

A Study of Ezekiel

Part Two:
Portrayals, Parables, and
Proverbs

Bob Faulkner

Dedication:

To diligent students of the Word

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PREFACE

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

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

"They are a rebellious house."

I have divided these unusual prophecies into portrayals, parables, and proverbs. The portrayals are visual aids given by God to illustrate, without words for the most part, coming judgment. Parables are of the spoken variety, stories that match the doings of Israel and Israel's God. The proverbs were circulating among the Jewish people, and needed a word of correction or explanation from Yahweh. Ezekiel is the messenger of all three forms.

I have continued the question-and-answer method and the quoting of the English Standard Version of the Bible.

A STUDY OF EZEKIEL

PART TWO

Portrayals, Parables, Proverbs

Chapters (or portions thereof):

4-6, 12, 15-18, 23, 24, 33,

PORTRAYALS

Portrayal 1: The Siege of Jerusalem.

1. How is it that Ezekiel was able to be seen and heard by his fellow exiles?

There are some things we must assume. Ezekiel is a known figure in the exiled community. People have heard him speak and are regularly watching him and his movements. So, when he suddenly builds a miniature city and labels it “Jerusalem”, the people around him are anxiously awaiting the message. He reminds us of the sidewalk chalk artist or street preacher who through his dramatic ways knows how to draw a crowd.

Jerusalem has already suffered much, but more troubles are coming, says the prophet. For one, Babylon will besiege the city.

2. How can an entire city be engraved on a brick?

4:1. *And you, son of man, take a brick and lay it before you, and engrave on it a city, even Jerusalem.*

As a matter of fact, much that we know about ancient Mesopotamia is from the discovery of bricks, or tiles, with vivid inscriptions. Those who had lived in Jerusalem much if not all of their lives, could recognize its skyline. The Temple, the hill of Zion. Ezekiel simply sketched this image, and allowed his friends and neighbors to see it.

Word got around that the priest/prophet was trying to say something. An outdoor show of this nature got their attention in this media-free age. "Let's go down to the prophet's house and see what he is creating today." The word got around quickly.

Thus did God give to his man a silent but powerful testimony in a series of visual aids.

Alright, Lord. The tile is finished. The city of Jerusalem, the heart throb of the people gathered around me, is visible. Now what?

3. How was Ezekiel to represent in his artwork that Jerusalem was about to be besieged by a foreign enemy?

4:2. And put siegeworks against it, and build a siege wall against it, and cast up a mound against it. Set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around.

Whether Ezekiel continued tracing on tiles, or created a model of the scene unfolding is not clear. What is clear is the imagery taking shape. Nebuchadnezzar is not finished with Judah and Jerusalem. This must have shocked the onlookers, as they gradually figured out what Ezekiel was silently saying. Had not Jerusalem been plundered enough? Had not enough citizens been relocated. No, the worst was still ahead.

4. What is a siege? Why is this siege coming to Jerusalem?

For those who may not be familiar with the term, a *siege* is a military blockade of a city by an enemy power. It is a persistent daily effort to bring a city to full surrender.

How is it possible that Jerusalem was still holding out against Babylon? What madness could compel it to stand against this mighty Empire that had swallowed up all the nations around Israel and had decimated Judah twice already?

The answer is not faith. It was faith that was called for earlier in Judah's history, when there was still an iota of righteousness left, especially in its great king Hezekiah. The might of Assyria had carried away Judah's sister-kingdom Israel and was threatening to wreak similar havoc in the South.

Then Hezekiah prayed. God intervened. All was reversed.

But unbelievable wickedness has overtaken Judah. The son of Hezekiah, and later the offspring of Josiah have now caused a stench in God's nostrils that demands judgment. The threat returns. Jeremiah warns essentially, "Do not resist Babylon. This judgment *will* take place!"

So, 605 B.C., judgment. 597 B.C., judgment. Jeremiah was right. But the present king, Zedekiah, is not buying. Jeconiah, king before him, has already been taken captive. Zedekiah, a puppet king placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar himself, rebels against the Emperor, and will not let this same fate come to him.

Wickedness continues to fester. Hence the call of Ezekiel and the ministry given to him.

5. Who were the last rulers of Israel, involved in these dealings with Nebuchadnezzar, and living during Ezekiel's prophecy?

