 3.5 feet (two cubits); and the porch of the gate ***was*** from the inside. And the chambers of the gate ***in*** the direction of the east ***were*** three on this side and three on this side; one measurement ***belonged*** to the three of them, and one measurement ***belonged*** to the pillars on this side and on this side. And he measured the breadth of the entrance of the gate, approximately 17.5 feet (ten cubits), ***and*** the length of the gate, approximately 23 feet (thirteen cubits). And a barrier before the chambers ***was*** approximately 1.75 feet (one cubit), and approximately 1.75 feet (one cubit) ***was*** the barrier on this side; and the chamber ***was*** approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits) on this side and approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits) on this side. And he measured the gate from the roof of the chamber to its roof, a breadth of approximately 44 feet (twenty-five cubits), entrance opposite entrance. And he made pillars, approximately 105 feet (sixty cubits), and to the pillar of the courtyard ***was*** the gate, all around, all around. And at the face of the gate of the entrance, to the front of the porch of the inner gate, ***was*** approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits). And closed windows ***were*** toward the chambers and toward their pillars within the gate all around, all around, and so for the vestibules; and windows ***were*** all around, all around within; and on the pillar ***were*** palm trees.

40:17-37 And he brought me into the outer courtyard, and look, rooms and a pavement made for the courtyard all around, all around; thirty rooms ***were*** on the pavement. And the pavement ***was*** by the side of the gates, corresponding to the length of the gates, the lower pavement. And he measured the breadth from before the lower gate to the front of the inner courtyard on the

outside, approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits), ***on*** the east and ***on*** the north. And the gate whose face ***was in*** the direction of the north, belonging to the outer courtyard, he measured its length and its breadth. And its chambers, three on this side and three on this side, and its pillars and its vestibules were according to the measurement of the first gate: its length approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits), and the breadth approximately 44 feet (twenty-five ***cubits***) by the cubit. And its windows and its vestibules and its palm trees ***were*** according to the measurement of the gate whose face ***was in*** the direction of the east; and by seven steps they go up into it, and its vestibules ***were*** before them. And a gate to the inner courtyard ***was*** opposite the gate to the north and to the east; and he measured from gate to gate, approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits). And he led me ***in*** the direction of the south, and look, a gate ***in*** the direction of the south; and he measured its pillars and its vestibules according to these measurements. And windows ***belonged*** to it and to its vestibules all around, all around, like these windows; the length ***was*** approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits), and the breadth approximately 44 feet (twenty-five cubits). And seven steps ***were*** its stairways, and its vestibules ***were*** before them; and palm trees ***belonged*** to it, one on this side and one on this side, on its pillars. And a gate ***belonged*** to the inner courtyard ***in*** the direction of the south; and he measured from gate to the gate ***in*** the direction of the south, approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits). And he brought me into the inner courtyard by the gate of the south, and he measured the gate of the south according to these measurements. And its chambers and its pillars and its vestibules ***were*** according to these measurements; and windows ***belonged*** to it and to its vestibules all around, all around; the length ***was*** approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits), and the breadth approximately 44 feet (twenty-five cubits). And vestibules ***were*** all around, all around; the length ***was*** approximately 44 feet (twenty-five cubits), and the breadth approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits). And its vestibules ***were*** toward the outer courtyard, and palm trees ***were*** on its pillars, and eight steps ***were*** its ascents. And he brought me into the inner courtyard ***in*** the direction of the east, and he measured the gate according to these measurements. And its chambers and its pillars and its vestibules ***were*** according to these measurements; and windows ***belonged*** to it and to its vestibules all around, all around; the length ***was*** approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits), and the breadth approximately 44 feet (twenty-five cubits). And its vestibules ***were*** toward the outer courtyard, and palm trees ***were*** on its pillars on this side and on this side, and eight steps ***were*** its ascents. And he brought me to the gate of the north, and he measured ***it*** according to these measurements: its chambers, its pillars and its vestibules; and windows ***belonged*** to it all around, all around; the length ***was*** approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits), and the breadth approximately 44 feet (twenty-five cubits). And its pillars ***were*** toward the outer courtyard, and palm trees ***were*** on its pillars on this side and on this side, and eight steps ***were*** its ascents.

40:38-49 And a room and its entrance ***were*** by the pillars of the gates; there they rinse the burnt offering. And in the porch of the gate ***were*** two tables on this side and two tables on this side, to slaughter on them the burnt offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering. And at the side outside, for the one going up to the entrance of the gate toward the north, ***were*** two tables; and at the other side, which ***belonged*** to the porch of the gate, ***were*** two tables. Four tables ***were*** on this side and four tables on this side, at the side of the gate: eight tables on which they slaughter. And four tables for the burnt offering ***were*** hewn stones: the length approximately 2.6 feet (one cubit and a half), and the breadth approximately 2.6 feet (one cubit and a half), and the height

approximately 1.75 feet (one cubit). On them they set down the instruments with which they slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice. And the hooks, approximately 3 inches (one handbreadth), ***were*** fixed on the inside all around, all around; and on the tables ***was*** the flesh of the offering. And outside the inner gate ***were*** rooms of singers in the inner courtyard, which ***was*** at the side of the gate of the north, and their faces ***were in*** the direction of the south; one ***was*** at the side of the gate of the east, ***its*** face ***in*** the direction of the north. And he spoke to me, "This room whose face ***is in*** the direction of the south ***is*** for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the house. And the room whose face ***is in*** the direction of the north ***is*** for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the altar. They ***are*** the sons of Zadok, the ones drawing near from the sons of Levi to the LORD to minister to Him." And he measured the courtyard, the length approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits) and the breadth approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits), squared; and the altar ***was*** before the house. And he brought me to the porch of the house, and he measured the pillar of the porch, approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits) on this side and approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits) on this side; and the breadth of the gate ***was*** approximately 5.25 feet (three cubits) on this side and approximately 5.25 feet (three cubits) on this side. The length of the porch ***was*** approximately 35 feet (twenty cubits), and the breadth approximately 19 feet (eleven cubits), and ***it was*** by the steps by which they go up to it; and columns ***were*** by the pillars, one on this side and one on this side.

Chapter 40 Preview

Fourteen years after Jerusalem fell, God gave Ezekiel his last great vision. It fills the final nine chapters of the book. The prophet is carried to the land of Israel and set on a very high mountain. A man who looks like bronze meets him with a measuring line and a measuring reed, and leads him through a temple, measuring as he goes. Chapter 40 covers the outer wall, the gates and courts, the tables for the sacrifices, the rooms for the priests, and the porch of the temple building.

These chapters are among the hardest in the Bible to read, and Bible teachers read them in different ways. I will explain at the start how I read them and name the other main views. Then we will walk through the measurements in groups. You do not need to picture every wall to understand the point. God was showing Ezekiel a holy house, ordered and complete, where He would live among His people forever.

Chapter 40 Study

40:1-2 *In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at **the** beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was struck down, on this very day the hand of the LORD was on me, and He brought me there. In visions of God He brought me to the land of Israel, and He set me down on a very high mountain, and on it **was something** like the structure of a city on the south.*

"In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was struck down." This is about 573 B.C. Ezekiel had been in Babylon for twenty-five years, half of a jubilee cycle of fifty years (Leviticus 25:10). Some teachers think the tenth day of the first month is meant, the day each family chose its Passover lamb

(Exodus 12:3). Others think it means the tenth day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement, when a year of jubilee was announced (Leviticus 25:9). Either way, the date points to redemption.

"In visions of God He brought me to the land of Israel, and He set me down on a very high mountain, and on it was something like the structure of a city on the south." Ezekiel calls this "visions of God," as he did in 1:1 and 8:3. In chapters 8 to 11 the Spirit took him to Jerusalem to see the temple full of idols and the glory leaving. Now he is taken to see a new temple where the glory will return.

The very high mountain fits other prophecies of the last days. Isaiah and Micah say that "the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established at the head of the mountains" (Micah 4:1; Isaiah 2:2), and Zechariah says the land around Jerusalem will be changed when the Lord returns (Zechariah 14:4, 10).

How should we read these chapters? There are four main views:

- A plan for the temple of the returning exiles. Some believe God gave Ezekiel a pattern for the temple Zerubbabel built after 538 B.C. But that temple was much smaller and never followed these measurements, the glory never filled it, and no river ever flowed from it.
- A symbol of the church. Many amillennial and covenant teachers believe the temple is a picture of the church, or of God's presence with His people in Christ, described in Old Testament terms. Some see its fulfillment in the new heavens and new earth of Revelation 21-22.
- A picture of heaven or of the ideal of worship, never meant to be built.
- A real temple in the coming kingdom. Many premillennial teachers, and I am one of them, believe Ezekiel saw a real temple that will stand in Israel during Christ's thousand-year reign on earth.

Why do I take the last view? First, the detail. God gives exact measurements, gates, rooms, tables and laws, and He tells Ezekiel to describe it to Israel so they can "measure the pattern" and do what is written (43:10-11). That reads like a plan, not a poem. Second, it follows the promise of 37:26-28 that God will put His sanctuary in Israel's midst forever. Third, the land is divided among the twelve tribes in real places with real borders (47:13-48:29). And fourth, other prophets also speak of a house of the LORD in Jerusalem in the kingdom, with worship there by Israel and the nations (Isaiah 56:6-7; 60:7, 13; Zechariah 14:16-21).

This view raises an honest question: why would there be sacrifices after Christ's one sacrifice for sin? I will deal with that carefully when we reach 43:18-27, where the sacrifices are described.

40:3-4 *And He brought me there, and look, a man, his appearance **was** like the appearance of bronze, and a cord of linen **was** in his hand, and the reed of measurement; and he **was** standing in the gate. And the man spoke to me, "Son of man, see with your eyes, and with your ears hear, and set your heart on all that I am showing you, for in order to show you, you have been brought here. Tell all that you are seeing to the house of Israel."*

"And look, a man, his appearance was like the appearance of bronze, and a cord of linen was in his hand, and the reed of measurement." This man is a heavenly guide, perhaps an angel. His bright bronze appearance is like the living creatures of 1:7. The linen cord was for long measurements, and the reed for shorter ones.

He tells Ezekiel what to do: "see with your eyes, and with your ears hear, and set your heart on all that I am showing you." Then: "Tell all that you are seeing to the house of Israel." Ezekiel was to look closely and report everything.

Measuring in the Bible is a sign of ownership and protection. What God measures, He claims as His own (Zechariah 2:1-5; Revelation 11:1; 21:15).

40:5 *And look, a wall **was** on the outside of the house, all around, all around; and in the hand of the man **was** the reed of measurement, approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits) by the cubit and a handbreadth. And he measured the breadth of the structure, approximately 10.5 feet (one reed), and the height, approximately 10.5 feet (one reed).*

"And look, a wall was on the outside of the house, all around." The first thing Ezekiel sees is a wall around the whole temple area. Its purpose is given in 42:20: "to separate between the holy and the common."

The measuring reed was six cubits long, using a long cubit, "the cubit and a handbreadth." A regular cubit was the length from the elbow to the fingertip, about eighteen inches. The long cubit added a handbreadth, about three inches, for about twenty-one inches. The SLB gives the reed as about ten and a half feet. The wall was one reed thick and one reed high.

40:6-16 *And he went to the gate whose face **was in** the direction toward the east, and he went up on its steps, and he measured the threshold of the gate, approximately 10.5 feet (one reed) **in** breadth, and the one threshold, approximately 10.5 feet (one reed) **in** breadth. And the chamber **was** approximately 10.5 feet (one reed) **in** length and approximately 10.5 feet (one reed) **in** breadth; and between the chambers **were** approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits); and the threshold of the gate beside the porch of the gate from the inside **was** approximately 10.5 feet (one reed). And he measured the porch of the gate from the inside, approximately 10.5 feet (one reed). And he measured the porch of the gate, approximately 14 feet (eight cubits), and its pillars, approximately 3.5 feet (two cubits); and the porch of the gate **was** from the inside. And the chambers of the gate **in** the direction of the east **were** three on this side and three on this side; one measurement **belonged** to the three of them, and one measurement **belonged** to the pillars on this side and on this side. And he measured the breadth of the entrance of the gate, approximately 17.5 feet (ten cubits), **and** the length of the gate, approximately 23 feet (thirteen cubits). And a barrier before the chambers **was** approximately 1.75 feet (one cubit), and approximately 1.75 feet (one cubit) **was** the barrier on this side; and the chamber **was** approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits) on this side and approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits) on this side. And he measured the gate from the roof of the chamber to its roof, a breadth of approximately 44 feet (twenty-five cubits), entrance opposite entrance. And he made pillars, approximately 105 feet (sixty cubits), and to the pillar of the courtyard **was** the gate, all around, all around. And at the face of the gate of the entrance, to the front of the porch of the inner gate, **was** approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits). And closed windows **were** toward the chambers and toward their pillars within the gate all around, all around, and so for the vestibules; and windows **were** all around, all around within; and on the pillar **were** palm trees.*

The guide begins at the east gate, the gate that faces the direction the glory left in 10:19 and 11:23, and the direction from which it will return (43:1-2). Ezekiel goes up its steps and watches him measure: the thresholds, the guardrooms, the porch and its pillars.

The gate is a large building, not just a doorway. On each side of its passage are three guardrooms, "three on this side and three on this side," each about ten and a half feet square, where guards could stand watch. The whole gateway is about eighty-seven feet long (fifty cubits, 40:15) and about forty-four feet wide (twenty-five cubits, 40:13). It has windows, and its pillars are carved with palm trees.

Gates like this, with three chambers on each side, have been found by archaeologists at cities from the time of Solomon, such as Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer. They were built for defense. In this temple, the gates guard holiness. Not everyone may walk in. The holy things of God are protected.

The palm trees on the pillars recall the carvings in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:29). Palms stood for life, fruitfulness and victory (Psalm 92:12; John 12:13).

40:17-19 *And he brought me into the outer courtyard, and look, rooms and a pavement made for the courtyard all around, all around; thirty rooms **were** on the pavement. And the pavement **was** by the side of the gates, corresponding to the length of the gates, the lower pavement. And he measured the breadth from before the lower gate to the front of the inner courtyard on the outside, approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits), **on** the east and **on** the north.*

The guide brings Ezekiel "into the outer courtyard," where there were "rooms and a pavement" all around, with "thirty rooms" on the pavement. These rooms were likely for the people to use when they came to worship, perhaps for eating their share of the peace offerings, as people did at the old temple (Jeremiah 35:2-4). The distance from the outer gate to the inner gate was "a hundred cubits," about one hundred seventy-five feet.

40:20-27 *And the gate whose face **was in** the direction of the north, belonging to the outer courtyard, he measured its length and its breadth. And its chambers, three on this side and three on this side, and its pillars and its vestibules were according to the measurement of the first gate: its length approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits), and the breadth approximately 44 feet (twenty-five **cubits**) by the cubit. And its windows and its vestibules and its palm trees **were** according to the measurement of the gate whose face **was in** the direction of the east; and by seven steps they go up into it, and its vestibules **were** before them. And a gate to the inner courtyard **was** opposite the gate to the north and to the east; and he measured from gate to gate, approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits). And he led me **in** the direction of the south, and look, a gate **in** the direction of the south; and he measured its pillars and its vestibules according to these measurements. And windows **belonged** to it and to its vestibules all around, all around, like these windows; the length **was** approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits), and the breadth approximately 44 feet (twenty-five cubits). And seven steps **were** its stairways, and its vestibules **were** before them; and palm trees **belonged** to it, one on this side and one on this side, on its pillars. And a gate **belonged** to the inner courtyard **in** the direction of the south; and he measured from gate to the gate **in** the direction of the south, approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits).*

The north gate and the south gate of the outer court are measured next. Each one matches the east gate exactly: the same guardrooms, pillars, windows and palm trees, the same length and breadth, and "seven steps" going up into it. Opposite each outer gate was a gate into the inner court, again a hundred cubits away.

Why so much repetition? Because each gate is the same. There is no better or worse way into God's house. Whether people came from the north, the south or the east, they came by the same measure. And there is no west gate, because the temple building itself stands on the west side, facing east.

40:28-37 *And he brought me into the inner courtyard by the gate of the south, and he measured the gate of the south according to these measurements. And its chambers and its pillars and its vestibules* ***were*** *according to these measurements; and windows* ***belonged*** *to it and to its vestibules all around, all around; the length* ***was*** *approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits), and the breadth approximately 44 feet (twenty-five cubits). And vestibules* ***were*** *all around, all around; the length* ***was*** *approximately 44 feet (twenty-five cubits), and the breadth approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits). And its vestibules* ***were*** *toward the outer courtyard, and palm trees* ***were*** *on its pillars, and eight steps* ***were*** *its ascents. And he brought me into the inner courtyard* ***in*** *the direction of the east, and he measured the gate according to these measurements. And its chambers and its pillars and its vestibules* ***were*** *according to these measurements; and windows* ***belonged*** *to it and to its vestibules all around, all around; the length* ***was*** *approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits), and the breadth approximately 44 feet (twenty-five cubits). And its vestibules* ***were*** *toward the outer courtyard, and palm trees* ***were*** *on its pillars on this side and on this side, and eight steps* ***were*** *its ascents. And he brought me to the gate of the north, and he measured* ***it*** *according to these measurements: its chambers, its pillars and its vestibules; and windows* ***belonged*** *to it all around, all around; the length* ***was*** *approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits), and the breadth approximately 44 feet (twenty-five cubits). And its pillars* ***were*** *toward the outer courtyard, and palm trees* ***were*** *on its pillars on this side and on this side, and eight steps* ***were*** *its ascents.*

Now Ezekiel goes into the inner court and sees its three gates, south, east and north. Each is built like the outer gates, but with a difference: these have "eight steps" instead of seven. The inner court is higher than the outer court, and the temple building higher still. The closer one comes to God's presence, the higher one climbs.

The inner gates also face outward, "toward the outer courtyard." Every part of the plan draws the worshiper inward and upward, toward the house of God.

Some teachers see meaning in the numbers, seven steps for the outer gates and eight for the inner, with eight as the number of a new beginning. Scripture does not explain them, and I mention it only as a thought.

40:38-43 *And a room and its entrance **were** by the pillars of the gates; there they rinse the burnt offering. And in the porch of the gate **were** two tables on this side and two tables on this side, to slaughter on them the burnt offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering. And at the side outside, for the one going up to the entrance of the gate toward the north, **were** two tables; and at the other side, which **belonged** to the porch of the gate, **were** two tables. Four tables **were** on this side and four tables on this side, at the side of the gate: eight tables on which they slaughter. And four tables for the burnt offering **were** hewn stones: the length approximately 2.6 feet (one cubit and a half), and the breadth approximately 2.6 feet (one cubit and a half), and the height approximately 1.75 feet (one cubit). On them they set down the instruments with which they slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice. And the hooks, approximately 3 inches (one handbreadth), **were** fixed on the inside all around, all around; and on the tables **was** the flesh of the offering.*

At the inner gates are rooms and tables for the sacrifices. "There they rinse the burnt offering." In the porch of the gate "were two tables on this side and two tables on this side, to slaughter on them the burnt offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering."

A burnt offering was an animal wholly burned on the altar, an offering of complete dedication to God (Leviticus 1). A sin offering was brought for sins, especially those done without intent, and its blood cleansed the holy things (Leviticus 4). A guilt offering was brought when a person wronged God or a neighbor, and it included paying back the loss (Leviticus 5:14-6:7). All three will be offered here.

There are eight tables in all for slaughtering, and four tables of cut stone for the burnt offering, with the tools set on them and hooks fixed around them. "And on the tables was the flesh of the offering."

We will come back to the meaning of these offerings in chapter 43. For now, notice that the temple Ezekiel sees is a place of real worship, with the same kinds of offerings Israel knew.

40:44-46 *And outside the inner gate **were** rooms of singers in the inner courtyard, which **was** at the side of the gate of the north, and their faces **were in** the direction of the south; one **was** at the side of the gate of the east, **its** face **in** the direction of the north. And he spoke to me, "This room whose face **is in** the direction of the south **is** for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the house. And the room whose face **is in** the direction of the north **is** for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the altar. They **are** the sons of Zadok, the ones drawing near from the sons of Levi to the LORD to minister to Him."*

Inside the inner court were rooms "of singers," and the guide explains that one room facing south is "for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the house," and the room facing north is "for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the altar."