There is some confusion regarding the family of [good] king Josiah that followed him in the rule of Judah. Let me try to dispel it:

- After the untimely death of Josiah, the people made one of his sons, **Jehoahaz**, king (609 B.C.). That lasted three months. A very wicked man. The Pharaoh of Egypt, another threatening power of the day, vying with Babylon for control, captured Jehoahaz, took him to Egypt (where he died), and placed his brother Eliakim on Judah's throne.
- Eliakim's name was changed to **Jehoiakim**. Another evil man, a puppet of the Pharaoh, he reigned for eleven years (609-597 B.C.) Babylon then rose to power over the entire area, and Jehoiakim became its servant. Same puppet, different puppeteer. He submitted to Babylon from 604-602 B.C., but then rebelled, against common sense and the very words of God through Jeremiah. The rebellion provoked an attack on Judah, the second of three such assaults. But just before Nebuchadnezzar entered Jerusalem, Jehoiakim died. When he died, his son Jehoiachin became king (597 B.C.)
- **Jehoiachin**, the king who will go captive with Ezekiel, had no sooner taken the throne when Judah was assaulted by the Babylonian Emperor (597). As we stated earlier, Jehoiachin is a prisoner for many years in Babylon, but later to be released, become a friend of the court, and die of old age.
- **Zedekiah**. The utter destruction of Jerusalem still does not take place, and another puppet is placed in the city by Nebuchadnezzar: he is Jehoiachin's uncle. That is, he is a son

of Josiah, one of three brothers that ruled Judah at one time: Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim are the other two. This brother is Mattaniah, and he also experienced a name change signifying the power of the name-changer. He is to be called Zedekiah. Zedekiah will play along with the Emperor for some time, but eventually he too rebels, is captured, blinded, and taken prisoner (586 B.C.).

In terms of our Ezekiel study: Jehoiachin is captured with Ezekiel; Zedekiah is still ruling Judah, and his evil and rebellion are the reason for God's final warning to Judah through the prophet.

6. How were ancient towns besieged and conquered?

(See again 4:2 above.)

The wall. The mound. The camps. The battering rams. What is all this about?

According to those who study these things, first a wall would be built around the city. A mound, (or tower in some translations) would then rise from which to observe the day-to-day behavior of the besieged. A catapult could operate from the mound, and arrows could easily reach their targets from this extra height.

Soldiers were stationed in the various *camps* mentioned here, ready to deploy as called upon. I think battering rams are self-explanatory.

Using sticks, stones, clay-made figures, and combining all this with a Spirit-led imagination, the street artist was able to portray the entire operation to the curious onlookers, who told their friends, who told their friends etc.

7. What was the function of the “iron griddle”?

4:3. *And you, take an iron griddle, and place it as an iron wall between you and the city; and set your face toward it, and let it be in a state of siege, and press the siege against it. This is a sign for the house of Israel.*

One now needs to imagine a scene as found in archaeological ruins, of an iron shield behind which men can safely shoot arrows into the city with no fear of retaliation. In addition to the mounds and camps and wall here is one more piece of the enemy’s plan to destroy Jerusalem.

The griddle was simply a flat iron pan, easily found around the house of Ezekiel. The location of its placement is between Ezekiel and his “Jerusalem.” The prophet is told now to act out the siege. Perhaps move the characters around, sling sticks into the city, stand behind the “wall” and hurl weapons. At the very least, Ezekiel’s face is to show his intention of animosity toward the now-cursed Jerusalem.

How difficult must this have been! God had not yet opened the prophet’s mouth but already he is being asked to demonstrate Yahweh’s coming wrath on His own people, and Ezekiel’s.

Next comes the timing of the decreed punishment.

Portrayal 2: Lying down on a Tel-Abib street.

8. Did Ezekiel actually lie down for 430 days straight?

4:4-8. "Then lie on your left side, and place the punishment of the house of Israel upon it. For the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their punishment. For I assign to you a number of days, 390 days, equal to the number of the years of their punishment. So long shall you bear the punishment of the house of Israel. And when you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah. Forty days I assign you, a day for each year. And you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem, with your arm bared, and you shall prophesy against the city. And behold, I will place cords upon you, so that you cannot turn from one side to the other, till you have completed the days of your siege.

Several issues to deal with in this second visual, which is connected to the first:

9. How should we view the enacting of this directive?

We are not told how many hours *each day* he is to be visibly stretched out on the street. He is told to prepare food. We assume he went home evenings as would all the residents of the Tel-Abib community. But we cannot lessen the severity of this exercise by suggesting he was not there full time.

If we are to be consistently literal, we must read the account as it is written, and marvel at the grace upon this man. Note that God had to put cords on him (v.8) to keep him in place for that long period. Most agree this was some sort of supernatural constraint. What human being could deliberately lay in the same position hour after hour, days upon weeks upon months? 390 days stretches past the year mark!

What a way to start this ministry! What a task of bitterness to follow the sweetness of the call from Heaven!

We are not told, but we assume that all of the dramatic scene he has created based on the first instructions are still in place. The difference now is that Ezekiel is not now actively involved in the human struggle of slinging arrows etc. He seems to be representing God Himself in this position of set defiance against Jerusalem.

10. Did Ezekiel bear the punishment of Israel?

Ezekiel is not the sin-bearer or the punishment-giver here. But He lies there in public as a visible stand in for the One who is both.

11. Why 390 years and why 40 years?

Commentators are all over the map as to what these years signify. For example, why so much more for Israel? The conjecture is that Israel was evil much longer and with greater intensity. Never was there a king who loved God with all his heart in the Northern Kingdom. Judah actually had a lot of them. Further, never did the majority of the people of the north worship in the true Temple in the true way. True worship was set up permanently in Judah.

Some want to take the 390 and 40 as symbolic only. The total of 430 years is one known to all: the time of the sojourn in Egypt.

Forty is the wandering in the wilderness. And so on. Ezekiel then is just reminding them of past punishments and past deliverances.

So did the actual days of the Ezekiel siege amount to 430? Or was a portion of the sentence overlapping? That is, Judah and Israel are to be punished simultaneously for the last 40 years, making 390 years the total length?

And should we stretch back into Israel's history to find 390 bad years? And into Judah's to find 40 bad years?

Or should we start counting from 586 B.C., the final destruction of Jerusalem, and go forward that many years to measure a punishment period to come? No, that doesn't work. You can look for yourself.

Again tending toward the literal and most obvious, I favor those men who have tried to find in Israel's past, counting backward from the destruction coming in 586 B.C., a time when Israel, and later Judah, went down in God's favor.

Using this method, the one event that rings true to me is the fourth year of King Rehoboam (Solomon's son and heir), when the ten tribes of Israel revolted and turned to idolatry. *390 years earlier...*

As for Judah, though its history is a bit checkered, there was still hope all the way to Josiah who led a huge revival and restored that tribe to its most favored status. For a while.

But Josiah had multiple wives, and began to take on battles that were not his, leading ultimately to his death and the reign of his wicked descendants. *All that had happened 40 years from the 586 date.*

12. Why “left” and “right” sides?

Some have conjectured that as Ezekiel was lying on his left side he was facing north, bespeaking the northern kingdom. Obviously, the right side would point to the southern tribe-Kingdom of Judah.

Ezekiel is thus to proceed with “bared arm”, a term used to describe the fighting nature of our God in places like Isaiah 52:10, *“The LORD will lay **bare** his holy **arm** in the sight of all the nations, and ... the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.”*

His God has made up His mind that Judah will be judged. Holding his prophet in cords that cannot be broken, He speaks that word on a street corner of Tel-Abib.

Portrayal 3. Ezekiel's unorthodox meals.

13. What is the meaning of Ezekiel's recommended diet?

4:9-13. *“And you, take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and emmer, and put them into a single vessel and make your bread from them. During the number of days that you lie on your side, 390 days, you shall eat it. And your food that you eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day; from day to day you shall eat it. And water you shall drink by measure, the sixth part of a hin; from day to day you shall drink. And you shall eat it as a barley cake, baking it in their sight on human dung.” And the LORD said, “Thus shall the people of Israel eat their bread unclean, among the nations where I will drive them.”*

Just when it seems the scene cannot get any more unusual... it gets more unusual. The siege is on. The Lord's face is set against Israel. Ezekiel lies on the street over a 390- to a 430-day period.

And now he eats. And the people watch what he eats.