"They are the sons of Zadok, the ones drawing near from the sons of Levi to the LORD to minister to Him." Zadok was the faithful priest who stood with King David when others rebelled and who anointed Solomon king (1 Kings 1:32-39). God had promised Eli long before that He would raise up

a faithful priest (1 Samuel 2:35). The sons of Zadok will be the priests who come near to God's altar. Chapter 44 will explain why.

40:47-49 *And he measured the courtyard, the length approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits) and the breadth approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits), squared; and the altar **was** before the house. And he brought me to the porch of the house, and he measured the pillar of the porch, approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits) on this side and approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits) on this side; and the breadth of the gate **was** approximately 5.25 feet (three cubits) on this side and approximately 5.25 feet (three cubits) on this side. The length of the porch **was** approximately 35 feet (twenty cubits), and the breadth approximately 19 feet (eleven cubits), and **it was** by the steps by which they go up to it; and columns **were** by the pillars, one on this side and one on this side.*

The inner court is measured: "a hundred cubits" long and "a hundred cubits" wide, "squared; and the altar was before the house." The altar stands at the very center of the whole temple plan. Everything is arranged around it. The way to God's presence goes past the altar.

Then the guide brings Ezekiel "to the porch of the house," the entrance of the temple building itself. It is about thirty-five feet wide and about nineteen feet deep, reached by steps, with "columns were by the pillars, one on this side and one on this side." These columns recall the two bronze pillars, Jachin and Boaz, that stood at the porch of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:21).

From the outer wall to the porch, everything says the same thing. God is holy, and He has made a way for His people to come near. For us, that way is Jesus Christ. Hebrews says we have confidence to enter the holy places "by the blood of Jesus," by a new and living way He opened for us (Hebrews 10:19-20).

Chapter 40 Summary

In about 573 B.C., the twenty-fifth year of the exile, God brought Ezekiel in visions to a very high mountain in the land of Israel, where a man like bronze with a linen cord and a measuring reed showed him a temple and told him to declare it all to Israel. I read this as a real temple in Christ's coming kingdom, while other teachers see Zerubbabel's plan, a symbol of the church, or a picture of heaven or the new creation. The guide measured the outer wall, which separated the holy from the common, and the three great gates of the outer court, each the same, with guardrooms, palm trees and seven steps. He measured the outer court with its thirty rooms, and the three gates of the inner court, each with eight steps. At the inner gates were tables for slaughtering the burnt offerings, sin offerings and guilt offerings, and in the inner court were rooms for the priests, the sons of Zadok. The square inner court had the altar at its center, before the porch of the temple.

Chapter 40 Study Questions

1. When did Ezekiel see this vision, and how long after Jerusalem fell? (40:1)

2. Where did God take Ezekiel, and what did he see there? (40:2)

3. What did the man with the measuring reed tell Ezekiel to do? (40:4)

4. What are the main views of what this temple is? Which reasons are given for reading it as a real future temple? (40:2; 37:26-28; 43:10-11)

5. What was the purpose of the wall around the temple? (40:5; 42:20)

6. How were the outer gates and inner gates alike, and how were they different? (40:22, 31)

7. What were the burnt offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering? (40:39)

8. Who were the sons of Zadok, and why were they chosen? (40:46; 1 Kings 1:32-39)

9. The altar stood at the center of the temple. What does it mean to you that the way to God goes through the cross? (Hebrews 10:19-20)

10. Ezekiel was told to see, hear and set his heart on all he was shown (40:4). How can you give that kind of attention to God's Word this week?

Chapter 41: The Temple Building

Scripture

41:1-12 And he brought me to the temple, and he measured the pillars, approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits) ***in*** breadth on this side and approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits) ***in*** breadth on this side, the breadth of the tent. And the breadth of the entrance ***was*** approximately 17.5 feet (ten cubits), and the sides of the entrance ***were*** approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits) on this side and approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits) on this side; and he measured its length, approximately 70 feet (forty cubits), and the breadth, approximately 35 feet (twenty cubits). And he went inward, and he measured the pillar of the entrance, approximately 3.5 feet (two cubits), and the entrance, approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits), and the breadth of the entrance, approximately 12 feet (seven cubits). And he measured its length, approximately 35 feet (twenty cubits), and the breadth, approximately 35 feet (twenty cubits), before the face of the temple; and he said to me, "This ***is*** the holy of holies." And he measured the wall of the house, approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits), and the breadth of the side chamber, approximately 7 feet (four cubits), all around, all around the house, all around. And the side chambers ***were*** side chamber upon side chamber, thirty-three times; and ***they were*** entering into the wall which ***belonged*** to the house for the side chambers all around, all around, to be held, but they would not be held in the wall of the house. And it became broad and it wound around higher and higher for the side chambers, for the winding around of the house ***went*** higher and higher all around, all around the house; therefore the breadth of the house ***increased*** upward, and so ***from*** the lowest ***story one*** goes up to the highest by the middle ***story***. And I saw a height ***belonging*** to the house all around, all around: the foundations of the side chambers ***were*** the fullness of the reed, approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits), ***to*** the joint. The breadth of the wall which ***belonged*** to the side chamber toward the outside ***was*** approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits); and that which ***was*** left free ***was*** between the side chambers which ***belonged*** to the house. And between the rooms ***was*** a breadth of approximately 35 feet (twenty cubits) around the house, all around, all around. And the entrance of the side chamber ***was*** toward the free space, one entrance ***in*** the direction of the north and one entrance toward the south; and the breadth of the place of the free space ***was*** approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits) all around, all around. And the structure which ***was*** before the face of the separate area, ***at*** the side ***in*** the direction of the west, ***was*** approximately 122.5 feet (seventy cubits) ***in*** breadth, and the wall of the structure ***was*** approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits) ***in*** breadth all around, all around, and its length approximately 157.5 feet (ninety cubits).

41:13-26 And he measured the house, the length approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits); and the separate area and the structure and its walls, the length approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits); and the breadth of the face of the house and the separate area toward the east, approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits). And he measured the length of the structure before the face of the separate area which ***was*** behind it, and its galleries on this side and on this side, approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits); and the inner temple and the porches of the courtyard, the thresholds and the closed windows and the galleries all around the three of them opposite the threshold ***were*** paneling of wood all around, all around, and ***from*** the ground to the windows, and the windows ***were*** covered, to ***the space*** above the entrance, and to the inner

house, and to the outside, and on all the wall all around, all around, in the inner ***part*** and in the outer ***part***, ***by*** measurements. And ***it was*** made ***with*** cherubim and palm trees, and a palm tree ***was*** between cherub and cherub; and two faces ***belonged*** to the cherub: and the face of a man ***was*** toward the palm tree on this side, and the face of a young lion ***was*** toward the palm tree on this side; ***it was*** made on all the house all around, all around. From the ground to above the entrance the cherubim and the palm trees ***were*** made, and ***on*** the wall of the temple. The temple: a squared doorpost; and the face of the holy place: the appearance ***was*** like the appearance. The altar ***was*** wood, approximately 5.25 feet (three cubits) high, and its length approximately 3.5 feet (two cubits); and its corners ***belonged*** to it, and its length and its sides ***were*** wood. And he spoke to me, "This ***is*** the table which ***is*** before the LORD." And two doors ***belonged*** to the temple and to the holy place. And two leaves ***belonged*** to the doors, two turning leaves: two ***leaves belonged*** to one door, and two leaves to the other. And ***there were*** made on them, on the doors of the temple, cherubim and palm trees, just as ***they were*** made on the walls; and a threshold of wood ***was*** on the face of the porch from the outside. And closed windows and palm trees ***were*** on this side and on this side, on the sides of the porch, and the side chambers of the house, and the thresholds.

Chapter 41 Preview

In chapter 40 the guide measured the walls, gates and courts. Now he brings Ezekiel into the temple building itself. He measures the holy place and then goes alone into the innermost room, which he names "the holy of holies" (41:4). Around the building are three stories of side rooms, and behind it, to the west, stands a large separate building. Inside, the walls are paneled with wood and carved with cherubim and palm trees. The only piece of furniture described is a wooden altar that the guide calls "the table which is before the LORD" (41:22).

This is a measurement chapter, so we will group the verses and look for the sense. The temple building has the same plan as Solomon's temple, about the same size, with a porch, a holy place and a most holy place. What is missing is just as important as what is there.

Chapter 41 Study

41:1-4 *And he brought me to the temple, and he measured the pillars, approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits) **in** breadth on this side and approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits) **in** breadth on this side, the breadth of the tent. And the breadth of the entrance **was** approximately 17.5 feet (ten cubits), and the sides of the entrance **were** approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits) on this side and approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits) on this side; and he measured its length, approximately 70 feet (forty cubits), and the breadth, approximately 35 feet (twenty cubits). And he went inward, and he measured the pillar of the entrance, approximately 3.5 feet (two cubits), and the entrance, approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits), and the breadth of the entrance, approximately 12 feet (seven cubits). And he measured its length, approximately 35 feet (twenty cubits), and the breadth, approximately 35 feet (twenty cubits), before the face of the temple; and he said to me, "This **is** the holy of holies."*

"And he brought me to the temple." The word here means the main hall, the holy place. The guide measures its entrance and its pillars, and then the hall itself: "its length, approximately 70 feet

(forty cubits), and the breadth, approximately 35 feet (twenty cubits)." That is exactly the size of the holy place in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:2, 17).

Notice the entrances get narrower as we go in. The doorway into the holy place is ten cubits wide. The doorway into the inner room is six cubits. The way into God's presence narrows as it goes deeper.

Then: "he went inward." Ezekiel does not go with him. Ezekiel was a priest, not the high priest, and only the high priest could enter the most holy place, once a year (Leviticus 16:2, 34). The guide goes in alone and measures the room: "approximately 35 feet (twenty cubits)" by "approximately 35 feet (twenty cubits)," a perfect square, the same as in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:20). "And he said to me, This is the holy of holies."

The holy of holies was the room where God's presence dwelt above the ark of the covenant between the cherubim. The ark was the gold-covered chest that held the tablets of the law, with the mercy seat on top, where the blood was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement.

But Ezekiel does not mention an ark. Jeremiah said that in the days to come, people would no longer speak of the ark of the covenant or miss it, because Jerusalem itself would be called the throne of the LORD (Jeremiah 3:16-17). In this temple, the LORD Himself will be there. Ezekiel will hear Him call it "the place of My throne" (43:7). The box that pictured His throne is no longer needed.

41:5-11 *And he measured the wall of the house, approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits), and the breadth of the side chamber, approximately 7 feet (four cubits), all around, all around the house, all around. And the side chambers **were** side chamber upon side chamber, thirty-three times; and **they were** entering into the wall which **belonged** to the house for the side chambers all around, all around, to be held, but they would not be held in the wall of the house. And it became broad and it wound around higher and higher for the side chambers, for the winding around of the house **went** higher and higher all around, all around the house; therefore the breadth of the house **increased** upward, and so **from** the lowest **story one** goes up to the highest by the middle **story**. And I saw a height **belonging** to the house all around, all around: the foundations of the side chambers **were** the fullness of the reed, approximately 10.5 feet (six cubits), **to** the joint. The breadth of the wall which **belonged** to the side chamber toward the outside **was** approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits); and that which **was** left free **was** between the side chambers which **belonged** to the house. And between the rooms **was** a breadth of approximately 35 feet (twenty cubits) around the house, all around, all around. And the entrance of the side chamber **was** toward the free space, one entrance **in** the direction of the north and one entrance toward the south; and the breadth of the place of the free space **was** approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits) all around, all around.*

Next the guide measures the walls of the building and the side rooms around it. The wall of the house is six cubits thick, about ten and a half feet. Around three sides of the building are side chambers, about seven feet wide, built in three stories, "thirty-three times," that is, probably thirty rooms on each of three levels.

These rooms are built so that they are not fastened into the wall of the temple itself. Each story steps back a little, so the upper rooms are wider than the lower ones, resting on ledges in the wall. Solomon's temple was built the same way, with beams resting on offsets so they were not fastened into the walls of the house (1 Kings 6:5-6, 10). The holy house stands on its own.

The building sits on a raised platform, "the fullness of the reed," about ten and a half feet high. Around it is an open space, and beyond that more rooms, with entrances to the north and south. These rooms were probably for storing the temple's supplies and the tithes and offerings of the people, as at the old temple (Nehemiah 13:4-5).

Verse 7 is hard to translate, and scholars differ on some of the details of these verses. The general picture is clear: a solid, ordered building, surrounded by rooms for those who serve, all raised above the courts around it.

41:12-14 *And the structure which **was** before the face of the separate area, **at** the side **in** the direction of the west, **was** approximately 122.5 feet (seventy cubits) **in** breadth, and the wall of the structure **was** approximately 8.75 feet (five cubits) **in** breadth all around, all around, and its length approximately 157.5 feet (ninety cubits). And he measured the house, the length approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits); and the separate area and the structure and its walls, the length approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits); and the breadth of the face of the house and the separate area toward the east, approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits).*

West of the temple, behind it, stood a large building facing "the separate area." It was about seventy cubits wide and ninety cubits long, with walls five cubits thick. Ezekiel does not say what it was for. Some think it was a storehouse or a building for the temple's service. Solomon's temple had a building on its west side called the Parbar (1 Chronicles 26:18), but we do not know if this is the same kind of structure.

Then the guide measures the whole house and its surroundings: "a hundred cubits" long, and the front facing east also "a hundred cubits" wide. The temple area is a perfect square. Square shapes run through this vision. The inner court is square (40:47), the altar hearth is square (43:16), the holy of holies is square, and the whole temple area is square (42:20). In Scripture, the square speaks of perfection and completeness. The holy of holies in Solomon's temple was a cube (1 Kings 6:20), and the New Jerusalem is a cube too, its length, breadth and height equal (Revelation 21:16).

41:15-20 *And he measured the length of the structure before the face of the separate area which **was** behind it, and its galleries on this side and on this side, approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits); and the inner temple and the porches of the courtyard, the thresholds and the closed windows and the galleries all around the three of them opposite the threshold **were** paneling of wood all around, all around, and **from** the ground to the windows, and the windows **were** covered, to **the space** above the entrance, and to the inner house, and to the outside, and on all the wall all around, all around, in the inner **part** and in the outer **part**, **by** measurements. And **it was** made **with** cherubim and palm trees, and a palm tree **was** between cherub and cherub; and two faces **belonged** to the cherub: and the face of a man **was** toward the palm tree on this side, and the face of a young lion **was** toward the palm tree on this side; **it was** made on all the house all around, all around. From the ground to above the entrance the cherubim and the palm trees **were** made, and **on** the wall of the temple.*

Now Ezekiel describes the inside of the building. The walls are "paneling of wood all around," from the floor to the windows. The windows are "covered," perhaps with lattice work.

On the walls are carvings: "cherubim and palm trees, and a palm tree was between cherub and cherub." Each cherub has "two faces," "the face of a man" turned toward the palm tree on one side and "the face of a young lion" toward the palm tree on the other. These carvings cover the walls of the whole house, "from the ground to above the entrance."

In chapter 1 the cherubim had four faces. Here, carved on a flat wall, only two are shown, the man and the lion, perhaps because a carving on a wall shows the faces turned to the side.

Why cherubim and palm trees? Cherubim guarded the way to the tree of life in Eden after man sinned (Genesis 3:24). The palm trees speak of life and fruitfulness. Some teachers see in the carvings a picture of a garden restored, with the cherubim no longer barring the way. The river of chapter 47 and its trees of life will make that picture even clearer.

41:21-22 *The temple: a squared doorpost; and the face of the holy place: the appearance **was** like the appearance. The altar **was** wood, approximately 5.25 feet (three cubits) high, and its length approximately 3.5 feet (two cubits); and its corners **belonged** to it, and its length and its sides **were** wood. And he spoke to me, "This **is** the table which **is** before the LORD."*

"The temple: a squared doorpost." The doorposts were square. "And the face of the holy place: the appearance was like the appearance." The meaning is that the front of the most holy place looked like the rest. The Hebrew is very short here.

Then Ezekiel sees the one piece of furniture described in the building: "The altar was wood, approximately 5.25 feet (three cubits) high, and its length approximately 3.5 feet (two cubits)." It had corners and sides of wood. "And he spoke to me, This is the table which is before the LORD."

This seems to be the table of showbread, called an altar here, where loaves of bread were set before the LORD each Sabbath in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:23-30; Leviticus 24:5-9). The bread was called the bread of the Presence. In this temple it is the only furniture named in the holy place. There is no golden lampstand and no altar of incense mentioned.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). The bread set before God's face pictured God's people living in His presence and fed by Him. In the kingdom, that fellowship will be complete.

41:23-26 *And two doors **belonged** to the temple and to the holy place. And two leaves **belonged** to the doors, two turning leaves: two **leaves belonged** to one door, and two leaves to the other. And **there were** made on them, on the doors of the temple, cherubim and palm trees, just as **they were** made on the walls; and a threshold of wood **was** on the face of the porch from the outside. And closed windows and palm trees **were** on this side and on this side, on the sides of the porch, and the side chambers of the house, and the thresholds.*

The holy place and the most holy place each have doors, two doors with two leaves each, folding leaves that could turn. The doors are carved with "cherubim and palm trees, just as they were made on the walls." There is "a threshold of wood" at the front of the porch, and windows and palm trees on the sides.

Solomon's temple also had folding doors of cypress carved with cherubim, palm trees and open flowers (1 Kings 6:31-35). Here there is no mention of gold overlay. The beauty of this temple is not in its wealth. It is in its holiness and in the glory that will fill it.

What does the temple building teach us? It teaches that God is holy and that His house is set apart. Only one could enter the holy of holies, and even Ezekiel had to stay outside. But for believers today, something wonderful has happened. When Jesus died, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). Through Christ, the way into God's presence is open to every believer (Hebrews 10:19-22). We come not to a building but to God Himself, through His Son.

Chapter 41 Summary

The guide brought Ezekiel into the temple building and measured its entrances and the holy place, forty cubits by twenty, the same size as in Solomon's temple. He went alone into the inner room, twenty cubits square, and named it the holy of holies; no ark is mentioned, for the LORD Himself would be there. Around the building were three stories of side rooms resting on ledges, not fastened into the temple wall, set on a raised platform, and behind it to the west was a large separate building. The whole temple area measured a hundred cubits square. Inside, the walls were paneled with wood and carved with cherubim with the faces of a man and a young lion, and with palm trees. The only furniture described was a wooden altar called "the table which is before the LORD," likely the table of showbread. The doors of the holy place and the most holy place were folding doors, carved like the walls.

Chapter 41 Study Questions

1. What were the sizes of the holy place and the holy of holies, and how did they compare to Solomon's temple? (41:2, 4; 1 Kings 6:2, 20)

2. Why did the guide go into the holy of holies alone? (41:3-4; Leviticus 16:2)

3. What do the narrowing doorways teach about coming into God's presence? (41:1-3)

4. How were the side rooms built, and why were they not fastened into the temple wall? (41:5-7)

5. What carvings covered the walls, and what faces did the cherubim have? (41:18-20)

6. Why might cherubim and palm trees be carved together? (Genesis 3:24)

7. What was "the table which is before the LORD," and what did it picture? (41:22; Exodus 25:30)

8. Why is there no ark in Ezekiel's temple? (Jeremiah 3:16-17; 43:7)

9. Jesus called Himself the bread of life (John 6:35). How do you "feed" on Him day by day?

10. The veil was torn when Jesus died (Matthew 27:51). What does it mean to you that you can come into God's presence through Christ? (Hebrews 10:19-22)

Chapter 42: The Priests' Chambers and the Temple Wall

Scripture

42:1-20 And he brought me out into the outer courtyard, ***by*** the way ***in*** the direction of the north; and he brought me to the room which ***was*** opposite the separate area and which ***was*** opposite the structure toward the north. Before the face of the length of approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits) ***was*** the entrance of the north, and the breadth ***was*** approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits). Opposite the approximately 35 feet (twenty ***cubits***) which ***belonged*** to the inner courtyard, and opposite the pavement which ***belonged*** to the outer courtyard, ***was*** gallery before the face of gallery in three ***stories***. And before the rooms ***was*** a walkway of approximately 17.5 feet (ten cubits) ***in*** breadth toward the inner ***part***, a way of approximately 1.75 feet (one cubit); and their entrances ***were*** toward the north. And the upper rooms ***were*** short, for galleries consumed from them, more than from the lower and from the middle ***rooms*** of the structure. For they ***were*** threefold, and there ***were*** no columns ***belonging*** to them like the columns of the courtyards; therefore it was reduced more than the lower and more than the middle from the ground. And the wall which ***was*** outside, corresponding to the rooms, ***in*** the direction of the outer courtyard before the face of the rooms, its length ***was*** approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits). For the length of the rooms which ***belonged*** to the outer courtyard ***was*** approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits), and look, on the face of the temple ***was*** approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits). And below these rooms ***was*** the ***way*** leading in from the east, when one comes to them from the outer courtyard. In the breadth of the wall of the courtyard ***in*** the direction of the east, before the face of the separate area and before the face of the structure, ***were*** rooms. And a way ***was*** before them, like the appearance of the rooms which ***were in*** the direction of the north; like their length, so ***was*** their breadth, and all their exits, and like their arrangements, and like their entrances. And like the entrances of the rooms which ***were in*** the direction of the south ***was*** an entrance at the head of the way, the way in front of the corresponding wall ***in*** the direction of the east, when one comes to them. And he said to me, "The rooms of the north ***and*** the rooms of the south which ***are*** before the face of the separate area, they ***are*** the rooms of holiness where the priests who ***are*** near to the LORD shall eat the most holy things. There they shall set down the most holy things, and the grain offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering, for the place ***is*** holy. When the priests go in, then they shall not go out from the holy place into the outer courtyard, and there they shall set down their garments in which they minister, for they ***are*** holiness; and they shall put on other garments, and they shall draw near to that which ***is*** for the people." And he finished the measurements of the inner house, and he brought me out ***by*** the way of the gate whose face ***is in*** the direction of the east, and he measured it all around, all around. He measured the side of the east with the reed of measurement, approximately 5,250 feet (five hundred reeds), by the reed of measurement all around. He measured the side of the north, approximately 5,250 feet (five hundred reeds), by the reed of measurement all around. The side of the south he measured, approximately 5,250 feet (five hundred reeds), by the reed of measurement. He turned to the side of the west; he measured approximately 5,250 feet (five hundred reeds) by the reed of measurement. On ***the*** four sides he measured it; a wall ***belonged*** to it all around, all around, the length five hundred and the breadth five hundred, to separate between the holy and the common.