Cereal and bread lovers will be quick to recognize the combination of grains spelled out here and now known as *Ezekiel 4:9*. A little pricey for me, but a good product.

I wonder how many would keep buying it if the full recipe of the Lord were placed on the package, and not just the grains? God's original plan was to have Ezekiel bake this bread *over human dung*.

The ingredients listed are a mixture of the good but soon-to-be-scarce grains, along with the more plentiful but coarse and less desirable ones. This would be the sort of mixture one would expect

to see in a land suffering from shortages. Soon Israel will be reduced to eating such bread. Not sure if the makers of today's bread took any of this into their thinking either. This is the bread of hard times. The bread of desperation. Not a health food for elite Israelites.

As to the amount, this twenty shekels is prison or pauper rations. Once a day Ezekiel is to eat a scant slice of bread. For over a year. The accompanying water, perhaps a small glass, would wash it down. And as Ezekiel lay there in the battle scene, the people were to know that this daily feeding would soon be the plight of their brothers and sisters left in Jerusalem. Horrible times coming as the siege continues on, and the Jews are scattered to unsympathizing nations.

How bake this bread? What is to be the fuel for the fire? The *excrement of humans*. This was not a practice unknown to the people, but certainly it was unknown in times of plenty. It was an unclean practice and God labels it as such here.

Human excrement was to be buried, per Deuteronomy 23:12-14. Never exposed, and certainly never used as charcoal!

14. What is Ezekiel's objection to the menu?

4:14-17. *Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I have never defiled myself. From my youth up till now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has tainted meat come into my mouth." Then he said to me, "See, I assign to you cow's dung instead of human dung, on which you may prepare your bread." Moreover, he said to me, "Son of man, behold, I will break the*

supply of bread in Jerusalem. They shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure and in dismay. I will do this that they may lack bread and water, and look at one another in dismay, and rot away because of their punishment.

What a dreadful scene. Ezekiel can't stand it and offers his first objection, not based on delicacy, but based on his desire to keep the very law it seems that God Himself is bypassing. This priest knew his Bible!

A New Testament character was once asked to defile himself in a similar manner by eating foods specifically forbidden by Moses' law. But God had something better in mind then: A brand new covenant written on the hearts of man that would not be concerned about eating and drinking, but upon the righteousness that only Christ can procure and infuse. (Peter in Acts 10 and 11.)

In Ezekiel's case, the Lord decides to make a slight alteration. The cow will be substituted for the human in terms of dung fire. Ezekiel is relieved, and the general detestability is kept in place. Yet, as one commentator points out, when the siege began and the punishment came on Israel, they did things far worse than use human waste to start a fire. Cannibal behavior, for example.

In the final verses of this command, the Lord explains to Ezekiel exactly what he will be picturing: Rations. Anxiety. Starvation.

Is there any reader who still desires the office of prophet?

Recall that Ezekiel has not yet spoken a word. Yet he has told an entire community of exiled Jews that their beloved capital is going to be besieged, starved out of existence, conquered, destroyed. Their people are going to be absolutely humiliated.

Yes, he could have said it all in words. But wouldn't you say this method got and kept their attention for those long months in Babylonia?

And now the new prophet will have an audience that will listen, should he speak again, silently or otherwise.

Portrayal 4. The prophet given a haircut.

15. How will the prophet use his own hair to preach a sermon to the exiles?

5:1-4. *And you, O son of man, take a sharp sword. Use it as a barber's razor and pass it over your head and your beard. Then take balances for weighing and divide the hair. A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. And a third part you shall take and strike with the sword all around the city. And a third part you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after them. And you shall take from these a small number and bind them in the skirts of your robe. And of these again you shall take some and cast them into the midst of the fire and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will come out into all the house of Israel.*

He is now to cut his beard and all the hair of his head, lay it on scales, divide it into thirds. One third is to be burned, symbolizing those Jews who will die by plague or famine. One third, he is to attack with a sword in his mini city, representing that third that will literally die by the sword. The final third is to be thrown into the air and scattered by the wind, showing that scattering is coming to the ones whose lives are spared.

But wait. Ezekiel is a priest. Does not Moses forbid any tampering with hair or beard of a priest? Is the prophet once more being asked to defy the principles that this God has set in order? It seems so, but there is no complaint this time.