Chapter 42 Preview

The tour of the temple area comes to an end. The guide brings Ezekiel out to the outer court and shows him two large buildings of rooms, one on the north and one on the south of the temple building. They are three stories high, stepped back as they rise. The guide explains their use: these are "the rooms of holiness" where the priests eat the most holy offerings and change their clothes before going out to the people (42:13-14).

Then the guide takes Ezekiel out through the east gate and measures the whole temple area from outside. It is a perfect square, five hundred on each side, with a wall all around it "to separate between the holy and the common" (42:20). That phrase sums up the whole tour.

Chapter 42 Study

42:1-12 *And he brought me out into the outer courtyard, **by** the way **in** the direction of the north; and he brought me to the room which **was** opposite the separate area and which **was** opposite the structure toward the north. Before the face of the length of approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits) **was** the entrance of the north, and the breadth **was** approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits). Opposite the approximately 35 feet (twenty **cubits**) which **belonged** to the inner courtyard, and opposite the pavement which **belonged** to the outer courtyard, **was** gallery before the face of gallery in three **stories**. And before the rooms **was** a walkway of approximately 17.5 feet (ten cubits) **in** breadth toward the inner **part**, a way of approximately 1.75 feet (one cubit); and their entrances **were** toward the north. And the upper rooms **were** short, for galleries consumed from them, more than from the lower and from the middle **rooms** of the structure. For they **were** threefold, and there **were** no columns **belonging** to them like the columns of the courtyards; therefore it was reduced more than the lower and more than the middle from the ground. And the wall which **was** outside, corresponding to the rooms, **in** the direction of the outer courtyard before the face of the rooms, its length **was** approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits). For the length of the rooms which **belonged** to the outer courtyard **was** approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits), and look, on the face of the temple **was** approximately 175 feet (a hundred cubits). And below these rooms **was** the **way** leading in from the east, when one comes to them from the outer courtyard. In the breadth of the wall of the courtyard **in** the direction of the east, before the face of the separate area and before the face of the structure, **were** rooms. And a way **was** before them, like the appearance of the rooms which **were in** the direction of the north; like their length, so **was** their breadth, and all their exits, and like their arrangements, and like their entrances. And like the entrances of the rooms which **were in** the direction of the south **was** an entrance at the head of the way, the way in front of the corresponding wall **in** the direction of the east, when one comes to them.*

"And he brought me out into the outer courtyard, by the way in the direction of the north." Ezekiel is shown a long building of rooms on the north side, "opposite the separate area" and opposite the large western building of 41:12. The building is a hundred cubits long, about one hundred seventy-five feet, and fifty cubits wide.

Its rooms are in "three stories," with galleries, and the upper rooms are "short," or narrower, than the lower and middle rooms, because the galleries take up space and there are no columns to hold them out. The building steps back as it goes up, like the side chambers of the temple.

In front of the rooms is "a walkway of approximately 17.5 feet (ten cubits)" wide, and an outer wall shields the rooms from the outer court. There is an entrance from the east, from the outer court. On the south side of the temple stands a matching building, with the same length and breadth, the same exits, the same arrangements and the same entrances.

The details in these verses are hard to picture, and the Hebrew is difficult in places. Scholars draw the plan in slightly different ways. But the purpose of the buildings is plain, because the guide explains it in the next verses.

42:13-14 *And he said to me, "The rooms of the north **and** the rooms of the south which **are** before the face of the separate area, they **are** the rooms of holiness where the priests who **are** near to the LORD shall eat the most holy things. There they shall set down the most holy things, and the grain offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering, for the place **is** holy. When the priests go in, then they shall not go out from the holy place into the outer courtyard, and there they shall set down their garments in which they minister, for they **are** holiness; and they shall put on other garments, and they shall draw near to that which **is** for the people."*

"The rooms of the north and the rooms of the south which are before the face of the separate area, they are the rooms of holiness where the priests who are near to the LORD shall eat the most holy things."

Under the law, certain offerings were "most holy." Parts of the grain offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering belonged to the priests, and they were to eat them in a holy place (Leviticus 6:16, 26; 7:6). These rooms are that holy place. "There they shall set down the most holy things, and the grain offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering, for the place is holy."

The rooms were also for changing clothes. "When the priests go in, then they shall not go out from the holy place into the outer courtyard, and there they shall set down their garments in which they minister, for they are holiness; and they shall put on other garments." The priests wore special linen garments when they served (44:17-19). Before they went out among the people, they changed into ordinary clothes.

Why so careful? Because God wanted His people to learn the difference between holy and common (44:23). The holy things of God were not to be treated like everyday things. Holiness means being set apart for God.

That lesson still matters for us. We are not under the law's rules about priestly garments. But the New Testament still calls us to holiness. Peter says, Be holy, because God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). Believers are now "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9), and our lives, our bodies and our worship are to be set apart for God (Romans 12:1). We should never treat holy things carelessly, God's name, His Word, His church, or the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

42:15-20 *And he finished the measurements of the inner house, and he brought me out **by** the way of the gate whose face **is in** the direction of the east, and he measured it all around, all around. He measured the side of the east with the reed of measurement, approximately 5,250 feet (five hundred reeds), by the reed of measurement all around. He measured the side of the north, approximately 5,250 feet (five hundred reeds), by the reed of measurement all around. The side of the south he measured, approximately 5,250 feet (five hundred reeds), by the reed of measurement. He turned to the side of the west; he measured approximately 5,250 feet (five hundred reeds) by the reed of measurement. On **the** four sides he measured it; a wall **belonged** to it all around, all around, the length five hundred and the breadth five hundred, to separate between the holy and the common.*

"And he finished the measurements of the inner house, and he brought me out by the way of the gate whose face is in the direction of the east, and he measured it all around, all around."

The guide measures each side of the whole temple area: east, north, south and west. Each side is "five hundred reeds." The SLB, following the Hebrew text, reads reeds and gives each side as about 5,250 feet, nearly a mile. Some scholars believe the measure is five hundred cubits instead, about 875 feet, which matches the five hundred of 45:2 and fits the sizes of the courts and gates measured in chapter 40. The ancient Greek translation reads cubits in some of these verses. Either way, the shape is a perfect square.

"On the four sides he measured it; a wall belonged to it all around, all around, the length five hundred and the breadth five hundred, to separate between the holy and the common."

This is the last line of the tour, and it tells us what the whole plan means. The wall is not there to keep God in or to keep people out of His love. It is there to mark the difference between what belongs to God and what is ordinary. In chapter 8, Ezekiel saw that very difference ignored. Idols were set up in the temple courts. Elders burned incense to images in secret. Women wept for a false god at the gate. Men turned their backs on the temple to bow to the sun (8:5-16). The people had wiped out the line between holy and common, and the glory left.

In the new temple, the line is drawn clearly again, measured and walled on every side. That is the reason the glory can return in the next chapter.

The same principle runs through the whole Bible. God is holy, and He calls His people to be holy. In the new creation, the city of God will have a great high wall (Revelation 21:12), and nothing unclean will ever enter it (Revelation 21:27). That is not a threat to those who belong to Christ. It is a promise. Nothing will ever spoil that city.

Chapter 42 Summary

The guide brought Ezekiel into the outer court and showed him two large buildings of rooms, one north and one south of the temple building, three stories high, with the upper rooms narrower, and with walkways, an outer wall and entrances from the east. He explained that these were the holy rooms where the priests who come near to the LORD eat the most holy offerings, the grain offering, sin offering and guilt offering, and where they take off their holy garments and put on

other clothes before going out to the people. Then the guide took Ezekiel out by the east gate and measured the whole temple area: five hundred on each side, a perfect square, with a wall all around to separate between the holy and the common. The clear line between holy and common, broken in chapter 8, prepares for the return of God's glory.

Chapter 42 Study Questions

1. Where were the priests' rooms, and how were they built? (42:1-12)

2. What were the priests to eat in these rooms? (42:13; Leviticus 6:16, 26)

3. Why did the priests change their garments before going out to the people? (42:14; 44:19)

4. How large was the whole temple area, and what shape was it? (42:15-20)

5. What was the purpose of the wall around the temple area? (42:20)

6. How had the people broken down the line between holy and common in chapter 8? (8:5-16)

7. How does the separation between holy and common prepare for the return of the glory in chapter 43?

8. What does Peter mean when he calls believers "a royal priesthood"? (1 Peter 2:9)

9. Is there any holy thing in your life, God's name, His Word, or the Lord's Supper, that you have treated as ordinary? (1 Corinthians 11:27-29)

10. What does it mean for you to present your body as a living sacrifice, holy to God? (Romans 12:1)

Chapter 43: The Glory Returns

Scripture

43:1-12 And he led me to the gate, the gate which ***was*** facing the direction of the east. And look, the glory of the God of Israel came from the direction of the east; and His sound ***was*** like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone from His glory. And ***it was*** like the appearance of the vision which I saw, like the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city; and visions ***were*** like the vision which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face. And the glory of the LORD came into the house ***by*** the way of the gate whose face ***was in*** the direction of the east. And a spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner courtyard; and look, the glory of the LORD filled the house. And I heard ***One*** speaking to me from the house, and a man was standing beside me. And He said to me, "Son of man, ***this is*** the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell there in the midst of the sons of Israel forever. And the house of Israel shall not again defile My holy name, they and their kings, by their prostitution and by the corpses of their kings, their high places, in their setting their threshold with My threshold and their doorpost beside My doorpost, and the wall ***was*** between Me and them; and they defiled My holy name by their abominations which they did, and I consumed them in My anger. Now let them put far away their prostitution and the corpses of their kings from Me, and I will dwell in their midst forever. You, son of man, declare the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern. And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, the design of the house and its arrangement and its exits and its entrances, and all its designs and all its statutes, and all its designs and all its laws, make known to them; and write ***it*** before their eyes, so that they may keep all its design and all its statutes, and do them. This ***is*** the law of the house: on the top of the mountain all its territory all around, all around ***shall be*** a holy of holies. Look, this ***is*** the law of the house.

43:13-27 And these ***are*** the measurements of the altar by cubits (a cubit ***is*** a cubit and a handbreadth): and the gutter ***is*** approximately 1.75 feet (the cubit), and approximately 1.75 feet (a cubit) the breadth, and its border on its edge all around ***is*** approximately 9 inches (one span); and this ***is*** the mound of the altar. And from the gutter on the ground to the lower ledge ***is*** approximately 3.5 feet (two cubits), and the breadth approximately 1.75 feet (one cubit); and from the smaller ledge to the larger ledge ***is*** approximately 7 feet (four cubits), and the breadth approximately 1.75 feet (the cubit). And the altar hearth ***is*** approximately 7 feet (four cubits), and from the altar hearth and upward ***are*** the horns, four. And the altar hearth ***is*** approximately 21 feet (twelve ***cubits***) ***in*** length by approximately 21 feet (twelve ***cubits***) ***in*** breadth, square on its four sides. And the ledge ***is*** approximately 24.5 feet (fourteen ***cubits***) ***in*** length by approximately 24.5 feet (fourteen ***cubits***) ***in*** breadth on its four sides; and the border around it ***is*** approximately 10.5 inches (half of the cubit), and its gutter ***is*** approximately 1.75 feet (a cubit) all around; and its steps ***are*** facing east." And He said to me, "Son of man, thus says the Lord GOD: These ***are*** the statutes of the altar on the day it is made, to offer up on it a burnt offering and to sprinkle on it blood. And you shall give to the priests, the Levites, who ***are*** of the seed of Zadok, the ones near to Me, declares the Lord GOD, to minister to Me, a young bull, a son of ***the*** herd, for a sin offering. And you shall take some of its blood and put ***it*** on its four horns and on the four corners of the

ledge and on the border all around; and you shall cleanse it from sin and make atonement for it. And you shall take the bull of the sin offering, and one shall burn it in the appointed place of the house, outside the sanctuary. And on the second day you shall bring near a male goat of ***the*** goats without blemish for a sin offering; and they shall cleanse the altar from sin, just as they cleansed ***it*** from sin with the bull. When you finish cleansing ***it*** from sin, you shall bring near a young bull, a son of ***the*** herd, without blemish, and a ram from the flock without blemish. And you shall bring them near before the LORD, and the priests shall throw salt on them, and they shall offer them up ***as*** a burnt offering to the LORD. Seven days you shall offer a male goat of sin offering for each day; and a young bull, a son of ***the*** herd, and a ram from the flock, without blemish, they shall offer. Seven days they shall make atonement for the altar and purify it, and they shall fill its hands. And they shall complete the days; and it shall be on the eighth day and onward ***that*** the priests shall offer your burnt offerings and your peace offerings on the altar; and I will accept you, declares the Lord GOD."

Chapter 43 Preview

This is the moment the whole book has been waiting for. In chapters 10 and 11 Ezekiel watched the glory of the LORD leave the temple by the east gate and stand on the mountain east of the city. Now, at the same east gate, he sees the glory of the God of Israel coming back from the east, with a sound like many waters, and the earth shines with it. The glory enters the house and fills it. Then God speaks from the temple: this is the place of His throne, where He will dwell among Israel forever.

The second half of the chapter describes the great altar of burnt offering and the seven days of offerings to cleanse it and set it apart. That raises a hard question, since Christ has offered one sacrifice for sins for all time. I will explain how I understand these offerings and name the other main views.

Chapter 43 Study

43:1-3 *And he led me to the gate, the gate which **was** facing the direction of the east. And look, the glory of the God of Israel came from the direction of the east; and His sound **was** like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone from His glory. And **it was** like the appearance of the vision which I saw, like the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city; and visions **were** like the vision which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face.*

"And he led me to the gate, the gate which was facing the direction of the east. And look, the glory of the God of Israel came from the direction of the east."

Go back to 10:18-19. There "the glory of the LORD went out from on the threshold of the house" and stood "at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the LORD." Then in 11:23 "the glory of the LORD went up from over the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is on the east of the city," the Mount of Olives. The glory left by the east. Now it comes back from the east, by the same way it left.

"And His sound was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone from His glory." In 1:24 the wings of the living creatures sounded "like the sound of many waters." John heard the risen Christ speak with a voice "like the sound of many waters" (Revelation 1:15).

Ezekiel says it was like the vision "which I saw when I came to destroy the city," that is, the vision of chapters 8 to 11 when he prophesied Jerusalem's destruction, and like the vision "by the river Chebar" in chapter 1. The glory that came to Ezekiel in exile, and left the temple in judgment, now returns in mercy. "And I fell on my face." Ezekiel's response is the same as the first time (1:28). God's glory still brings a man to the ground.

Zechariah tells us that when the Lord comes to fight for Jerusalem in the last day, "His feet will stand on that day on the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east" (Zechariah 14:4). The angels told the disciples at Jesus' ascension from the Mount of Olives that He would come in the same way they saw Him go (Acts 1:11-12). I believe the return of the glory to the temple in Ezekiel's vision will take place when Jesus Christ returns from heaven to reign. The glory that left from the east will come back from the east.

43:4-5 *And the glory of the LORD came into the house **by** the way of the gate whose face **was in** the direction of the east. And a spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner courtyard; and look, the glory of the LORD filled the house.*

"And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose face was in the direction of the east." The Spirit lifted Ezekiel up and brought him into the inner court, "and look, the glory of the LORD filled the house."

It is the same thing that happened when the tabernacle was finished, when "the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" and even Moses could not enter (Exodus 40:34-35), and when Solomon dedicated the temple and the priests could not stand to minister because the glory filled the house (1 Kings 8:10-11). The glory never filled Zerubbabel's temple after the exile, and it never filled Herod's. This is one reason I believe Ezekiel's temple is still future.

The glory did come to Herod's temple in another way, when the Son of God walked in its courts. John says, "we beheld His glory" (John 1:14). But Jesus was rejected, and He left that temple, saying, Your house is left to you desolate (Matthew 23:38), and went out to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24:1-3). When He comes again, He will be received, and His glory will fill the house.

43:6-7 *And I heard **One** speaking to me from the house, and a man was standing beside me. And He said to me, "Son of man, **this is** the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell there in the midst of the sons of Israel forever. And the house of Israel shall not again defile My holy name, they and their kings, by their prostitution and by the corpses of their kings, their high places,*

"And I heard One speaking to me from the house, and a man was standing beside me." The guide stood beside Ezekiel, but the voice came from inside the temple. It was the LORD Himself.

"Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell there in the midst of the sons of Israel forever."

Think of what those words meant to an exile whose temple had been burned. God says, This is My throne, and I will live here among My people forever. The ark was called God's footstool (1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalm 132:7). Here God needs no ark. He Himself is present, His throne and His feet among His people.

"And the house of Israel shall not again defile My holy name, they and their kings, by their prostitution and by the corpses of their kings, their high places." Prostitution here is the prophets' word for idolatry, being unfaithful to God as a wife is unfaithful to her husband. The corpses of their kings may mean the dead idols the kings worshiped, or the kings' memorials or tombs that were too close to God's house. Either way, God's house will never again be defiled.

43:8-9 *in their setting their threshold with My threshold and their doorpost beside My doorpost, and the wall **was** between Me and them; and they defiled My holy name by their abominations which they did, and I consumed them in My anger. Now let them put far away their prostitution and the corpses of their kings from Me, and I will dwell in their midst forever.*

God explains what had gone wrong before. The kings had set "their threshold with My threshold and their doorpost beside My doorpost, and the wall was between Me and them." Solomon's palace was built right next to the temple, and the kings treated God's house like a royal chapel. They mixed what was God's with what was theirs, and "they defiled My holy name by their abominations."

"Now let them put far away their prostitution and the corpses of their kings from Me, and I will dwell in their midst forever." In the new plan, the temple stands apart in the holy portion of the land, and the prince's land is separate (45:7; 48:21). God will not share His house with any king's pride.

Is there anything we have set right next to God, with only a thin wall between, as though it were equal to Him? God will not share His place in our hearts any more than He would share His house.

43:10-12 *You, son of man, declare the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern. And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, the design of the house and its arrangement and its exits and its entrances, and all its designs and all its statutes, and all its designs and all its laws, make known to them; and write **it** before their eyes, so that they may keep all its design and all its statutes, and do them. This **is** the law of the house: on the top of the mountain all its territory all around, all around **shall be** a holy of holies. Look, this **is** the law of the house.*

"You, son of man, declare the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern."

Why would a temple make them ashamed? Because a clear picture of God's holiness exposes our sin.

"And if they are ashamed of all that they have done," then Ezekiel was to make known "the design of the house and its arrangement and its exits and its entrances," and all its laws, and to "write it before their eyes, so that they may keep all its design and all its statutes, and do them."

"This is the law of the house: on the top of the mountain all its territory all around, all around shall be a holy of holies. Look, this is the law of the house." In the old temple, only one small room was the holy of holies. Here the whole mountaintop is most holy. God's holiness spreads out from His presence to fill everything around Him. Zechariah says that in that day even the cooking pots in Jerusalem will be holy to the LORD (Zechariah 14:20-21).

43:13-17 *And these **are** the measurements of the altar by cubits (a cubit **is** a cubit and a handbreadth): and the gutter **is** approximately 1.75 feet (the cubit), and approximately 1.75 feet (a cubit) the breadth, and its border on its edge all around **is** approximately 9 inches (one span); and this **is** the mound of the altar. And from the gutter on the ground to the lower ledge **is** approximately 3.5 feet (two cubits), and the breadth approximately 1.75 feet (one cubit); and from the smaller ledge to the larger ledge **is** approximately 7 feet (four cubits), and the breadth approximately 1.75 feet (the cubit). And the altar hearth **is** approximately 7 feet (four cubits), and from the altar hearth and upward **are** the horns, four. And the altar hearth **is** approximately 21 feet (twelve **cubits**) **in** length by approximately 21 feet (twelve **cubits**) **in** breadth, square on its four sides. And the ledge **is** approximately 24.5 feet (fourteen **cubits**) **in** length by approximately 24.5 feet (fourteen **cubits**) **in** breadth on its four sides; and the border around it **is** approximately 10.5 inches (half of the cubit), and its gutter **is** approximately 1.75 feet (a cubit) all around; and its steps **are** facing east."*

Now the altar of burnt offering is measured "by cubits," using the long cubit, "a cubit and a handbreadth." It is built in steps. At the bottom is a base with a gutter around it. Above that are two ledges, a lower one and a larger one, each set back from the one below. On top is the altar hearth, where the fire burned, about twenty-one feet square, with four horns at its corners. The ledge below is about twenty-four and a half feet square. The whole altar stood about seventeen to nineteen feet high, not counting the horns, depending on how the base is counted.

"And its steps are facing east." The law of Moses said not to build steps up to an altar (Exodus 20:26), so that the priest's nakedness would not be exposed. Later, the priests were given linen undergarments (Exodus 28:42-43), and the great altar of Solomon's temple was large enough that it must have had a ramp or steps. Here the steps face east, so that the priest going up faces west, toward the house of God, with his back to the rising sun. That is the opposite of the men in 8:16, who turned their backs on the temple to bow to the sun.

43:18-21 *And He said to me, "Son of man, thus says the Lord GOD: These **are** the statutes of the altar on the day it is made, to offer up on it a burnt offering and to sprinkle on it blood. And you shall give to the priests, the Levites, who **are** of the seed of Zadok, the ones near to Me, declares the Lord GOD, to minister to Me, a young bull, a son of **the** herd, for a sin offering. And you shall take some of its blood and put **it** on its four horns and on the four corners of the ledge and on the border all around; and you shall cleanse it from sin and make atonement for it. And you shall take the bull of the sin offering, and one shall burn it in the appointed place of the house, outside the sanctuary.*

"These are the statutes of the altar on the day it is made, to offer up on it a burnt offering and to sprinkle on it blood."

Like the tabernacle altar in the days of Moses (Exodus 29:36-37), this altar is to be cleansed and set apart before it is used. On the first day, a young bull is offered "for a sin offering," given to "the priests, the Levites, who are of the seed of Zadok." Its blood is put on the four horns, the four corners of the ledge and the border, "and you shall cleanse it from sin and make atonement for it." The bull is burned outside the sanctuary.

This brings us to the hard question. Why would there be sacrifices, and even sin offerings and atonement, after Christ has died? Hebrews says Christ was offered "once for all" (Hebrews 10:10), and "having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12). "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). And "where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer an offering for sin" (Hebrews 10:18). Nothing can add to the cross.

I want to be very clear: whatever these offerings are, they are not a return to the old way of salvation, and they do not take away sin. That was never true of animal sacrifices, even under Moses. "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Old Testament believers were saved by grace through faith, looking forward to God's promised Redeemer, and the sacrifices pictured the Lamb who was coming. No sacrifice in Ezekiel's temple will save anyone. Only Christ saves.

So how do premillennial teachers understand them? There are two main explanations, and many hold both together:

- A memorial. The offerings will look back to the cross, the way the Lord's Supper does for us now. Jesus said, "do this in My remembrance" (1 Corinthians 11:24), and Paul says that when we eat the bread and drink the cup, we "proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). In the kingdom, the offerings may be a visible teaching, especially for the people born during that time, of what the Lamb of God did once for all.
- Ceremonial cleansing. In the kingdom, Christ will reign in glory on the earth, but there will still be people in natural bodies, those who come through the Tribulation and their children, who can still sin and die (Isaiah 65:20). With the holy presence of God in the midst of the land, these offerings would keep the temple and the worshipers ceremonially clean, as the old offerings did for Israel's worship. They would deal with fitness to come near the holy place, not with the guilt of sin before God. The Hebrew word for making atonement, kipper, often means to cleanse or purge, and here it is used of cleansing the altar itself (43:20, 26).

Other teachers see things differently. Some believe Ezekiel described the true worship of the future in the only terms his hearers knew, and that the sacrifices should not be read as literal animal offerings. Many amillennial teachers say that the sacrifices show the whole temple vision must be read as a symbol of the church or of Christ, since literal sacrifices after the cross would contradict Hebrews. Other prophets also speak of sacrifices and priests in the coming kingdom (Isaiah 56:7; 60:7; Jeremiah 33:18; Zechariah 14:21), so the question is not limited to Ezekiel.

I believe the memorial and cleansing views fit the text best, but I hold the details with humility. What I am sure of is this: the cross is enough. The Lamb of God has taken away the sin of the world (John 1:29), and in the kingdom every offering will point to Him.

43:22-24 *And on the second day you shall bring near a male goat of **the** goats without blemish for a sin offering; and they shall cleanse the altar from sin, just as they cleansed **it** from sin with the bull. When you finish cleansing **it** from sin, you shall bring near a young bull, a son of **the** herd, without blemish, and a ram from the flock without blemish. And you shall bring them near before the LORD, and the priests shall throw salt on them, and they shall offer them up **as** a burnt offering to the LORD.*

"And on the second day you shall bring near a male goat of the goats without blemish for a sin offering; and they shall cleanse the altar from sin." After the cleansing, a young bull and a ram "without blemish" are offered as a burnt offering, and "the priests shall throw salt on them."

Without blemish meant with no defect or sickness. That pointed to Christ, the Lamb "without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). Salt was added to every offering under the law (Leviticus 2:13). It stood for the lasting covenant between God and His people, which could not decay, a "covenant of salt" (Numbers 18:19).

43:25-27 *Seven days you shall offer a male goat of sin offering for each day; and a young bull, a son of **the** herd, and a ram from the flock, without blemish, they shall offer. Seven days they shall make atonement for the altar and purify it, and they shall fill its hands. And they shall complete the days; and it shall be on the eighth day and onward **that** the priests shall offer your burnt offerings and your peace offerings on the altar; and I will accept you, declares the Lord GOD."*

"Seven days you shall offer a male goat of sin offering for each day; and a young bull, a son of the herd, and a ram from the flock, without blemish." For seven days the priests "shall make atonement for the altar and purify it, and they shall fill its hands." To fill the hands was the phrase used for ordaining a priest, setting him apart for service (Exodus 29:9, 35). Here it means the altar is set apart and ready for its work.

Seven days of preparation are like the seven days of ordination for Aaron and his sons (Exodus 29:35-37) and the dedication of Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 7:9).

"And it shall be on the eighth day and onward that the priests shall offer your burnt offerings and your peace offerings on the altar." A peace offering was a fellowship offering, shared between God, the priest and the worshiper, eaten as a meal in God's presence (Leviticus 3; 7:11-15). It spoke of peace with God.

And the last words of the chapter: "and I will accept you, declares the Lord GOD." That is the whole goal. The glory has returned, the altar is ready, and God accepts His people. For us, that acceptance has already been won. We are accepted in the Beloved, because of what Christ has done (Ephesians 1:6).

Chapter 43 Summary

The guide led Ezekiel to the east gate, and he saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east, with a sound like many waters, and the earth shone with it. It was the same glory he had seen by the Chebar and at the destruction of the city, the glory that had left by the east in 10:18-19

and 11:23, and Ezekiel fell on his face. The glory entered the house by the east gate and filled it. The LORD spoke from the temple: this was the place of His throne, where He would dwell among Israel forever, and they would no longer defile His name with idols or with their kings' buildings set beside His house. Ezekiel was to show Israel the plan so they would be ashamed of their sins and keep its laws, and the whole mountaintop would be most holy. Then God gave the measurements of the great stepped altar and the seven days of offerings to cleanse and set it apart, after which the priests would offer burnt offerings and peace offerings and God would accept His people. These sacrifices do not add to Christ's once-for-all sacrifice; I take them as memorial and ceremonial cleansing in the kingdom, while other teachers read them differently.

Chapter 43 Study Questions

1. From what direction did the glory come back, and why is that important? (43:1-2; 10:18-19; 11:23)

2. What did Ezekiel compare this vision to, and how did he respond? (43:3)

3. What happened when the glory entered the house? Where else in Scripture did God's glory fill His house? (43:4-5; Exodus 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11)

4. What did God call the temple, and how long would He dwell there? (43:7)

5. How had Israel's kings defiled God's name, according to 43:7-9?

6. Why would seeing the temple make Israel ashamed? (43:10-11)

7. What is "the law of the house"? (43:12)

8. How does Hebrews 10:10-14 shape the way we understand the sacrifices in 43:18-27? What are the main explanations for them?

9. Is there anything in your life that you have placed right beside God, as though it were His equal? (43:8)

10. God said, "I will accept you" (43:27). How does knowing you are accepted in Christ change the way you come to God? (Ephesians 1:6)

Chapter 44: The Prince, the Levites and the Priests

Scripture

44:1-14 And he brought me back ***by*** the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces east; and it ***was*** shut. And the LORD said to me, "This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, for the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered by it; and it shall be shut. ***As for*** the prince, a prince he ***is***; he shall sit in it to eat bread before the LORD. By the way of the porch of the gate he shall enter, and by its way he shall go out." And he brought me ***by*** the way of the gate of the north before the face of the house; and I saw, and look, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD; and I fell on my face. And the LORD said to me, "Son of man, set your heart, and see with your eyes, and with your ears hear all that I am speaking to you concerning all the statutes of the house of the LORD and all its laws; and set your heart on the entrance of the house, with all the exits of the sanctuary. And you shall say to Rebellion, to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Enough for you of all your abominations, O house of Israel, in your bringing in sons of a foreign ***land***, uncircumcised of heart and uncircumcised of flesh, to be in My sanctuary, to profane it, My house, when you bring near My food, fat and blood; and they broke My covenant, in addition to all your abominations. And you have not kept the charge of My holy things, but you set ***them as*** keepers of My charge in My sanctuary for yourselves. Thus says the Lord GOD: No son of a foreign ***land***, uncircumcised of heart and uncircumcised of flesh, shall enter My sanctuary, of any son of a foreign ***land*** who ***is*** in the midst of the sons of Israel. But the Levites who went far from Me when Israel went astray, who went astray from Me after their idols, and they shall bear their iniquity. And they shall be in My sanctuary ministering, ***as*** overseers at the gates of the house, and ministering ***to*** the house; they shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them. Because they ministered to them before their idols, and they became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel, therefore I have lifted up My hand against them, declares the Lord GOD, and they shall bear their iniquity. And they shall not draw near to Me to serve as priest to Me, and to draw near to any of My holy things, to the most holy things; and they shall bear their disgrace and their abominations which they have done. And I will make them keepers of the charge of the house, for all its service and for all that is done in it.

44:15-31 And the priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok, who kept the charge of My sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near to Me to minister to Me, and they shall stand before Me to bring near to Me fat and blood, declares the Lord GOD. They shall enter My sanctuary, and they shall come near to My table to minister to Me, and they shall keep My charge. And it shall be, when they enter the gates of the inner courtyard, they shall be clothed ***with*** linen garments; and wool shall not come up on them while they minister in the gates of the inner courtyard and inward. Linen headdresses shall be on their head, and linen undergarments shall be on their loins; they shall not gird themselves with sweat. And when they go out into the outer courtyard, into the outer courtyard to the people, they shall take off their garments in which they ***were*** ministering and set them down in the rooms of holiness, and they shall put on other garments; and they shall not sanctify the people with their garments. And their head they shall not shave, and ***their*** hair they shall not let grow loose; they shall surely trim their heads.

And no priest shall drink wine when they enter the inner courtyard. And a widow and a divorced ***woman*** they shall not take for themselves for wives; but virgins of the seed of the house of Israel, and the widow who is a widow from a priest, they shall take. And they shall teach My people ***the difference*** between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean they shall make them know. And in a dispute they shall stand for judgment; by My judgments they shall judge it; and My laws and My statutes in all My appointed times they shall keep, and My Sabbaths they shall sanctify. And to a dead man he shall not go to become unclean; but for father, and for mother, and for son, and for daughter, for brother, and for sister who has not belonged to a husband, they may make themselves unclean. And after his cleansing, they shall count seven days for him. And on the day he goes into the holy place, into the inner courtyard, to minister in the holy place, he shall bring near his sin offering, declares the Lord GOD. And it shall be for them an inheritance: I ***am*** their inheritance; and a possession you shall not give them in Israel: I ***am*** their possession. The grain offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering, they shall eat them; and every devoted thing in Israel shall belong to them. And the first of all the firstfruits of everything, and every contribution of everything from all your contributions, shall belong to the priests; and the first of your dough you shall give to the priest, to cause a blessing to rest on your house. Any carcass and torn ***animal***, from the flying things and from the beasts, the priests shall not eat.'"

Chapter 44 Preview

The glory has returned, and now God gives the rules for His house. First, the outer east gate is to be shut forever, because the LORD God of Israel has entered by it. Only the prince may sit inside it to eat bread before the LORD. Then Ezekiel falls on his face again before the glory, and God tells him to pay close attention to who may enter the sanctuary and who may not.

Foreigners who are uncircumcised in heart and flesh may not enter. The Levites who led Israel into idolatry will serve in the temple, but only as gatekeepers and helpers, never as priests at the altar. The sons of Zadok, who stayed faithful, will come near to God. The rest of the chapter gives their rules: their clothes, their hair, their marriages, their teaching, their judging, and their inheritance, which is the LORD Himself.

Chapter 44 Study

44:1-2 *And he brought me back **by** the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces east; and it **was** shut. And the LORD said to me, "This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, for the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered by it; and it shall be shut.*

"And he brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces east; and it was shut."

"And the LORD said to me, This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, for the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered by it; and it shall be shut."

This is the gate through which the glory returned in 43:1-4. Because the LORD entered by it, no one else may ever use it. It is set apart forever by His coming. The shut gate is a sign of honor to

God, and also a promise. The glory left by the east once. It came back by the east. The gate is shut behind Him because He is never leaving again.

Some people connect this verse with the east gate of the old city of Jerusalem today, often called the Golden Gate, which has been sealed for centuries. It is a striking sight, and many visitors think of Ezekiel when they see it. But Ezekiel's gate belongs to the temple of his vision, in the coming kingdom, not to the present city wall, which was built long after his time. I do not think the sealed gate today is the fulfillment of this verse.

In Christian history, some writers read the shut gate as a picture of Mary, through whom the Lord came into the world. The text does not say that. It speaks of a real gate, shut because the LORD entered His house through it.

44:3 ***As for*** *the prince, a prince he* ***is****; he shall sit in it to eat bread before the LORD. By the way of the porch of the gate he shall enter, and by its way he shall go out."*

"As for the prince, a prince he is; he shall sit in it to eat bread before the LORD. By the way of the porch of the gate he shall enter, and by its way he shall go out."

The prince does not enter through the shut gate. He enters from the inner side, through the gate's porch, and sits in the gateway to eat a meal before the LORD, likely his share of a peace offering.

Who is the prince? This is a question we need to settle carefully, because he appears again and again in chapters 44 to 48. In 34:24 and 37:25, God calls "My servant David" the "prince" over His people, and I believe that is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. But the prince in these chapters cannot be Christ. He offers a sin offering "for himself" (45:22). He has sons who inherit land (46:16). He is warned not to oppress the people (45:8-9; 46:18). He worships at the threshold of the gate (46:2). None of that fits the sinless Son of God, who is King of kings.

So I believe this prince is a human ruler in the kingdom, probably from the line of David, who will lead Israel under Christ the King and represent the people in worship. Some teachers believe he is David himself, raised from the dead to serve under his greater Son. Others see a line of Davidic princes. Scripture does not name him, and we should not go further than it does.

44:4-5 *And he brought me* ***by*** *the way of the gate of the north before the face of the house; and I saw, and look, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD; and I fell on my face. And the LORD said to me, "Son of man, set your heart, and see with your eyes, and with your ears hear all that I am speaking to you concerning all the statutes of the house of the LORD and all its laws; and set your heart on the entrance of the house, with all the exits of the sanctuary.*

"And he brought me by the way of the gate of the north before the face of the house; and I saw, and look, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD; and I fell on my face."

Ezekiel cannot get used to God's glory. Every time he sees it, he falls down. We should never become casual about the presence of God.

Then God tells him to listen carefully: "set your heart, and see with your eyes, and with your ears hear all that I am speaking to you concerning all the statutes of the house of the LORD and all its laws; and set your heart on the entrance of the house, with all the exits of the sanctuary." The coming verses are about who may enter and who may not. God wants Ezekiel to pay close attention.

44:6-9 *And you shall say to Rebellion, to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Enough for you of all your abominations, O house of Israel, in your bringing in sons of a foreign* ***land****, uncircumcised of heart and uncircumcised of flesh, to be in My sanctuary, to profane it, My house, when you bring near My food, fat and blood; and they broke My covenant, in addition to all your abominations. And you have not kept the charge of My holy things, but you set* ***them as*** *keepers of My charge in My sanctuary for yourselves. Thus says the Lord GOD: No son of a foreign* ***land****, uncircumcised of heart and uncircumcised of flesh, shall enter My sanctuary, of any son of a foreign* ***land*** *who* ***is*** *in the midst of the sons of Israel.*

"And you shall say to Rebellion, to the house of Israel." God calls Israel by a new name: Rebellion. It is the word He used for them from the start (2:5-8).

"Enough for you of all your abominations." The charge is that Israel brought "sons of a foreign land, uncircumcised of heart and uncircumcised of flesh, to be in My sanctuary, to profane it." Israel had let foreigners who did not know or love God serve in the temple, perhaps as guards or workers, while the people themselves "have not kept the charge of My holy things." Long before, Joshua made the Gibeonites temple servants (Joshua 9:23-27), and later foreign temple servants returned from exile (Ezra 2:43-58). But here the problem is that men with no faith in God and no part in His covenant were put in charge in His house.

So God says, "No son of a foreign land, uncircumcised of heart and uncircumcised of flesh, shall enter My sanctuary."

Notice the words "uncircumcised of heart." The issue is not race. It is the heart. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant, and God always wanted it to be the sign of a heart given to Him (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4). Foreigners who joined themselves to the LORD were always welcome to worship Him (Isaiah 56:6-7), and in 47:22-23 God will give the foreigners living in Israel an inheritance among the tribes. What God shuts out is the unbelieving heart.

44:10-14 *But the Levites who went far from Me when Israel went astray, who went astray from Me after their idols, and they shall bear their iniquity. And they shall be in My sanctuary ministering,* ***as*** *overseers at the gates of the house, and ministering* ***to*** *the house; they shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them. Because they ministered to them before their idols, and they became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel, therefore I have lifted up My hand against them, declares the Lord GOD, and they shall bear their iniquity. And they shall not draw near to Me to serve as priest to Me, and to draw near to any of My holy things, to the most holy things; and they shall bear their disgrace and their abominations which they have done. And I will make them keepers of the charge of the house, for all its service and for all that is done in it.*

"But the Levites who went far from Me when Israel went astray, who went astray from Me after their idols, and they shall bear their iniquity."

A Levite was a member of the tribe of Levi, set apart to serve at the tabernacle and temple. The priests were the Levites of Aaron's family, who served at the altar. The other Levites helped them, guarded the gates, carried and cared for the holy things, and led the singing (Numbers 3:5-10; 1 Chronicles 23:28-32).