Beyond the legal is the personal/moral issue involved. The commentator tells us that the beard of the Eastern man is precious to him. Removing it and the hair too is a shameful act. At best it represents deep sorrow.

The word for “sword” is used in both verse 1 and verse 2, in the latter of which it clearly describes its intended use. So “sword” must remain in verse 1. A sharp knife would suffice for Ezekiel and for the Hebrew, but the imagery is clear. Use it as a knife. But use a sword. Let the people know that I am going to use such an instrument to come against my people in Jerusalem.

Lost in the drama, if we are not careful, is the “small number” taken from the scattered third, and placed, as it were, in the prophet’s pocket. And from the small number, more suffering. What is this about?

It is true that there were a few Jews left in their land to do the servile work of maintaining agricultural necessities. But even this small number had to endure serious problems as the land settled under its new ruler for seventy years.

It is also true that even in that final slaughter, some Jews were brought to Babylon, and returned later with the company of Israel. There was some suffering that awaited them also as they were opposed in the rebuilding of the city and Temple.

One of these scenarios is being foretold through the prophet. God will not make a *full end* of Israel/Judah, but neither will he allow them to have perfect peace at this time. Remnant theology is everywhere in Scripture, starting with Noah’s eight-member family.

And now shall the prophet speak? For the first time, yes, he opens his mouth.

16. How did Israel compare to the nations around her?

5:5-9. "Thus says the Lord GOD: This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. And she has rebelled against my rules by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries all around her; for they have rejected my rules and have not walked in my statutes. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not walked in my statutes or obeyed my rules, and have not even acted according to the rules of the nations that are all around you, therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, even I, am against you. And I will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations. And because of all your abominations I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again."

Humanly speaking, we place high expectations on a child to whom we have given every opportunity to succeed. Tutors, the best schools and colleges. Perhaps private music lessons. Teaching all the social graces, even directing to proper friendships and potential life mates. An appropriate amount of financial assistance is always available. Living conditions all ideal. Educational travel.

When the youth is thus prepared, he/she goes into the world to become a significant player in the human arena, or even the church.

Or not.

It doesn't always happen, does it? And in God's wonderful dealings with his son Israel, it definitely did not happen. Israel – the nation, that is – was delivered from a horrible bondage, trained by God

Himself, equipped fully to overcome many nations stronger than himself. A significant piece of real estate was handed over to Israel, a land of his own, in one of the most advantageous locations of earth, part of the Fertile Crescent, where the goods and services of many surrounding nations passed through to enrich and beautify.

Now, Israel, produce something for Me, said the teacher/parent. Look how I have blessed you. How will you bless Me in return?

Slowly and very surely the Israelite people turned away from their Father and Master to other lords. They were distracted by every god of every neighbor. Solomon married women who were connected to these gods. After Solomon, Jeroboam took ten of the tribes who had already fallen away to idolatry, and made them fall away farther.

There were good moments. But essentially Israel became a colossal disappointment. They were worse than their neighbors in the amount of ungodliness. They were worse than their neighbors in walking in the light they were given. They were ungrateful children. Rebels, as God had told Ezekiel from the beginning.

Now the price would have to be paid. As the Canaanites whom they replaced, they had become a poison to the very ground they occupied and would have to be removed, simply from a humanitarian standpoint. False religion is deadly. And false religion that is somehow attributed to the God of Heaven cannot be tolerated.

God says in conclusion, I will punish you in a way I have never punished anyone, for you have sinned in a way that no other nation has sinned.

17. As the worst nation in the entire area, what unusual punishments will be visited on Israel?

5:10-17. *Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers. And I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to all the winds. Therefore, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will withdraw. My eye will not spare, and I will have no pity. A third part of you shall die of pestilence and be consumed with famine in your midst; a third part shall fall by the sword all around you; and a third part I will scatter to all the winds and will unsheathe the sword after them. Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them and satisfy myself. And they shall know that I am the LORD—that I have spoken in my jealousy—when I spend my fury upon them. Moreover, I will make you a desolation and an object of reproach among the nations all around you and in the sight of all who pass by. You shall be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations all around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury, and with furious rebukes—I am the LORD; I have spoken—when I send against you the deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, and when I bring more and more famine upon you and break your supply of bread. I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword upon you. I am the LORD; I have spoken.”*

The list of corrective measures is unimaginable. When Father is angry, there is no place to hide.

1. Cannibalism. The siege will produce such hunger that fathers will eat sons and sons, fathers.
2. Scattering. You think you somehow survived all this? Not so. Those remaining will be scattered, away from the land.
3. Withdrawal. My presence will no longer be a given. The worst fate of all.
4. No pity. No use crying out for mercy. Those days are over.
5. One-third of you will die of disease and starvation.
6. One-third more who thought you could escape or fight your way to victory will find I am not fighting for and with you any longer. You will lose, and die.
7. One-third of you may get out alive, but the places you run to will be devoid of my protection, and you will die there too.
8. Wild beasts will help me finish off any who remain. They will eat your children.
9. If by chance you still survive, you will be taunted and jeered by all who know of the desecration I have made of your land. You will not be proud of the nation I gave you through David and Solomon. You will be humiliated because of the nation you have created through ungodly kings and priests.

Ezekiel's mouth is open. This is not the odd man drawing pictures on the sidewalk, lying down on the street hardly able to move from hunger. Poor Ezekiel! No, suddenly he is talking, and his words are

more biting and hurtful than they had ever imagined possible. And he says that the Lord has told him all these things!

Portrayal 5: Ezekiel preaches to mountains and hills and valleys.

18. Why a special message to nature?

(Sermon 1) 6:1-7. The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. Your altars shall become desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain before your idols. And I will lay the dead bodies of the people of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars. Wherever you dwell, the cities shall be waste and the high places ruined, so that your altars will be waste and ruined, your idols broken and destroyed, your incense altars cut down, and your works wiped out. And the slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I am the LORD."

Ezekiel now is to set his gaze south, and before the wondering crowd that now is his, he is to address a sermon to the idol-filled hills and mountains and the places in between, of his homeland. God will bring the Babylonian sword to destroy them all. Not intending to destroy the works of nature, we understand, but the abominations that took place there.

Specifically mentioned are altars, incense altars, idols, and the people who used them.

Whether in high places given to the sun-god worship or ravines dedicated to the Phoenician Astaroth worshiped with Ba'al, all will be torn down, as well as the worshipers. Yes, some worshiped in their own way the God of Israel in those places, but such worship was not ordered of the Lord and is therefore to come down with a vengeance also.

No more incense on these hills. The stench of rotting flesh instead.

No more offering of children to appease their gods. They themselves will be given in sacrifice, and their bones scattered.

Idolatry was at the heart of Israel's corruption. And here God shows the people of God today the importance of true worship! Whether good worship to a false god or corrupted worship to the true God, it will not be accepted. *Eventually God brings it all down.*

Let the church beware. Is the real Jesus being approached in the smoke-filled darkrooms of some modern assemblies? If it is Jesus, is this worship in Spirit and Truth, as He loves so much?

Has worship become big business among us? Has it become entertainment? Is it pure flesh that makes the worshiper feel good but creates fury in the heart of God? Each pastor will have to respond to these queries. In Israel's case, it was too late to respond.

So ends Ezekiel's first message to the mountains. Sermon two will be included in part 5 of this series, regarding the restoration of Israel. Ezekiel will be given quite a different set of facts regarding the mountains of Israel, thrilling to hear.

19. Then Israel is finished? Not one Jew will be saved from this destruction?

6:8-10. Yet I will leave some of you alive. When you have among the nations some who escape the sword, and when you are scattered through the countries, then those of you who escape will remember me among the nations where they are carried captive, how I have been broken over their whoring heart that has departed from me and over their eyes that go whoring after their idols. And they will be loathsome in their own sight for the evils that they have committed, for all their abominations. And they shall know that I am the LORD. I have not said in vain that I would do this evil to them.

This is what we call grace. Let it speak volumes to us down to the very century in which we live. Israel deserved utter cancellation. That almost happened. But some found grace.

In the early-Genesis world, all deserved to die. But Noah found *grace*.

In the Babylonian world created by Nimrod's descendants, corruption had again set in. But Abraham found *grace*.

The soul that sins shall die, Ezekiel will tell us later. But you and I found *grace*. The world is condemned to hell even now. But grace works in the midst of that condemnation. Delight in it. Rejoice over it. You have found grace in the eyes of the Lord!