These Levites had served at the high places and idols during Israel's years of rebellion. "They ministered to them before their idols, and they became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel." Their sin was not only their own. They led others into sin. Leaders carry a heavier responsibility (James 3:1).

So their service is limited. They will still serve "as overseers at the gates of the house," slaughter the offerings for the people, and "stand before them to minister to them." But "they shall not draw near to Me to serve as priest to Me." They are not cast out. They still have a place in God's house. But they lose the honor of drawing near to His altar.

There is both grace and justice here. Forgiveness is real, but sin still has consequences. A man who falls into sin can be fully forgiven and still not be restored to every place of leadership he once had. God gives these Levites a real and honored work to do, "for all its service and for all that is done in it." There is no small job in God's house.

44:15-16 *And the priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok, who kept the charge of My sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near to Me to minister to Me, and they shall stand before Me to bring near to Me fat and blood, declares the Lord GOD. They shall enter My sanctuary, and they shall come near to My table to minister to Me, and they shall keep My charge.*

"And the priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok, who kept the charge of My sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near to Me to minister to Me."

Zadok was the priest who stayed loyal to David during Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 15:24-29) and who anointed Solomon when Adonijah tried to take the throne (1 Kings 1:32-39). Solomon made him chief priest in place of Abiathar (1 Kings 2:35), fulfilling God's word to Eli that He would raise up "a faithful priest" (1 Samuel 2:35). His line served in the temple until the exile.

Because they were faithful, they "shall stand before Me to bring near to Me fat and blood." They will enter the sanctuary and come near God's table and "keep My charge." Faithfulness in hard times is remembered by God. Jesus said the one who is faithful in little will be given much (Luke 16:10; 19:17).

44:17-19 *And it shall be, when they enter the gates of the inner courtyard, they shall be clothed* ***with*** *linen garments; and wool shall not come up on them while they minister in the gates of the inner courtyard and inward. Linen headdresses shall be on their head, and linen undergarments shall be on their loins; they shall not gird themselves with sweat. And when they go out into the outer courtyard, into the outer courtyard to the people, they shall take off their garments in which they* ***were*** *ministering and set them down in the rooms of holiness, and they shall put on other garments; and they shall not sanctify the people with their garments.*

"They shall be clothed with linen garments; and wool shall not come up on them." The priests' clothes were linen, as in the law (Exodus 28:39-43). "They shall not gird themselves with sweat." Wool made a man sweat, and sweat was a sign of the curse on human labor (Genesis 3:19). The work of God's priests was not to be the sweat of the curse. Linen also pictured purity. In Revelation, the fine linen of the bride is the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:8).

When the priests go out to the people, they are to take off their holy garments and put on other clothes, "and they shall not sanctify the people with their garments." Holy things were not to be carried into common places (42:14).

44:20-22 *And their head they shall not shave, and* ***their*** *hair they shall not let grow loose; they shall surely trim their heads. And no priest shall drink wine when they enter the inner courtyard. And a widow and a divorced* ***woman*** *they shall not take for themselves for wives; but virgins of the seed of the house of Israel, and the widow who is a widow from a priest, they shall take.*

"Their head they shall not shave, and their hair they shall not let grow loose; they shall surely trim their heads." Shaving the head and letting the hair hang loose were signs of mourning or of pagan practice (Leviticus 21:5, 10). God's priests were to look orderly and self-controlled.

"No priest shall drink wine when they enter the inner courtyard." This was the law given right after Nadab and Abihu died for offering strange fire (Leviticus 10:9). A priest needed a clear head to tell holy from common.

Priests were to marry "virgins of the seed of the house of Israel," or the widow of a priest, not a widow or divorced woman (Leviticus 21:7, 13-14). These rules protected the priest's family line and pictured the purity God wants among those who serve Him.

These verses are a reminder that the people in the kingdom who serve in this temple are living in natural bodies, marrying and having children, and needing rules about mourning. That fits what I said in 43:18-27 about mortal people living in the kingdom under Christ's reign.

44:23-24 *And they shall teach My people **the difference** between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean they shall make them know. And in a dispute they shall stand for judgment; by My judgments they shall judge it; and My laws and My statutes in all My appointed times they shall keep, and My Sabbaths they shall sanctify.*

"And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean they shall make them know."

This is the very thing the priests of Ezekiel's day failed to do. God said in 22:26 that "between the holy and the common they have not made a distinction." In the kingdom, the priests will teach it again.

They will also judge. "In a dispute they shall stand for judgment; by My judgments they shall judge it." And they will keep God's appointed feasts and "My Sabbaths they shall sanctify." The Sabbath was the seventh day, set apart for rest and worship, a sign between God and Israel (Exodus 31:13-17). In this vision, Israel in the kingdom keeps the Sabbaths. Believers today differ on how the Sabbath applies to the church, since Paul says no one should judge us regarding a Sabbath day, which was a shadow of what was coming (Colossians 2:16-17). What is plain here is that God's house will be a place where His day and His feasts are honored.

44:25-27 *And to a dead man he shall not go to become unclean; but for father, and for mother, and for son, and for daughter, for brother, and for sister who has not belonged to a husband, they may make themselves unclean. And after his cleansing, they shall count seven days for him. And on the day he goes into the holy place, into the inner courtyard, to minister in the holy place, he shall bring near his sin offering, declares the Lord GOD.*

A priest "shall not go to become unclean" by touching the dead, except for his closest family: father, mother, son, daughter, brother, or unmarried sister (Leviticus 21:1-3). Even then, after his cleansing he must wait seven more days, and when he returns to the inner court to serve, "he shall bring near his sin offering."

Death made a person unclean because death is the result of sin, and God is life. The priests who served in His presence were to stay as far from death as possible. One day death itself will be swallowed up forever (Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:54).

44:28-31 *And it shall be for them an inheritance: I **am** their inheritance; and a possession you shall not give them in Israel: I **am** their possession. The grain offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering, they shall eat them; and every devoted thing in Israel shall belong to them. And the first of all the firstfruits of everything, and every contribution of everything from all your contributions, shall belong to the priests; and the first of your dough you shall give to the priest, to cause a blessing to rest on your house. Any carcass and torn **animal**, from the flying things and from the beasts, the priests shall not eat.'"*

"And it shall be for them an inheritance: I am their inheritance; and a possession you shall not give them in Israel: I am their possession."

This is one of the most beautiful lines in these chapters. The priests would not own farmland like the other tribes. They would live on the offerings and gifts of the people: "the grain offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering," "every devoted thing in Israel," and "the first of all the firstfruits of everything." But God says their real inheritance is Himself. God told Aaron the same thing long ago (Numbers 18:20).

David said, "The LORD is the portion of my share and my cup," and he rejoiced in the inheritance God had given him (Psalm 16:5-6). Every believer can say that. Whatever we have or do not have in this world, the Lord Himself is our portion.

The people's gifts would also bless them. "The first of your dough you shall give to the priest, to cause a blessing to rest on your house." Giving to God's work is never a loss.

The chapter closes with a food law: the priests "shall not eat" any animal that died on its own or was torn by beasts (Leviticus 22:8). Even in small things, God's priests were to be clean.

Chapter 44 Summary

The guide brought Ezekiel back to the outer east gate, and it was shut. The LORD said it must stay shut forever, because the LORD God of Israel had entered by it; only the prince, a human ruler under Christ, could sit inside its porch to eat bread before the LORD. Ezekiel saw the glory filling the house and fell on his face, and God told him to mark carefully who may enter the sanctuary. No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and flesh would enter, as Israel had allowed before. The Levites who had led Israel into idolatry would serve as gatekeepers and helpers but would not come near as priests. The sons of Zadok, who stayed faithful, would come near to minister at God's altar and table. They would wear linen, trim their hair, drink no wine in the inner court, marry within the rules of the law, teach the difference between holy and common, judge disputes, keep God's feasts and Sabbaths, and avoid the uncleanness of the dead. They would have no land, for the LORD Himself would be their inheritance.

Chapter 44 Study Questions

1. Why was the outer east gate to be shut, and who was allowed to sit in it? (44:1-3)

2. What reasons are given for saying the prince is not Christ Himself? (44:3; 45:22; 46:16)

3. How did Ezekiel respond when he saw the glory filling the house again? (44:4)

4. What does "uncircumcised of heart" mean, and why is the heart the real issue? (44:7-9; Deuteronomy 10:16)

5. What had the Levites done, and what work were they still given? (44:10-14)

6. Why were the sons of Zadok allowed to come near to God? (44:15; 1 Kings 1:32-39)

7. What were the priests to teach the people? Why had that been missing before? (44:23; 22:26)

8. What did God say would be the priests' inheritance? (44:28; Numbers 18:20)

9. The Levites were forgiven but lost a place of honor because they led others into sin. What does that teach about leadership and consequences? (James 3:1)

10. Can you say with David, "The LORD is the portion of my share and my cup"? What would change in your life if you believed that more deeply? (Psalm 16:5-6)

Chapter 45: The Holy Portion and the Offerings

Scripture

45:1-12 "And when you allot the land ***as*** an inheritance, you shall offer up a contribution to the LORD, a holy ***portion*** from the land: ***as*** length, twenty-five thousand ***in*** length, and the breadth ten thousand; it ***shall be*** holy in all its territory all around. Of this there shall be for the holy place five hundred by five hundred, squared all around, and approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits) ***of*** pasture land ***shall belong*** to it all around. And from this measured area you shall measure a length of twenty-five thousand and a breadth of ten thousand; and in it shall be the sanctuary, a holy of holies. It ***is*** a holy ***portion*** from the land; it shall belong to the priests, the ministers of the sanctuary, who draw near to minister to the LORD; and it shall be for them a place for houses and a sanctuary for the sanctuary. And twenty-five thousand ***in*** length and ten thousand ***in*** breadth shall belong to the Levites, the ministers of the house, for them for a possession: twenty rooms. And ***as*** the possession of the city you shall give five thousand ***in*** breadth and twenty-five thousand ***in*** length, corresponding to the holy contribution; it shall belong to all the house of Israel. And to the prince ***shall belong land*** on this side and on this side of the holy contribution and of the possession of the city, before the face of the holy contribution and before the face of the possession of the city, from the west side westward and from the east side eastward, and ***in*** length corresponding to one of the portions, from the west border to the east border. Of the land it shall belong to him for a possession in Israel; and My princes shall no longer oppress My people, and the land they shall give to the house of Israel according to their tribes. Thus says the Lord GOD: Enough for you, O princes of Israel! Remove violence and plunder, and do justice and righteousness; lift off your evictions from My people, declares the Lord GOD. Let balances of righteousness and an ephah of righteousness and a bath of righteousness be for you. The ephah and the bath shall be one measure, so that the bath carries a tenth of the homer, and the ephah a tenth of the homer; according to the homer shall be its measurement. And the shekel ***shall be*** approximately 2/5 ounce (twenty gerahs); twenty shekels, twenty-five shekels, ***and*** fifteen shekels shall be the mina for you.

45:13-25 This ***is*** the contribution which you shall offer up: approximately 3 quarts (a sixth of the ephah) from a homer of wheat, and you shall give approximately 3 quarts (a sixth of the ephah) from a homer of barley; and the prescribed portion of the oil, the bath of oil, ***shall be*** approximately 2.5 quarts (a tenth of the bath) from the kor, approximately 60 gallons (ten baths), a homer, for approximately 60 gallons (ten baths) ***are*** a homer; and one sheep from the flock, from the two hundred, from the well-watered land of Israel, for a grain offering and for a burnt offering and for peace offerings, to make atonement for them, declares the Lord GOD. All the people of the land shall be ***bound*** to this contribution for the prince in Israel. And on the prince shall be the burnt offerings and the grain offering and the drink offering at the feasts and at the new moons and on the Sabbaths, at all the appointed times of the house of Israel; he shall offer the sin offering and the grain offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings to make atonement for the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord GOD: In the first ***month***, on the first ***day*** of the month, you shall take a young bull, a son of ***the*** herd, without blemish, and you shall cleanse the sanctuary from sin. And the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering and put ***it*** on

the doorpost of the house and on the four corners of the ledge of the altar and on the doorpost of the gate of the inner courtyard. And so you shall do on the seventh ***day*** in the month for each man who errs and for the simple ***one***; and you shall make atonement for the house. In the first ***month***, on the fourteenth day of the month, the Passover shall be for you, a feast of weeks of days; unleavened bread shall be eaten. And the prince shall offer on that day, for himself and for all the people of the land, a young bull ***as*** a sin offering. And ***during*** the seven days of the feast he shall offer a burnt offering to the LORD, seven young bulls and seven rams without blemish, daily, the seven days; and a sin offering, a male goat of ***the*** goats, daily. And ***as*** a grain offering he shall offer approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) for the young bull and approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) for the ram, and oil, approximately 1 gallon (a hin) for the ephah. In the seventh ***month***, on the fifteenth day of the month, at the feast, he shall offer like these ***for*** the seven days, like the sin offering, like the burnt offering, and like the grain offering, and like the oil."

Chapter 45 Preview

Before the land is divided among the tribes in chapters 47 and 48, God sets aside a holy portion in the middle of it. In it are the sanctuary, land for the priests, land for the Levites, and land for the city. On each side of the holy portion is land for the prince. Because the prince has his own land, he will have no excuse to take land from the people, as Israel's kings had done.

That leads to a strong word to the princes of Israel: stop the violence, do justice, and use honest weights and measures. Then God sets the offerings the people will give to the prince, and the offerings the prince will provide for the whole nation at the feasts, new moons and Sabbaths. The chapter ends with a cleansing of the sanctuary at the new year, and with the Passover and the feast of the seventh month.

Chapter 45 Study

45:1-5 *"And when you allot the land **as** an inheritance, you shall offer up a contribution to the LORD, a holy **portion** from the land: **as** length, twenty-five thousand **in** length, and the breadth ten thousand; it **shall be** holy in all its territory all around. Of this there shall be for the holy place five hundred by five hundred, squared all around, and approximately 87.5 feet (fifty cubits) **of** pasture land **shall belong** to it all around. And from this measured area you shall measure a length of twenty-five thousand and a breadth of ten thousand; and in it shall be the sanctuary, a holy of holies. It **is** a holy **portion** from the land; it shall belong to the priests, the ministers of the sanctuary, who draw near to minister to the LORD; and it shall be for them a place for houses and a sanctuary for the sanctuary. And twenty-five thousand **in** length and ten thousand **in** breadth shall belong to the Levites, the ministers of the house, for them for a possession: twenty rooms.*

"And when you allot the land as an inheritance, you shall offer up a contribution to the LORD, a holy portion from the land." The word for contribution means something lifted up and set apart, given to God. Before anyone receives his share, God's share comes first.

The holy portion is "twenty-five thousand in length, and the breadth ten thousand." The unit is not given here. Most teachers believe it is the long cubit, which would make this strip about eight

miles long and about three miles wide. Some believe the unit is the reed, which would make it much larger.

In the middle of this portion is the sanctuary area, "five hundred by five hundred, squared," with a strip of open land fifty cubits wide around it. The rest of this strip belongs "to the priests, the ministers of the sanctuary," as "a place for houses." The priests live around the holy place.

Beside it, a second strip of the same size belongs "to the Levites, the ministers of the house," as their possession. The SLB reads "twenty rooms" at the end of verse 5. The ancient Greek translation reads cities to live in, which many think is the better sense.

Notice the order. God's dwelling is at the center. Those who serve Him live closest to Him. The rest of the land is arranged around that center. That is how life is meant to be arranged: God first, and everything else in its place around Him (Matthew 6:33).

45:6-8 *And **as** the possession of the city you shall give five thousand **in** breadth and twenty-five thousand **in** length, corresponding to the holy contribution; it shall belong to all the house of Israel. And to the prince **shall belong land** on this side and on this side of the holy contribution and of the possession of the city, before the face of the holy contribution and before the face of the possession of the city, from the west side westward and from the east side eastward, and **in** length corresponding to one of the portions, from the west border to the east border. Of the land it shall belong to him for a possession in Israel; and My princes shall no longer oppress My people, and the land they shall give to the house of Israel according to their tribes.*

"And as the possession of the city you shall give five thousand in breadth and twenty-five thousand in length." This third strip is for the city, and it belongs "to all the house of Israel." No single tribe owns it. It belongs to the whole nation.

"And to the prince shall belong land on this side and on this side of the holy contribution and of the possession of the city." The prince's land runs east and west from the holy portion all the way to the borders of the land.

Then God explains why: "Of the land it shall belong to him for a possession in Israel; and My princes shall no longer oppress My people, and the land they shall give to the house of Israel according to their tribes."

The kings of Israel had often grabbed land that was not theirs. Samuel warned the people that a king would take the best of their fields (1 Samuel 8:14). King Ahab and Jezebel had Naboth killed so they could take his vineyard (1 Kings 21). In the kingdom, the prince will have his own land, so he will never need to take anyone else's.

45:9-12 *Thus says the Lord GOD: Enough for you, O princes of Israel! Remove violence and plunder, and do justice and righteousness; lift off your evictions from My people, declares the Lord GOD. Let balances of righteousness and an ephah of righteousness and a bath of righteousness be for you. The ephah and the bath shall be one measure, so that the bath carries a tenth of the homer, and the ephah a tenth of the homer; according to the homer shall be its measurement. And the shekel* ***shall be*** *approximately 2/5 ounce (twenty gerahs); twenty shekels, twenty-five shekels,* ***and*** *fifteen shekels shall be the mina for you.*

"Thus says the Lord GOD: Enough for you, O princes of Israel! Remove violence and plunder, and do justice and righteousness; lift off your evictions from My people."

This is a word for Ezekiel's own day as much as for the future. The princes of Israel had used violence, plundered the poor and driven families out of their homes and land (22:6, 27). God says, Enough. Stop it. Do what is right.

Then He turns to something very practical: "Let balances of righteousness and an ephah of righteousness and a bath of righteousness be for you." The ephah was a dry measure for grain, about three-fifths of a bushel. The bath was a liquid measure of the same size, for oil or wine. The homer was ten of each. The shekel was a weight used for money, and the mina was sixty shekels.

Why does God care about weights and measures? Because cheating in business is cheating your neighbor, and God hates it. "Scales of deceit are an abomination of the LORD" (Proverbs 11:1). Amos condemned those who made the ephah small and the shekel great to cheat the poor (Amos 8:5). God's people are to be honest in the store, the market and the office, not just in church. The prince who leads the nation will be held to that standard, and so are we.

45:13-17 *This* ***is*** *the contribution which you shall offer up: approximately 3 quarts (a sixth of the ephah) from a homer of wheat, and you shall give approximately 3 quarts (a sixth of the ephah) from a homer of barley; and the prescribed portion of the oil, the bath of oil,* ***shall be*** *approximately 2.5 quarts (a tenth of the bath) from the kor, approximately 60 gallons (ten baths), a homer, for approximately 60 gallons (ten baths)* ***are*** *a homer; and one sheep from the flock, from the two hundred, from the well-watered land of Israel, for a grain offering and for a burnt offering and for peace offerings, to make atonement for them, declares the Lord GOD. All the people of the land shall be* ***bound*** *to this contribution for the prince in Israel. And on the prince shall be the burnt offerings and the grain offering and the drink offering at the feasts and at the new moons and on the Sabbaths, at all the appointed times of the house of Israel; he shall offer the sin offering and the grain offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings to make atonement for the house of Israel.*

Now God sets the offering the people will give. It is a small share of what they produce: "a sixth of the ephah from a homer of wheat," and the same of barley, which is one sixtieth. Of oil, "a tenth of the bath from the kor," one percent. And "one sheep from the flock, from the two hundred." These were to be used "for a grain offering and for a burnt offering and for peace offerings, to make atonement for them."

A grain offering was an offering of flour or grain with oil, given in thanks and devotion to God (Leviticus 2). We met the burnt, sin and peace offerings in chapters 40 and 43.

"All the people of the land shall be bound to this contribution for the prince in Israel." The people give to the prince, and the prince is responsible to provide the offerings for the whole nation: "on the prince shall be the burnt offerings and the grain offering and the drink offering at the feasts and at the new moons and on the Sabbaths." A drink offering was wine poured out at the altar with the other offerings (Numbers 15:5-10). New moons were the first day of each month, marked by special offerings (Numbers 28:11-15).

The prince "shall offer the sin offering and the grain offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings to make atonement for the house of Israel." As I said in chapter 43, I understand these offerings in the kingdom as memorials of Christ's sacrifice and as ceremonial cleansing for worship, not as a way to remove the guilt of sin, which Christ has done once for all (Hebrews 10:10-14). The words "make atonement" here describe cleansing for worship in God's presence.