Loathsome. A good word. To loathe is to dislike with disgust. Those who find grace in God's eyes are first disgusted with themselves, then delighted for God's mercy. Surviving, scattered Jews will finally "get it." They'll know why God had to do what He had to do, and

they will rightly blame themselves for the disaster. An entire nation blown away, they will muse, because of me and my friends who could not control our passions, could not discipline ourselves to worship the Lord the way He wanted to be worshiped. Now what?

This topic of loathing that leads to restoration will be revisited several more times in Ezekiel's prophecies. For now we leave it as a "local" prophecy of a repentant few who will be a part of the coming return to the land facilitated by the likes of Cyrus and Darius, and Ezra and Nehemiah.

20. Whether God is at peace with His people, or during "war-time" with them, what is His constant desire?

6:11-14. Thus says the Lord GOD: "Clap your hands and stamp your foot and say, Alas, because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, for they shall fall by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. He who is far off shall die of pestilence, and he who is near shall fall by the sword, and he who is left and is preserved shall die of famine. Thus I will spend my fury upon them. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when their slain lie among their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the mountaintops, under every green tree, and under every leafy oak, wherever they offered pleasing aroma to all their idols. And I will stretch out my hand against them and make the land desolate and waste, in all their dwelling places, from the wilderness to Riblah. Then they will know that I am the LORD."

Have you seen it yet? 5:13. 6:7. 6:14. And there will be more. God wants all to know that *He is the Lord*. There is a tearful element to

such a request. God who created you wants you to know *He is the Lord*. God who saved you over and over wants you to know *He is the Lord*. God who sustains life on the planet simply wants you to know *He is the Lord*.

Here the prophet and the people alike are told to show outwardly the feelings of horror that have come upon them. Clapping or “smiting” of the hands, stamping of the foot, as a preacher in days past might pound the pulpit and raise his voice to get the attention of his hearers on a certain point of his message. “Listen to me!” God is saying.

The three categories of punishment are enumerated again. Sword, famine, and pestilence are equivalent to the three groups delineated at the beginning of chapter 5 by the cutting of the hair. One group of Israelites will die of starvation in the city. One group will die of disease in other lands. One group will be slaughtered attempting to fight and/or escape.

The irony pictured is that of dead bodies surrounding the worship places, where only yesterday live bodies polluted the worship of Almighty God, a jealous God indeed!

Desolation is promised from the wilderness, usually thought of as the area south and east of Canaan, to Riblah. Most Hebrew manuscripts read *Diblah* here, but the few that use the former spelling make more sense in terms of location. Riblah is in the north, whereas Diblah is mentioned in connection with Moab in the south. To say from the wilderness to Diblah would not cover the land of Israel, but from the wilderness to Riblah would be like saying “Dan to Beersheba.”

Small point. Bottom line, the desolation will be extensive.

We now move to chapter 12 for Ezekiel's next visual lesson. Note that all chapters skipped over here will be covered in future portions of this study.

Portrayal 6: Ezekiel packs his bags.

21. Who is being represented by Ezekiel's bag-packing?

12:1-16. *The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house. As for you, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight. You shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house. You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight, as baggage for exile, and you shall go out yourself at evening in their sight, as those do who must go into exile. In their sight dig through the wall, and bring your baggage out through it. In their sight you shall lift the baggage upon your shoulder and carry it out at dusk. You shall cover your face that you may not see the land, for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel."*

And I did as I was commanded. I brought out my baggage by day, as baggage for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my own hands. I brought out my baggage at dusk, carrying it on my shoulder in their sight.

In the morning the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?' Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are in it. Say, 'I am a sign for you: as I have done, so shall it be done to them. They shall go into exile, into captivity.' And the prince who is among them shall lift his baggage upon his shoulder at dusk, and shall go out. They shall dig through the wall to bring him out through it. He shall cover his face, that he may not see the land with his eyes. And I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare. And I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, yet he shall not see it, and he shall die there. And I will scatter toward every wind all who are around him, his helpers

and all his troops, and I will unsheathe the sword after them. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them among the countries. But I will let a few of them escape from the sword, from famine and pestilence, that they may declare all their abominations among the nations where they go, and may know that I am the LORD.”