45:18-20 *Thus says the Lord GOD: In the first **month**, on the first **day** of the month, you shall take a young bull, a son of **the** herd, without blemish, and you shall cleanse the sanctuary from sin. And the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering and put **it** on the doorpost of the house and on the four corners of the ledge of the altar and on the doorpost of the gate of the inner courtyard. And so you shall do on the seventh **day** in the month for each man who errs and for the simple **one**; and you shall make atonement for the house.*

"In the first month, on the first day of the month, you shall take a young bull, a son of the herd, without blemish, and you shall cleanse the sanctuary from sin." The new year begins with cleansing. The priest puts some of the blood "on the doorpost of the house and on the four corners of the ledge of the altar and on the doorpost of the gate of the inner courtyard."

This reminds us of the first Passover, when the blood was put on the doorposts of Israel's houses in Egypt (Exodus 12:7). The year that began with blood on the doorposts is remembered with blood on the doorposts of God's house.

"And so you shall do on the seventh day in the month for each man who errs and for the simple one; and you shall make atonement for the house." This offering is for those who sin without meaning to, or out of ignorance (Leviticus 4:2). God provides for weak and foolish people too.

Ezekiel does not mention the Day of Atonement, the great day in the seventh month when the high priest went into the holy of holies (Leviticus 16). In fact, he never mentions a high priest at all. Some see this as a sign that the great High Priest, Christ, has already entered the true holy place once for all (Hebrews 9:11-12), so that the Day of Atonement has been fulfilled. Scripture does not explain the absence, and I offer that only as a possible reason.

45:21-25 *In the first **month**, on the fourteenth day of the month, the Passover shall be for you, a feast of weeks of days; unleavened bread shall be eaten. And the prince shall offer on that day, for himself and for all the people of the land, a young bull **as** a sin offering. And **during** the seven days of the feast he shall offer a burnt offering to the LORD, seven young bulls and seven rams without blemish, daily, the seven days; and a sin offering, a male goat of **the** goats, daily. And **as** a grain offering he shall offer approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) for the young bull and approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) for the ram, and oil, approximately 1 gallon (a hin) for the ephah. In the seventh **month**, on the fifteenth day of the month, at the feast, he shall offer like these **for** the seven days, like the sin offering, like the burnt offering, and like the grain offering, and like the oil."*

"In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, the Passover shall be for you, a feast of weeks of days." That is the Passover joined with the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:15-20). "Unleavened bread shall be eaten."

The Passover remembered the night God brought Israel out of Egypt, when the blood of the lamb protected every house that had it (Exodus 12). It also pointed forward to Christ. Paul says, "our Passover was sacrificed for us: Christ" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus died at Passover, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In the kingdom, Israel will keep the Passover again, and I believe they will know at last who the Lamb was.

"And the prince shall offer on that day, for himself and for all the people of the land, a young bull as a sin offering." Here is one of the clearest signs that the prince is not Christ. He offers a sin offering for himself (44:3). For seven days he provides burnt offerings, "seven young bulls and seven rams without blemish, daily," a male goat each day for a sin offering, and grain and oil with them. A hin was a liquid measure of about a gallon.

"In the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month, at the feast, he shall offer like these for the seven days." This is the Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles, when Israel lived in shelters for seven days to remember their years in the wilderness (Leviticus 23:33-43). Zechariah says that in the kingdom, those left from all the nations will go up to Jerusalem year after year "to bow down to the King, the LORD of armies, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths" (Zechariah 14:16).

The two great feasts, one at the start of the year and one in the seventh month, frame the year with remembering God's rescue and God's care. Ezekiel does not mention the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost. Some suggest it is because that feast was fulfilled at Pentecost in Acts 2, when the Spirit was poured out. Again, Scripture does not say.

Chapter 45 Summary

God told Israel to set apart a holy portion in the middle of the land before dividing it among the tribes: a strip for the sanctuary and the priests, a strip for the Levites, and a strip for the city that belonged to all Israel, with the prince's land on each side, so that the princes would no longer oppress God's people or take their land. God told the princes to stop violence and plunder, to do justice, and to use honest balances and measures. The people would give a small offering of grain, oil and sheep to the prince, and the prince would provide the burnt offerings, grain offerings, drink offerings, sin offerings and peace offerings for the nation at the feasts, new moons and

Sabbaths. At the new year the sanctuary would be cleansed with the blood of a bull on its doorposts, and an offering would be made for those who sinned without meaning to. Israel would keep the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days, and the feast of the seventh month, with the prince offering a sin offering for himself and the people. These offerings remember and honor Christ's once-for-all sacrifice; they do not add to it.

Chapter 45 Study Questions

1. What is the holy portion, and what is placed at its center? (45:1-4)

2. Who lives in each part of the holy portion? (45:4-6)

3. Why was the prince given his own land? (45:7-8; 1 Kings 21)

4. What did God tell the princes of Israel to stop doing, and to start doing? (45:9)

5. Why does God care about honest weights and measures? (45:10-12; Proverbs 11:1)

6. What was the prince responsible to provide for the nation? (45:16-17)

7. How does the cleansing of the sanctuary at the new year remind us of the first Passover? (45:18-19; Exodus 12:7)

8. How does Paul connect the Passover to Christ? (45:21; 1 Corinthians 5:7)

9. God's dwelling was at the center of the land, with everything else arranged around it. What is at the center of your life? (Matthew 6:33)

10. Is there any area of your work or business where you are tempted to cut corners? What would honest balances look like for you this week?

Chapter 46: Worship in the Kingdom

Scripture

46:1-15 "Thus says the Lord GOD: The gate of the inner courtyard which faces east shall be shut the six days of work, and on the day of the Sabbath it shall be opened, and on the day of the new moon it shall be opened. And the prince shall enter ***bẏ*** the way of the porch of the gate from outside, and he shall stand by the doorpost of the gate; and the priests shall offer his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall bow down at the threshold of the gate; and he shall go out, and the gate shall not be shut until the evening. And the people of the land shall bow down ***at*** the entrance of that gate on the Sabbaths and on the new moons before the LORD. And the burnt offering which the prince shall bring near to the LORD on the day of the Sabbath ***shall be*** six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish; and the grain offering ***shall be*** approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) for the ram, and for the lambs the grain offering ***shall be*** the gift of his hand, and oil, approximately 1 gallon (a hin) for the ephah. And on the day of the new moon, a young bull, a son of ***the*** herd, without blemish, and six lambs and a ram; they shall be without blemish. And approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) for the young bull and approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) for the ram he shall offer ***as*** a grain offering, and for the lambs as much as his hand can reach, and oil, approximately 1 gallon (a hin) for the ephah. And when the prince enters, he shall enter ***bẏ*** the way of the porch of the gate, and by its way he shall go out. And when the people of the land come before the LORD at the appointed times, the one who enters ***bẏ*** the way of the gate of the north to bow down shall go out ***bẏ*** the way of the gate of the south, and the one who enters ***bẏ*** the way of the gate of the south shall go out ***bẏ*** the way of the gate toward the north; he shall not return ***bẏ*** the way of the gate by which he entered, for he shall go out opposite it. And the prince ***shall be*** in their midst; when they enter, he shall enter, and when they go out, they shall go out. And at the feasts and at the appointed times the grain offering shall be approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) for the young bull and approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) for the ram, and for the lambs the gift of his hand, and oil, approximately 1 gallon (a hin) for the ephah. And when the prince offers a freewill offering, a burnt offering or peace offerings, ***as*** a freewill offering to the LORD, then one shall open for him the gate which faces east, and he shall offer his burnt offering and his peace offerings just as he offers on the day of the Sabbath; and he shall go out, and one shall shut the gate after his going out. And a lamb, a son of its year, without blemish, you shall offer ***as*** a burnt offering daily to the LORD; morning by morning you shall offer it. And a grain offering you shall offer with it morning by morning, approximately 3 quarts (a sixth of the ephah), and oil, approximately 1/3 gallon (a third of the hin), to moisten the fine flour, a grain offering to the LORD, statutes forever, continually. They shall offer the lamb and the grain offering and the oil morning by morning, a continual burnt offering.

46:16-24 Thus says the Lord GOD: When the prince gives a gift to any man from his sons, it ***is*** his inheritance; it shall belong to his sons; it ***is*** their possession by inheritance. And when he gives a gift from his inheritance to one of his servants, then it shall belong to him until the year of liberty, and it shall return to the prince; only his inheritance, ***as for*** his sons, it shall belong to them. And the prince shall not take from the inheritance of the people, to oppress them out of their

possession; from his own possession he shall cause his sons to inherit, so that My people shall not be scattered, each man from his possession." And he brought me through the entrance which ***was*** at the side of the gate, to the rooms of holiness for the priests, which faced north; and look, there ***was*** a place there in the far parts westward. And he said to me, "This ***is*** the place where the priests shall boil the guilt offering and the sin offering, where they shall bake the grain offering, so as not to bring ***them*** out into the outer courtyard to sanctify the people." And he brought me out into the outer courtyard, and he caused me to pass to the four corners of the courtyard; and look, a courtyard ***was*** in the corner of the courtyard, a courtyard in the corner of the courtyard. In the four corners of the courtyard ***were*** enclosed courtyards, approximately 70 feet (forty ***cubits***) ***in*** length and approximately 52.5 feet (thirty ***cubits***) ***in*** breadth; one measurement ***belonged*** to the four of them, set in corners. And a row ***was*** all around in them, around the four of them, and boiling places ***were*** made under the rows all around. And he said to me, "These ***are*** the house of the ones boiling, where the ministers of the house shall boil the sacrifice of the people."

Chapter 46 Preview

Chapter 46 continues the rules for worship in the new temple. The inner east gate is shut on the six working days and opened on the Sabbath and the new moon. The prince worships at its threshold while the priests offer his offerings, and the people bow down at the entrance of the gate. God sets the offerings for the Sabbath, the new moon, the feasts and the daily morning burnt offering. He also gives an orderly way for the crowds to come and go at the feasts: whoever comes in by the north goes out by the south, and whoever comes in by the south goes out by the north.

Then God protects the land of the people. The prince may give land to his sons forever, but land he gives to a servant goes back to him in the year of liberty, and he may never take the people's land. The chapter ends with a tour of the temple kitchens, where the priests and Levites cook the offerings.

Chapter 46 Study

46:1-3 *"Thus says the Lord GOD: The gate of the inner courtyard which faces east shall be shut the six days of work, and on the day of the Sabbath it shall be opened, and on the day of the new moon it shall be opened. And the prince shall enter* ***by*** *the way of the porch of the gate from outside, and he shall stand by the doorpost of the gate; and the priests shall offer his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall bow down at the threshold of the gate; and he shall go out, and the gate shall not be shut until the evening. And the people of the land shall bow down* ***at*** *the entrance of that gate on the Sabbaths and on the new moons before the LORD.*

"The gate of the inner courtyard which faces east shall be shut the six days of work, and on the day of the Sabbath it shall be opened, and on the day of the new moon it shall be opened."

This is the inner east gate, not the outer east gate that stays shut forever (44:1-2). It opens on the days set apart for God: the Sabbath, the seventh day of each week, and the new moon, the first day of each month.

"And the prince shall enter by the way of the porch of the gate from outside, and he shall stand by the doorpost of the gate." The prince goes as far as the threshold of the inner gate, but not into the inner court, which is for the priests. "The priests shall offer his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall bow down at the threshold of the gate." Then he goes out, and the gate stays open "until the evening."

The prince is the highest ruler in Israel under Christ, and yet he bows down. He does not serve as a priest. King Uzziah was struck with leprosy when he tried to burn incense in the temple, a job that belonged to the priests (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). In the kingdom, rulers will know their place before God.

"And the people of the land shall bow down at the entrance of that gate on the Sabbaths and on the new moons before the LORD." While the gate is open, the people can look in from the outer court toward the altar and the house, and worship. The prince and the people worship together. He leads them, and he bows with them.

46:4-7 *And the burnt offering which the prince shall bring near to the LORD on the day of the Sabbath* ***shall be*** *six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish; and the grain offering* ***shall be*** *approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) for the ram, and for the lambs the grain offering* ***shall be*** *the gift of his hand, and oil, approximately 1 gallon (a hin) for the ephah. And on the day of the new moon, a young bull, a son of* ***the*** *herd, without blemish, and six lambs and a ram; they shall be without blemish. And approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) for the young bull and approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) for the ram he shall offer* ***as*** *a grain offering, and for the lambs as much as his hand can reach, and oil, approximately 1 gallon (a hin) for the ephah.*

God sets the prince's offerings for these days. On the Sabbath: "six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish," with a grain offering of an ephah (about three-fifths of a bushel) for the ram, and for the lambs "the gift of his hand," as much as he wishes to give, with a hin of oil (about a gallon) for each ephah. On the new moon: "a young bull," "six lambs and a ram," all without blemish, with grain and oil in the same way.

These amounts are different from the ones in the law of Moses. Numbers 28:9-15 calls for two lambs on the Sabbath, and two bulls, one ram and seven lambs on the new moon. Ezekiel's numbers are not the same. That tells us this is not simply the old system started up again. It is a new order of worship that God Himself gives for the kingdom.

46:8-10 *And when the prince enters, he shall enter* ***by*** *the way of the porch of the gate, and by its way he shall go out. And when the people of the land come before the LORD at the appointed times, the one who enters* ***by*** *the way of the gate of the north to bow down shall go out* ***by*** *the way of the gate of the south, and the one who enters* ***by*** *the way of the gate of the south shall go out* ***by*** *the way of the gate toward the north; he shall not return* ***by*** *the way of the gate by which he entered, for he shall go out opposite it. And the prince* ***shall be*** *in their midst; when they enter, he shall enter, and when they go out, they shall go out.*

"And when the prince enters, he shall enter by the way of the porch of the gate, and by its way he shall go out."

"And when the people of the land come before the LORD at the appointed times, the one who enters by the way of the gate of the north to bow down shall go out by the way of the gate of the south." And the one who comes in by the south goes out by the north. "He shall not return by the way of the gate by which he entered, for he shall go out opposite it."

At the great feasts, huge crowds would come to the temple. This rule kept the people moving in one direction, so there was no crush at the gates. It is a practical rule for order in worship. God cares about order (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Some teachers also see a picture in it. A person who comes into God's presence does not go back out the same way. Worship should change us, and send us out in a new direction. That is a fair thought, though the text gives the rule for its practical reason.

"And the prince shall be in their midst; when they enter, he shall enter, and when they go out, they shall go out." The prince does not stand apart from the people at the feasts. He walks in with them and out with them. Good leaders walk with the people they lead.

46:11-15 *And at the feasts and at the appointed times the grain offering shall be approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) for the young bull and approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) for the ram, and for the lambs the gift of his hand, and oil, approximately 1 gallon (a hin) for the ephah. And when the prince offers a freewill offering, a burnt offering or peace offerings,* ***as*** *a freewill offering to the LORD, then one shall open for him the gate which faces east, and he shall offer his burnt offering and his peace offerings just as he offers on the day of the Sabbath; and he shall go out, and one shall shut the gate after his going out. And a lamb, a son of its year, without blemish, you shall offer* ***as*** *a burnt offering daily to the LORD; morning by morning you shall offer it. And a grain offering you shall offer with it morning by morning, approximately 3 quarts (a sixth of the ephah), and oil, approximately 1/3 gallon (a third of the hin), to moisten the fine flour, a grain offering to the LORD, statutes forever, continually. They shall offer the lamb and the grain offering and the oil morning by morning, a continual burnt offering.*

At the feasts and appointed times, the grain offering is an ephah with each bull and each ram, "and for the lambs the gift of his hand," with a hin of oil for each ephah.

"And when the prince offers a freewill offering," something he gives on his own because he wants to, not because it is required, the inner east gate will be opened for him, and "he shall offer his burnt offering and his peace offerings just as he offers on the day of the Sabbath." Then "one shall shut the gate after his going out." God welcomes the worship that comes from a willing heart (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Then comes the daily offering: "a lamb, a son of its year, without blemish, you shall offer as a burnt offering daily to the LORD; morning by morning you shall offer it." With it goes a grain offering of a sixth of an ephah and a third of a hin of oil, "a continual burnt offering."

Under Moses, the daily burnt offering was a lamb in the morning and another in the evening (Exodus 29:38-42; Numbers 28:3-8). Here only the morning lamb is named. Again, this is a different order. Each day begins with an offering to God.

Every believer can learn from that. Start the day with the Lord. The psalmist said, "LORD, in the morning You hear my voice" (Psalm 5:3). The mercies of the LORD "are new in the mornings; great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:23).

46:16-18 *Thus says the Lord GOD: When the prince gives a gift to any man from his sons, it **is** his inheritance; it shall belong to his sons; it **is** their possession by inheritance. And when he gives a gift from his inheritance to one of his servants, then it shall belong to him until the year of liberty, and it shall return to the prince; only his inheritance, **as for** his sons, it shall belong to them. And the prince shall not take from the inheritance of the people, to oppress them out of their possession; from his own possession he shall cause his sons to inherit, so that My people shall not be scattered, each man from his possession."*

Now God gives a law about the prince and the land. "When the prince gives a gift to any man from his sons, it is his inheritance; it shall belong to his sons; it is their possession by inheritance." The prince may give land to his sons, and they keep it.

"And when he gives a gift from his inheritance to one of his servants, then it shall belong to him until the year of liberty, and it shall return to the prince." The year of liberty is the year of jubilee, the fiftieth year, when land returned to the family that first owned it and Israelite servants went free (Leviticus 25:8-13). God gave that law so that no family would lose its land forever. Here the same law keeps the prince's land in the prince's family.

"And the prince shall not take from the inheritance of the people, to oppress them out of their possession." This repeats the warning of 45:8-9. "From his own possession he shall cause his sons to inherit, so that My people shall not be scattered, each man from his possession."

Notice that the prince has sons who inherit. That is another reason I do not take him to be Christ (44:3). He is a human ruler with a family, living under God's law.

God cares about families having a place of their own. In Israel, land was not just property. It was each family's share in the promise God made to Abraham. The rulers of Ezekiel's day had taken land from the weak, and the people were scattered. In the kingdom, that will never happen again.

46:19-24 *And he brought me through the entrance which **was** at the side of the gate, to the rooms of holiness for the priests, which faced north; and look, there **was** a place there in the far parts westward. And he said to me, "This **is** the place where the priests shall boil the guilt offering and the sin offering, where they shall bake the grain offering, so as not to bring **them** out into the outer courtyard to sanctify the people." And he brought me out into the outer courtyard, and he caused me to pass to the four corners of the courtyard; and look, a courtyard **was** in the corner of the courtyard, a courtyard in the corner of the courtyard. In the four corners of the courtyard **were** enclosed courtyards, approximately 70 feet (forty **cubits**) **in** length and approximately 52.5 feet (thirty **cubits**) **in** breadth; one measurement **belonged** to the four of them, set in corners. And a row **was** all around in them, around the four of them, and boiling places **were** made under the rows all around. And he said to me, "These **are** the house of the ones boiling, where the ministers of the house shall boil the sacrifice of the people."*

The guide brings Ezekiel through an entrance at the side of the gate "to the rooms of holiness for the priests, which faced north," and shows him "a place there in the far parts westward." He explains: "This is the place where the priests shall boil the guilt offering and the sin offering, where they shall bake the grain offering, so as not to bring them out into the outer courtyard to sanctify the people." The priests' portions of the most holy offerings are cooked in a holy kitchen, near the priests' rooms of 42:13.

Then the guide takes Ezekiel to the four corners of the outer court. In each corner is a smaller enclosed court, about seventy feet long and fifty-two and a half feet wide, with a row of stone around it and "boiling places" made under the rows. "These are the house of the ones boiling, where the ministers of the house shall boil the sacrifice of the people."

These are the kitchens for the people's peace offerings. A peace offering was shared: part burned on the altar, part given to the priest, and the rest eaten by the worshiper and his family in a joyful meal before the LORD (Leviticus 7:11-18; Deuteronomy 12:7). The Levites cook the meat, and the people eat together in God's house.

It is a homely way to end a chapter about worship. After all the gates and offerings, we see families sitting down to a meal in the courts of the LORD. Worship in God's house is not only bowing and offering. It is also fellowship and joy at His table. Jesus spoke of the day when many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 8:11).

Chapter 46 Summary

God said the inner east gate would be shut on the six working days and opened on the Sabbath and the new moon. The prince would enter by its porch, stand at the doorpost while the priests offered his burnt offerings and peace offerings, and bow down at the threshold, and the people would bow at the entrance of the gate. God set the Sabbath and new moon offerings, different from those of Moses' law, and the grain offerings for the feasts. At the feasts the people would enter by the north or south gate and leave by the opposite one, with the prince going in and out among them. A freewill offering by the prince would open the east gate for him, and a lamb would

be offered every morning as a continual burnt offering. The prince could give land to his sons forever, but a gift to a servant would return in the year of liberty, and he must never take the people's land. Finally, the guide showed Ezekiel the kitchens where the priests cooked the holy offerings and where the Levites boiled the sacrifices for the people to eat.

Chapter 46 Study Questions

1. When was the inner east gate opened, and when was it shut? (46:1)

2. Where did the prince stand and what did he do when the gate was open? (46:2)

3. How were the Sabbath and new moon offerings different from those in Numbers 28? What does that suggest? (46:4-7)

4. Why did the people leave by the opposite gate from the one they entered? (46:9)

5. What was a freewill offering, and how was the prince to offer one? (46:12)

6. What was offered every morning? (46:13-15)

7. What was the year of liberty, and how did it protect the land? (46:17; Leviticus 25:8-13)

8. What were the kitchens in the corners of the outer court used for? (46:21-24)

9. The prince walked in and out with the people at the feasts (46:10). What can leaders today learn from that?

10. Each day in the kingdom begins with an offering to God. How do you begin your day, and how could you give the first part of it to the Lord? (Psalm 5:3)

Chapter 47: The River from the Temple and the Borders of the Land

Scripture

47:1-12 And he brought me back to the entrance of the house; and look, waters ***were*** going out from under the threshold of the house eastward, for the face of the house ***was*** east; and the waters ***were*** going down from under, from the south side of the house, from the south of the altar. And he brought me out ***by*** the way of the gate toward the north, and he led me around ***by*** the way outside to the gate of the outside, ***by*** the way which faces east; and look, waters ***were*** trickling from the south side. When the man went out eastward, and a line ***was*** in his hand, he measured approximately 1,750 feet (a thousand by the cubit), and he made me pass through the waters, waters ***up to the*** ankles. And he measured approximately 1,750 feet (a thousand ***cubits***), and he made me pass through the waters, waters ***up to the*** knees; and he measured approximately 1,750 feet (a thousand ***cubits***), and he made me pass through, waters ***up to the*** loins. And he measured approximately 1,750 feet (a thousand ***cubits***), a river which I was not able to pass through, for the waters had risen, waters of swimming, a river which could not be passed through. And he said to me, "Have you seen, son of man?" And he led me and brought me back ***to*** the bank of the river. When I returned, look, on the bank of the river ***were*** very many trees on this side and on this side. And he said to me, "These waters are going out to the eastern region, and they shall go down to the Arabah, and they shall go toward the sea; into the sea ***they go***, the ***waters*** brought out, and the waters shall be healed. And it shall be ***that*** every living being which swarms, wherever the two rivers go, shall live; and the fish shall be very many, for these waters have gone there, and they shall be healed; and everything shall live wherever the river goes. And it shall be ***that*** fishermen shall stand beside it; from Engedi as far as Eneglaim there shall be a spreading place for nets; their fish shall be according to its kind, like the fish of the Great Sea, very many. Its swamps and its marshes, and they shall not be healed; to salt they are given. And by the river, on its bank on this side and on this side, every tree for food shall grow up; its leaf shall not wither, and its fruit shall not come to an end; according to its months it shall bear new fruit, because its waters, they ***are*** going out from the sanctuary; and its fruit shall be for food, and its leaf for healing."

47:13-23 Thus says the Lord GOD: "This ***is*** the border by which you shall inherit the land for the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph ***shall have*** portions. And you shall inherit it, each man like his brother, ***concerning*** which I lifted up My hand to give it to your fathers; and this land shall fall to you as an inheritance. And this ***is*** the border of the land: on the north side, from the Great Sea ***by*** the way of Hethlon, to the entrance of Zedad, Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim, which ***is*** between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazer-hatticon, which ***is*** on the border of Hauran. And the border shall be from the sea ***to*** Hazar-enan, the border of Damascus, and north northward, and the border of Hamath; and ***this is*** the north side. And the east side: from between Hauran and from between Damascus and from between Gilead and from between the land of Israel, the Jordan; from ***the*** border to the eastern sea you shall measure; and ***this is*** the east side. And the south side southward: from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribah of Kadesh, ***to*** the wadi, to the Great Sea; and ***this is*** the south side southward. And the west side ***is*** the Great Sea, from ***the*** border as far as opposite the entrance of Hamath; this ***is*** the west side. And you shall divide this

land for yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall be ***that*** you shall allot it ***as*** an inheritance for yourselves and for the sojourners who sojourn in your midst, who have fathered sons in your midst; and they shall be to you like the native-born among the sons of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance in the midst of the tribes of Israel. And it shall be ***that*** in the tribe with which the sojourner sojourns, there you shall give ***him*** his inheritance, declares the Lord GOD."

Chapter 47 Preview

The guide brings Ezekiel back to the door of the temple, and he sees water flowing out from under the threshold toward the east. Outside, the guide measures the stream at four points, and each time Ezekiel wades in it is deeper: ankles, knees, waist, and then a river too deep to cross. The river flows down to the Arabah and into the Dead Sea, and the salt water is healed. Fish swarm where nothing could live before, fishermen spread their nets along its shore, and trees grow on both banks, bearing fresh fruit every month, with leaves for healing.

The second half of the chapter sets the borders of the land God promised to the twelve tribes. And it ends with a surprise: foreigners who live among Israel and raise families there will receive an inheritance with the tribes, like the native-born.

Chapter 47 Study

47:1-2 *And he brought me back to the entrance of the house; and look, waters **were** going out from under the threshold of the house eastward, for the face of the house **was** east; and the waters **were** going down from under, from the south side of the house, from the south of the altar. And he brought me out **by** the way of the gate toward the north, and he led me around **by** the way outside to the gate of the outside, **by** the way which faces east; and look, waters **were** trickling from the south side.*

"And he brought me back to the entrance of the house; and look, waters were going out from under the threshold of the house eastward."

In the old temple in Jerusalem, there was no river. The city's water came from springs outside the walls and from cisterns. Here, water flows from the house of God itself, from "under the threshold," and runs east, past the south side of the altar.

Ezekiel follows the guide out by the north gate, since the outer east gate is shut (44:2), and around the outside to the east gate. There he sees the water "trickling from the south side." The Hebrew word suggests water dripping or trickling out of a jar. It starts very small.

The source of the river is the point. It flows from the place where God dwells. In chapter 43 the glory came back to the house. Now life flows out of it. Where God is present, life follows.

47:3-5 *When the man went out eastward, and a line **was** in his hand, he measured approximately 1,750 feet (a thousand by the cubit), and he made me pass through the waters, waters **up to the** ankles. And he measured approximately 1,750 feet (a thousand **cubits**), and he made me pass through the waters, waters **up to the** knees; and he measured approximately 1,750 feet (a thousand **cubits**), and he made me pass through, waters **up to the** loins. And he measured approximately 1,750 feet (a thousand **cubits**), a river which I was not able to pass through, for the waters had risen, waters of swimming, a river which could not be passed through.*

"When the man went out eastward, and a line was in his hand, he measured approximately 1,750 feet (a thousand by the cubit), and he made me pass through the waters, waters up to the ankles."

The guide measures a thousand cubits, about a third of a mile, and leads Ezekiel through the stream. It is ankle-deep. Another thousand cubits, and it is "up to the knees." Another thousand, "up to the loins," waist-deep. Another thousand, and it is "a river which I was not able to pass through, for the waters had risen, waters of swimming."

Think about what is happening. No other streams are joining it. No rain is falling. Normal rivers grow because other waters flow into them. This river grows on its own, the farther it flows from God's house. It starts as a trickle and becomes a river too deep to cross.

That is how God's work often goes. It begins small, a trickle, a few people, a mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32), and it grows by God's power, not man's. The life of God in a person can grow the same way, deeper and deeper over the years. Are you only ankle-deep in the things of God? There is more.

47:6-7 *And he said to me, "Have you seen, son of man?" And he led me and brought me back **to** the bank of the river. When I returned, look, on the bank of the river **were** very many trees on this side and on this side.*

"And he said to me, Have you seen, son of man?" The guide wants Ezekiel to take it in. He brings Ezekiel back to the bank, "look, on the bank of the river were very many trees on this side and on this side."

This valley runs from Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea through the wilderness of Judea, one of the driest places in the land. Very little grows there. Now its banks are lined with trees.

47:8-9 *And he said to me, "These waters are going out to the eastern region, and they shall go down to the Arabah, and they shall go toward the sea; into the sea **they go**, the **waters** brought out, and the waters shall be healed. And it shall be **that** every living being which swarms, wherever the two rivers go, shall live; and the fish shall be very many, for these waters have gone there, and they shall be healed; and everything shall live wherever the river goes.*

"These waters are going out to the eastern region, and they shall go down to the Arabah, and they shall go toward the sea; into the sea they go, the waters brought out, and the waters shall be healed."

The Arabah is the deep valley of the Jordan and the Dead Sea. "The sea" here is the Dead Sea, called "the eastern sea" in 47:18. It is the lowest land on the face of the earth, about fourteen hundred feet below sea level, and its water is so salty that fish cannot live in it. Fish carried down the Jordan into it die. That is why it is called the Dead Sea.

But when the river reaches it, "the waters shall be healed." The salt water becomes fresh. "And it shall be that every living being which swarms, wherever the two rivers go, shall live; and the fish shall be very many." The words "two rivers" are a Hebrew form that may picture the river dividing, or may just stress how great it is. Zechariah says that on the day the Lord's feet stand on the Mount of Olives, "living waters will go out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea" (Zechariah 14:8). Ezekiel follows the branch that goes east.

"And everything shall live wherever the river goes." That is the theme of the whole passage. Death turns to life wherever the water of God reaches.

47:10-11 *And it shall be **that** fishermen shall stand beside it; from Engedi as far as Eneglaim there shall be a spreading place for nets; their fish shall be according to its kind, like the fish of the Great Sea, very many. Its swamps and its marshes, and they shall not be healed; to salt they are given.*

"And it shall be that fishermen shall stand beside it; from Engedi as far as Eneglaim there shall be a spreading place for nets." En-gedi is a spring and oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea, where David once hid from Saul (1 Samuel 24:1). The location of En-eglaim is not known for sure, but it was likely also on the shore of the sea. Fishermen will line the shore from one to the other, spreading their nets to dry. "Their fish shall be according to its kind, like the fish of the Great Sea, very many." The Great Sea is the Mediterranean. The Dead Sea will teem with fish like the ocean.

"Its swamps and its marshes, and they shall not be healed; to salt they are given." Some places along the edge will stay salty. Why? Salt was needed. It was used with every offering (43:24; Leviticus 2:13), for preserving food, and in daily life. God leaves salt where it is useful. Even in the kingdom, He provides for every need.

47:12 *And by the river, on its bank on this side and on this side, every tree for food shall grow up; its leaf shall not wither, and its fruit shall not come to an end; according to its months it shall bear new fruit, because its waters, they **are** going out from the sanctuary; and its fruit shall be for food, and its leaf for healing."*

"And by the river, on its bank on this side and on this side, every tree for food shall grow up; its leaf shall not wither, and its fruit shall not come to an end; according to its months it shall bear new fruit, because its waters, they are going out from the sanctuary; and its fruit shall be for food, and its leaf for healing."

Here is the high point of the vision. The trees never stop bearing. They give new fruit every month. Their leaves never wither. Their fruit feeds, and their leaves heal. And the reason is given: "because its waters, they are going out from the sanctuary." Everything good in this picture flows from the presence of God.

This verse reaches back to the beginning of the Bible. In Eden, "a river was going out from Eden to water the garden" (Genesis 2:10), and in the middle of the garden was the tree of life. Sin shut man out of that garden, and cherubim guarded the way (Genesis 3:24). Ezekiel's river and trees show the curse being rolled back. The land that became like Eden in 36:35 now has its own river of life.

And this verse reaches forward to the end of the Bible. John saw "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, flowing out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," and on each side of the river was "a tree of life producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit according to each single month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:1-2). The picture is almost the same.

How do the two fit together? I believe Ezekiel describes a real river that will flow from the temple in Jerusalem during Christ's thousand-year reign, after the land is changed at His return (Zechariah 14:4, 8, 10). Revelation 22 describes the river of the new Jerusalem in the new heavens and new earth, after the thousand years, when there is no temple, for the Lord God and the Lamb are its temple (Revelation 21:22). The millennial river is a foretaste of the eternal one. Both flow from the presence of God. Both bring life and healing.

Some teachers read Ezekiel's river only as a symbol of the Holy Spirit and the gospel flowing out to the nations. The New Testament does use water as a picture of the Spirit. Jesus said, "Rivers of living water will flow out of his belly," and John explains that He was speaking of the Spirit (John 7:38-39). Jesus told the woman at the well that the water He gives becomes "a spring of water welling up into eternal life" (John 4:14). I believe the river is real, but the spiritual lesson is true too. The life that flows from God's presence is the life of His Spirit, and it is already flowing to everyone who believes in Jesus.

That is the heart of this passage for us today. Wherever the river goes, everything lives. Wherever the Spirit of God goes, dead hearts come alive. Are there dry, dead places in your life? The water of life is still flowing, and Jesus still says, Come to Me and drink (John 7:37). "Let the one who thirsts come; and the one who wishes, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

47:13-14 *Thus says the Lord GOD: "This **is** the border by which you shall inherit the land for the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph **shall have** portions. And you shall inherit it, each man like his brother, **concerning** which I lifted up My hand to give it to your fathers; and this land shall fall to you as an inheritance.*

"This is the border by which you shall inherit the land for the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph shall have portions." The land is to be divided among the twelve tribes. Levi receives no tribal land, because the LORD is their inheritance (44:28), and their place is in the holy portion. So Joseph receives two portions, one for each of his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, as Jacob promised (Genesis 48:5). That keeps the number of tribal portions at twelve.

"And you shall inherit it, each man like his brother." In Joshua's day, the tribes received different sizes of land. Here each tribe receives an equal share.

"Concerning which I lifted up My hand to give it to your fathers." God swore to give this land to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 15:18; 26:3; 28:13). He has not forgotten His oath. "And this land shall fall to you as an inheritance."

47:15-20 *And this **is** the border of the land: on the north side, from the Great Sea **by** the way of Hethlon, to the entrance of Zedad, Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim, which **is** between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazer-hatticon, which **is** on the border of Hauran. And the border shall be from the sea **to** Hazar-enan, the border of Damascus, and north northward, and the border of Hamath; and **this is** the north side. And the east side: from between Hauran and from between Damascus and from between Gilead and from between the land of Israel, the Jordan; from **the** border to the eastern sea you shall measure; and **this is** the east side. And the south side southward: from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribah of Kadesh, **to** the wadi, to the Great Sea; and **this is** the south side southward. And the west side **is** the Great Sea, from **the** border as far as opposite the entrance of Hamath; this **is** the west side.*

God now traces the borders. The north border runs from the Great Sea, the Mediterranean, past Hethlon and "the entrance of Zedad," near Hamath, to Hazar-enan on the border of Damascus. Several of these places cannot be located for certain today, but the line runs well north of Galilee, into what is now Lebanon and Syria.

The east border runs down from there, between Hauran, Damascus and Gilead on one side and the land of Israel on the other, along "the Jordan" to "the eastern sea," the Dead Sea.

The south border runs "from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribah of Kadesh, to the wadi, to the Great Sea." Tamar was south of the Dead Sea. Kadesh was the oasis where Israel camped in the wilderness. The wadi is the Brook of Egypt, a dry riverbed that runs to the Mediterranean.

"And the west side is the Great Sea," up to "opposite the entrance of Hamath."

These are almost exactly the borders God gave Moses in Numbers 34:1-12. Notice that the land east of the Jordan, where Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh settled in Moses' day, is not included. In the kingdom, all twelve tribes will live west of the Jordan.

Israel has never held all of this land in a lasting way. David and Solomon ruled over a wide area, including much of it, but the tribes never settled it as described here. I believe God will give it to them in the kingdom, as He promised.

47:21-23 *And you shall divide this land for yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall be **that** you shall allot it **as** an inheritance for yourselves and for the sojourners who sojourn in your midst, who have fathered sons in your midst; and they shall be to you like the native-born among the sons of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance in the midst of the tribes of Israel. And it shall be **that** in the tribe with which the sojourner sojourns, there you shall give **him** his inheritance, declares the Lord GOD."*

"And you shall divide this land for yourselves according to the tribes of Israel."

Then comes a remarkable command: "you shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the sojourners who sojourn in your midst, who have fathered sons in your midst; and they shall be to you like the native-born among the sons of Israel."

A sojourner was a foreigner who lived among Israel. Under the law of Moses, sojourners were to be treated with kindness and justice (Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:18-19), but they did not receive a share of the land. Here they do. Foreigners who settle among Israel and raise families there will receive an inheritance "in the midst of the tribes of Israel," in whatever tribe they live.

This is grace. It fits the heart of God shown all through Scripture. Rahab of Jericho and Ruth of Moab became part of Israel and even part of the line of David and of Christ (Matthew 1:5). Isaiah said that foreigners who join themselves to the LORD will be brought to His holy mountain, "for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples" (Isaiah 56:7).

For Gentile believers today, this is precious. Paul reminds us that we were once "strangers to the covenants of the promise, not having hope" (Ephesians 2:12), but now in Christ "you are no longer strangers and resident aliens, but fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). That does not mean the church has replaced Israel. Ezekiel's land is still divided among Israel's twelve tribes. It means God's grace has always made room at His table for those who were far off.

Chapter 47 Summary

The guide brought Ezekiel to the door of the temple, where water flowed out from under the threshold eastward, past the south side of the altar. Outside, the guide measured the stream every thousand cubits, and it grew from ankle-deep to knee-deep to waist-deep to a river too deep to cross, though no other water joined it. Trees lined its banks, and it flowed down to the Arabah and into the Dead Sea, where the salt water was healed and fish swarmed like the fish of the Mediterranean, with fishermen from En-gedi to En-eglaim, while the marshes stayed salty for the people's use. On both banks grew fruit trees that never withered and bore new fruit every month, with fruit for food and leaves for healing, because the water came from the sanctuary, a picture like Eden's river and the river of life in Revelation 22:1-2. Then God set the borders of the land for the twelve tribes, much as in Numbers 34, with Joseph receiving two portions and each tribe an equal share, and He commanded that foreigners living among Israel with their families receive an inheritance like the native-born.

Chapter 47 Study Questions

1. Where did the water come from, and which way did it flow? (47:1-2)

2. How deep was the water at each of the four measurements? What is unusual about how this river grows? (47:3-5)

3. What happens when the river reaches the Dead Sea? (47:8-9)

4. Why are the swamps and marshes left salty? (47:11; 43:24)

5. What is special about the trees along the river, and why do they bear fruit? (47:12)

6. How does the river of 47:1-12 compare to the river in Eden (Genesis 2:10) and the river of life (Revelation 22:1-2)?

7. Why does Joseph receive two portions? (47:13; Genesis 48:5)

8. What does God command about the sojourners who live among Israel? How does Ephesians 2:12-19 speak to Gentile believers? (47:22-23)

9. Jesus said rivers of living water would flow from those who believe in Him (John 7:38-39). Where do you see the life of the Spirit flowing in and through you?

10. Are you ankle-deep, knee-deep, or swimming in your walk with God? What would it take to go deeper? (47:3-5)

Chapter 48: The Division of the Land and the City Named The LORD Is There

Scripture

48:1-14 "And these ***are*** the names of the tribes: from the end toward the north, beside the way of Hethlon, ***to*** the entrance of Hamath, Hazar-enan, the border of Damascus northward, beside Hamath, and they shall belong to him, the east side ***to*** the west: Dan, one ***portion***. And by the border of Dan, from the east side to the west side: Asher, one ***portion***. And by the border of Asher, from the east side and to the west side: Naphtali, one ***portion***. And by the border of Naphtali, from the east side to the west side: Manasseh, one ***portion***. And by the border of Manasseh, from the east side to the west side: Ephraim, one ***portion***. And by the border of Ephraim, from the east side and to the west side: Reuben, one ***portion***. And by the border of Reuben, from the east side to the west side: Judah, one ***portion***. And by the border of Judah, from the east side to the west side, shall be the contribution which you shall offer up, twenty-five thousand ***in*** breadth, and ***in*** length like one of the portions, from the east side to the west side; and the sanctuary shall be in its midst. The contribution which you shall offer up to the LORD ***shall be*** twenty-five thousand ***in*** length and ten thousand ***in*** breadth. And for these shall be the holy contribution: for the priests, northward twenty-five thousand, and westward ten thousand ***in*** breadth, and eastward ten thousand ***in*** breadth, and southward twenty-five thousand ***in*** length; and the sanctuary of the LORD shall be in its midst. For the priests who ***are*** sanctified, from the sons of Zadok, who kept My charge, who did not go astray when the sons of Israel went astray, just as the Levites went astray, it shall belong to them, a contribution from the contribution of the land, a holy of holies, by the border of the Levites. And the Levites, corresponding to the border of the priests, ***shall have*** twenty-five thousand ***in*** length and ten thousand ***in*** breadth; all the length ***shall be*** twenty-five thousand and the breadth ten thousand. And they shall not sell any of it, and one shall not exchange ***it***, and one shall not transfer the first of the land; for ***it is*** holy to the LORD.

48:15-35 And the five thousand which remain in the breadth before the face of the twenty-five thousand, it ***is*** common ***land*** for the city, for dwelling and for pasture land; and the city shall be in its midst. And these ***shall be*** its measurements: the north side four thousand five hundred, and the south side four thousand five hundred, and on the east side four thousand five hundred, and the west side four thousand five hundred. And the city shall have pasture land: northward two hundred fifty, and southward two hundred fifty, and eastward two hundred fifty, and westward two hundred fifty. And the remainder in the length corresponding to the holy contribution ***shall be*** ten thousand eastward and ten thousand westward; and it shall be corresponding to the holy contribution, and its produce shall be for food for the workers of the city. And the worker of the city, they shall work it, from all the tribes of Israel. All the contribution ***shall be*** twenty-five thousand by twenty-five thousand; foursquare you shall offer up the holy contribution, with the possession of the city. And the remainder ***shall belong*** to the prince, on this side and on this side of the holy contribution and of the possession of the city, before the face of the twenty-five thousand ***of the*** contribution as far as the east border, and westward before the face of the twenty-five thousand at the west border, corresponding to the portions ***belonging*** to the prince; and the holy contribution and the sanctuary of the house shall be in its midst. And from the

possession of the Levites and from the possession of the city, in the midst of what shall belong to the prince, between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin, it shall belong to the prince. And the rest of the tribes: from the east side to the west side, Benjamin, one ***portion***. And by the border of Benjamin, from the east side to the west side: Simeon, one ***portion***. And by the border of Simeon, from the east side to the west side: Issachar, one ***portion***. And by the border of Issachar, from the east side to the west side: Zebulun, one ***portion***. And by the border of Zebulun, from the east side to the west side: Gad, one ***portion***. And by the border of Gad, at the south side southward, the border shall be from Tamar ***to*** the waters of Meribah of Kadesh, ***to*** the wadi, to the Great Sea. This ***is*** the land which you shall allot by inheritance to the tribes of Israel, and these ***are*** their divisions, declares the Lord GOD. And these ***shall be*** the exits of the city: from the north side, four thousand five hundred ***in*** measurement. And the gates of the city ***shall be*** by the names of the tribes of Israel: three gates northward: the Gate of Reuben, one; the Gate of Judah, one; the Gate of Levi, one. And at the east side, four thousand five hundred, and three gates: and the Gate of Joseph, one; the Gate of Benjamin, one; the Gate of Dan, one. And the south side, four thousand five hundred ***in*** measurement, and three gates: the Gate of Simeon, one; the Gate of Issachar, one; the Gate of Zebulun, one. The west side, four thousand five hundred, their gates three: the Gate of Gad, one; the Gate of Asher, one; the Gate of Naphtali, one. All around ***shall be*** eighteen thousand; and the name of the city from ***that*** day ***shall be*** 'The LORD ***Is*** There.'"

Chapter 48 Preview

The last chapter of Ezekiel divides the land among the twelve tribes. The land is laid out in strips from east to west, seven tribes north of the holy portion and five tribes south of it. In the middle is the holy portion, with the sanctuary of the LORD at its center, the land of the priests and Levites, and the city with its common land, all bordered on the east and west by the land of the prince.

The book ends with the city. It has twelve gates, three on each side, named for the twelve tribes of Israel. And it has a new name: "The LORD Is There" (48:35). Ezekiel began with the glory of God appearing to an exile in a foreign land. He watched that glory leave Jerusalem because of sin. He ends with a city where God lives among His people forever.

Chapter 48 Study

48:1-7 *"And these **are** the names of the tribes: from the end toward the north, beside the way of Hethlon, **to** the entrance of Hamath, Hazar-enan, the border of Damascus northward, beside Hamath, and they shall belong to him, the east side **to** the west: Dan, one **portion**. And by the border of Dan, from the east side to the west side: Asher, one **portion**. And by the border of Asher, from the east side and to the west side: Naphtali, one **portion**. And by the border of Naphtali, from the east side to the west side: Manasseh, one **portion**. And by the border of Manasseh, from the east side to the west side: Ephraim, one **portion**. And by the border of Ephraim, from the east side and to the west side: Reuben, one **portion**. And by the border of Reuben, from the east side to the west side: Judah, one **portion**.*

"And these are the names of the tribes: from the end toward the north." The tribes are listed from north to south. Each one receives a strip of land running "from the east side to the west side,"

from the Jordan to the Mediterranean. Each strip is called "one portion." Each tribe receives an equal share, as God said in 47:14.

North of the holy portion, from the far north down, are Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben and Judah.

This is very different from the map in Joshua's day. Then, the tribes' lands were different sizes and shapes, and some tribes lived east of the Jordan. Here the whole land is laid out in even bands.

Notice also who is placed where. Dan, the first tribe to fall into open idolatry when it set up a carved image at its new home in the north (Judges 18:30-31), is still given its place. Dan is left out of the list of tribes in Revelation 7:5-8, but here Dan receives an inheritance. God's grace includes even the tribe that strayed first. The tribes descended from Jacob's sons by the servant women Bilhah and Zilpah (Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher; Genesis 30:3-13) are placed at the far ends. The tribes of Rachel and Leah are placed closer to the center. Judah, the royal tribe of David, borders the holy portion on the north.

48:8-12 *And by the border of Judah, from the east side to the west side, shall be the contribution which you shall offer up, twenty-five thousand **in** breadth, and **in** length like one of the portions, from the east side to the west side; and the sanctuary shall be in its midst. The contribution which you shall offer up to the LORD **shall be** twenty-five thousand **in** length and ten thousand **in** breadth. And for these shall be the holy contribution: for the priests, northward twenty-five thousand, and westward ten thousand **in** breadth, and eastward ten thousand **in** breadth, and southward twenty-five thousand **in** length; and the sanctuary of the LORD shall be in its midst. For the priests who **are** sanctified, from the sons of Zadok, who kept My charge, who did not go astray when the sons of Israel went astray, just as the Levites went astray, it shall belong to them, a contribution from the contribution of the land, a holy of holies, by the border of the Levites.*

"And by the border of Judah, from the east side to the west side, shall be the contribution which you shall offer up, twenty-five thousand in breadth." This is the holy portion described in 45:1-8, now placed on the map. It is twenty-five thousand long from north to south, and as wide from east to west as one of the tribal portions. "And the sanctuary shall be in its midst."

The central part, twenty-five thousand by ten thousand, belongs to the priests, "and the sanctuary of the LORD shall be in its midst." These are the sons of Zadok, "who kept My charge, who did not go astray when the sons of Israel went astray, just as the Levites went astray" (48:11; see 44:10-15). Their land is "a holy of holies," most holy, because it surrounds God's house.

48:13-14 *And the Levites, corresponding to the border of the priests, **shall have** twenty-five thousand **in** length and ten thousand **in** breadth; all the length **shall be** twenty-five thousand and the breadth ten thousand. And they shall not sell any of it, and one shall not exchange **it**, and one shall not transfer the first of the land; for **it is** holy to the LORD.*

"And the Levites, corresponding to the border of the priests, shall have twenty-five thousand in length and ten thousand in breadth." Next to the priests' land is an equal strip for the Levites.

"And they shall not sell any of it, and one shall not exchange it, and one shall not transfer the first of the land; for it is holy to the LORD." This land is not theirs to trade. It belongs to God. They live on it and use it, but they hold it in trust.

That is true of everything we have. Our time, money, homes and abilities are gifts from God, held in trust for Him (1 Corinthians 4:7; 1 Peter 4:10).

48:15-20 *And the five thousand which remain in the breadth before the face of the twenty-five thousand, it **is** common **land** for the city, for dwelling and for pasture land; and the city shall be in its midst. And these **shall be** its measurements: the north side four thousand five hundred, and the south side four thousand five hundred, and on the east side four thousand five hundred, and the west side four thousand five hundred. And the city shall have pasture land: northward two hundred fifty, and southward two hundred fifty, and eastward two hundred fifty, and westward two hundred fifty. And the remainder in the length corresponding to the holy contribution **shall be** ten thousand eastward and ten thousand westward; and it shall be corresponding to the holy contribution, and its produce shall be for food for the workers of the city. And the worker of the city, they shall work it, from all the tribes of Israel. All the contribution **shall be** twenty-five thousand by twenty-five thousand; foursquare you shall offer up the holy contribution, with the possession of the city.*

"And the five thousand which remain in the breadth before the face of the twenty-five thousand, it is common land for the city, for dwelling and for pasture land; and the city shall be in its midst." The third strip is for the city. It is called common, not in the sense of cheap, but in the sense of ordinary use. It is not holy like the priests' and Levites' land, but it serves the whole nation.

The city itself is a square, "four thousand five hundred" on each side, with a band of pasture land "two hundred fifty" wide all around it. If these are long cubits, the city is about a mile and a half on each side. On each side of the city, east and west, is farmland, "ten thousand eastward and ten thousand westward," and "its produce shall be for food for the workers of the city." Those workers come "from all the tribes of Israel." The city does not belong to one tribe. It belongs to the whole nation.

"All the contribution shall be twenty-five thousand by twenty-five thousand; foursquare you shall offer up the holy contribution, with the possession of the city." The whole holy portion is a perfect square. Once again, the square speaks of completeness and order.

48:21-22 *And the remainder **shall belong** to the prince, on this side and on this side of the holy contribution and of the possession of the city, before the face of the twenty-five thousand **of the** contribution as far as the east border, and westward before the face of the twenty-five thousand at the west border, corresponding to the portions **belonging** to the prince; and the holy contribution and the sanctuary of the house shall be in its midst. And from the possession of the Levites and from the possession of the city, in the midst of what shall belong to the prince, between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin, it shall belong to the prince.*

"And the remainder shall belong to the prince, on this side and on this side of the holy contribution and of the possession of the city." The prince's land stretches from the holy square to

the eastern border and from the holy square to the western border. It lies "between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin." As we saw in 45:7-9, the prince has his own land, so he will never take the people's.

48:23-29 *And the rest of the tribes: from the east side to the west side, Benjamin, one* ***portion****. And by the border of Benjamin, from the east side to the west side: Simeon, one* ***portion****. And by the border of Simeon, from the east side to the west side: Issachar, one* ***portion****. And by the border of Issachar, from the east side to the west side: Zebulun, one* ***portion****. And by the border of Zebulun, from the east side to the west side: Gad, one* ***portion****. And by the border of Gad, at the south side southward, the border shall be from Tamar* ***to*** *the waters of Meribah of Kadesh,* ***to*** *the wadi, to the Great Sea. This* ***is*** *the land which you shall allot by inheritance to the tribes of Israel, and these* ***are*** *their divisions, declares the Lord GOD.*

South of the holy portion are the rest of the tribes, again from east to west, from north to south: Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun and Gad.

Benjamin, the other tribe that stayed with Judah when the kingdom divided (1 Kings 12:21), borders the holy portion on the south, as Judah borders it on the north. Gad is farthest south. Its southern border is the south border of the land, "from Tamar to the waters of Meribah of Kadesh, to the wadi, to the Great Sea," as in 47:19.

"This is the land which you shall allot by inheritance to the tribes of Israel, and these are their divisions, declares the Lord GOD."

God keeps His promises in detail. He promised this land to Abraham about four thousand years ago (Genesis 13:14-17; 15:18), and here He assigns it, tribe by tribe. Not one tribe is forgotten. Not one inheritance is lost. If God is that faithful with the boundaries of a land, we can trust Him with every promise He has made to us.

48:30-34 *And these* ***shall be*** *the exits of the city: from the north side, four thousand five hundred* ***in*** *measurement. And the gates of the city* ***shall be*** *by the names of the tribes of Israel: three gates northward: the Gate of Reuben, one; the Gate of Judah, one; the Gate of Levi, one. And at the east side, four thousand five hundred, and three gates: and the Gate of Joseph, one; the Gate of Benjamin, one; the Gate of Dan, one. And the south side, four thousand five hundred* ***in*** *measurement, and three gates: the Gate of Simeon, one; the Gate of Issachar, one; the Gate of Zebulun, one. The west side, four thousand five hundred, their gates three: the Gate of Gad, one; the Gate of Asher, one; the Gate of Naphtali, one.*

"And these shall be the exits of the city." The city has a wall with twelve gates, three on each side. "And the gates of the city shall be by the names of the tribes of Israel."

On the north are the gates of Reuben, Judah and Levi. On the east are the gates of Joseph, Benjamin and Dan. On the south are the gates of Simeon, Issachar and Zebulun. On the west are the gates of Gad, Asher and Naphtali.

Notice that here Levi has a gate, and Joseph has one gate instead of two for Ephraim and Manasseh. In the division of the land, Levi had no tribal portion, so Joseph's two sons were

counted separately to make twelve. In the gates of the city, Levi is counted with his brothers and Joseph is one, as in the list of Jacob's twelve sons (Genesis 35:23-26). Every son of Jacob has his name on a gate.

Each side measures "four thousand five hundred," and the whole city is "eighteen thousand" around, about six miles if the measure is the long cubit.

John saw the same pattern in the holy city, new Jerusalem. It had "a great and high wall, having twelve gates," and on the gates were the names "of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel" (Revelation 21:12), three gates on each side (Revelation 21:13). The city of Ezekiel's vision in the thousand-year kingdom and the eternal city John saw are not the same city, since John's comes down out of heaven and is far larger. But both carry the names of Israel's tribes on their gates. God's promises to Israel are built into the very gates of His city.

48:35 *All around **shall be** eighteen thousand; and the name of the city from **that** day **shall be** 'The LORD **Is** There.'"*

"All around shall be eighteen thousand." And "the name of the city from that day" shall be "The LORD Is There."

In Hebrew the name is Yahweh Shammah. The LORD is there. These are the last words of the book of Ezekiel, and they sum up everything God was doing through it.

Think back over the whole book. In chapter 1, Ezekiel sat among the exiles by the river Chebar, far from the temple, and the heavens opened. The glory of God came to him in a foreign land. In chapters 8 to 11, Ezekiel watched that glory leave the temple in Jerusalem, step by step, because the people filled God's house with idols. It paused at the threshold, at the east gate, and on the mountain to the east, and then it was gone. For a priest, there could be no sadder sight. Jerusalem became the city the LORD had left.

Then the city fell (33:21). But God did not stop there. He promised to search for His scattered sheep (34:11), to give His people a new heart and His own Spirit (36:26-27), to raise the dry bones of Israel and set them in their land (37:1-14), to defeat their last enemy (38-39), and to put His sanctuary in their midst forever (37:26-28). In chapter 43 the glory came back by the east gate and filled the house. And now the city that God once left has a new name. It is the city where the LORD is.

Which city is this? Ezekiel does not name it. Most premillennial teachers believe it is Jerusalem, rebuilt and renamed in the kingdom. Jeremiah said that at that time "they will call Jerusalem" by a new name, "The throne of the LORD" (Jeremiah 3:17). Isaiah and Zechariah also give Jerusalem new names in the age to come (Isaiah 60:14; 62:2-4; Zechariah 8:3). Some teachers think Ezekiel's city is a new city in the holy portion, near the temple but separate from it. Either way, its name tells us what matters most about it. The best thing about this city is not its walls, its gates or its size. It is that God is there.

That has always been the heart of God's plan. In the garden, God walked with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:8). In the wilderness, He told Moses, "they shall make for Me a sanctuary, and I will

dwell in their midst" (Exodus 25:8). In the fullness of time, the Son of God came as Immanuel, "which is translated, God with us" (Matthew 1:23). He "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Before He went back to heaven, He promised, "look, I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age" (Matthew 28:20). He has given His Spirit to live in every believer (John 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19). And at the very end, a loud voice from the throne says, "Look, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them, and they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them, their God" (Revelation 21:3).

The LORD is there. That is the hope of Israel, and it is the hope of every believer. Heaven is not mainly a place of gold streets and gates of pearl. It is where God is. And the best news of the gospel is that through Jesus Christ, God is with us now and will be with us forever.

Is the LORD there in your life? Not just near you, not just in your family's history or your church's building, but with you, because you belong to Him through His Son? If He is, then wherever you go, even into your own exile, you can say what Ezekiel saw at the end of his book: The LORD is there.

Chapter 48 Summary

God divided the land among the twelve tribes in equal strips from east to west: Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben and Judah in the north, and Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun and Gad in the south. Between Judah and Benjamin lay the holy portion, a square of twenty-five thousand on each side, holding the land of the priests, the sons of Zadok, with the sanctuary of the LORD in its midst, the land of the Levites, which could never be sold, and the common land of the city, worked by people from all the tribes, with the prince's land on the east and west. The city was a square with twelve gates, three on each side, named for the twelve sons of Jacob, like the gates of the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21. And the name of the city from that day would be "The LORD Is There." The book that began with God's glory appearing to an exile, and watched it leave Jerusalem, ends with God dwelling among His people forever.

Chapter 48 Study Questions

1. How was the land divided among the tribes, and how did that differ from the division in Joshua's day? (48:1-7, 23-29)

2. Which tribes border the holy portion on the north and the south? (48:7-8, 22-23)

3. Why were the priests, the sons of Zadok, given the land around the sanctuary? (48:10-11)

4. Why could the Levites not sell or exchange their land? (48:14)

5. Who worked the land around the city, and what does that say about whom the city belongs to? (48:18-19)

6. What were the names on the twelve gates, and how is this list different from the list of tribal portions? (48:31-34)

7. How does the city of Ezekiel 48 compare with the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21:12-13?

8. What is the name of the city, and how does it tie together the whole book of Ezekiel? (48:35; 10:18-19; 43:1-5)

9. Trace God's plan to dwell with His people through Exodus 25:8, Matthew 1:23 and Revelation 21:3. What does it mean to you that God wants to be with you?

10. Can you say that the LORD is there in your life? What would change in your week if you lived each day aware that He is with you? (Matthew 28:20)

Conclusion

Ezekiel begins with a priest in exile by the river Chebar, seeing the glory of God in a foreign land, and it ends with a city whose name is "The LORD Is There" (48:35). In between, we watched that glory leave the temple in Jerusalem because God's people had filled His house with idols. We heard Ezekiel warn, act out signs, and grieve, until the day the escapee came with the news, "The city has been struck" (33:21). Then the message turned. God promised to be the Shepherd of His scattered sheep, to raise up His servant David over them, to bring the dry bones of Israel to life, to defeat their last enemy, and to dwell in their midst forever. The glory that left by the east gate came back by the east gate and filled the house.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. Read that way, Ezekiel shows us a God who is holy and will not wink at sin, and a God who keeps every promise He makes. He kept His word of judgment on Jerusalem in 586 B.C., just as Ezekiel said. I believe He will keep His word of restoration to Israel just as surely, when Jesus Christ, the Son of David and the good Shepherd, returns to reign. God's gifts and calling are not taken back (Romans 11:29).

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and give you a deeper sense of His glory and His grace. Ezekiel fell on his face every time he saw the glory of the LORD. May we never grow casual about the God we worship, and may we never forget how far He has gone to bring us home.

The heart of Ezekiel's good news is not that God's people will finally try harder. It is that God Himself will change them. "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh" (36:26). Jesus told Nicodemus that a person must be born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). That new birth comes through Jesus, who died for our sins and rose again, and who gives His Spirit to everyone who trusts in Him. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (33:11). He calls us to turn and live. The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow in God's Word and follow the good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11; 1 Peter 2:25).

Bibliography

The following source was consulted throughout this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

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