After a reminder to Ezekiel about the utterly rebellious nature of Israel, God literally sends Ezekiel packing. In the picture of the barber, Ezekiel has already spoken of a major exile coming. Of course, two waves of Babylonian prisoners have already passed out of the land and some of these very exiles are listening to Ezekiel preach.

But it is not finished. Once more Nebuchadnezzar will be directed to sweep through Judah and after destroying some by disease and starvation and the sword itself, he will bring one last detachment of the condemned to his land.

Ezekiel is to picture this last wave of exiles now, to a group that is presumably as hardened as the ones in Judah who do not know their fate as yet. The ones here at Chebar Canal need to hear the truth about their own fate, if they harbor any thoughts of a soon return to home and normalcy.

So on a given day Ezekiel is to start gathering things around his house, things he would take on a journey were he being removed to different surroundings altogether. All day long Ezekiel would perform this task before the wondering eyes of his now very attentive crowd of followers.

“What is he up to now?” they had to be asking. Why does he seem to be preparing for a trip somewhere? What is he trying to tell us?

Now if his “stuff” is being brought out all day (v. 4), it is impossible for Ezekiel to escape through the “wall” of his house at night. This wall must be a city wall, or a wall constructed artificially by Ezekiel for the purpose of demonstration.

At any rate, after “packing” and preparing all day, Ezekiel is to dig a hole through a wall. He then is to take all that baggage, and last of all himself, through the wall, and start walking.

We are not told if this is a one-time performance or something he will do regularly until all have gotten the message, that message being: Jews will be leaving Judah!

One Jew in particular, rebellious King Zedekiah, will be escaping secretly, thinking he can avoid the prophecies of fellow-prophet Jeremiah leveled against him in constant warning.

For example, Jeremiah 34:2-3, where God says, “I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. You shall not escape from his hand but shall surely be captured and delivered into his hand. You shall see the king of Babylon eye to eye and speak with him face to face.”

But was not Zedekiah blinded? And does not Ezekiel confirm by his actions here what is explained later in our text, “He shall cover his face that he may not see the land with his eyes... yet he shall not see it, and he shall die there (v. 12-13).”

Let’s read the actual historical event recorded in 2 Kings 25, to see what happened as a result of God’s decrees through the prophets. I will place in bold, those things Ezekiel has portrayed.

*“And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem and **laid siege** to it. And they built **siegeworks all around** it. So the city was besieged till the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. On the ninth day of the fourth month the **famine** was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war **fled by night** by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king’s garden, and the **Chaldeans were around the city**. And they went in the direction of the Arabah. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him. Then they*

captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon [he saw Nebuchadnezzar!] *at Riblah, and they passed sentence on him. They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and **put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains and took him to Babylon*** [a land that he never saw].”

The “prince” – Zedekiah – escapes through a hole in the wall, is captured, blinded, and thus never sees the land of his captivity, a captivity he denied until the very moment of his capture. Those before him are dead from the siege. Those around him are scattered or exiled. A few will escape, later to loathe themselves and all the abominations they have committed against the Lord.

Ezekiel the siege-maker, Ezekiel the barber, Ezekiel the traveler, knew of and preached all this, years in advance.

Portrayal 7: Shaky meals for the prophet.

22. Why is Ezekiel being asked to feign anxiety while eating and drinking?

12:17-20. *And the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink water with trembling and with anxiety. And say to the people of the land, Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with anxiety, and drink water in dismay. In this way her land will be stripped of all it contains, on account of the violence of all those who dwell 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."*

Once again the prophet is called to a dramatic role, but as in the last one, he is commanded to speak an explanation of his activities. Whether this was carried out once or on a series of days, we do not know. We assume the 390- or 430-year period of lying on his side is finished by chapter 12.

Very little need for me to comment on this final visual. A piece of bread. A cup of water. Eat and drink while you are shaking and looking afraid. Then tell the people that a day is coming when their former friends and relatives in Judah will be eating and drinking like this every day, not knowing what is coming next. They will see a siege wall. The mounds. The camps of soldiers. The arrows coming over the wall. Food will get scarce. The very bread and water in their trembling hands will be rationed and then non-existent. Violence. Bloodshed. Desolation.

"And you shall know That I am the Lord."

Portrayal 8: Ezekiel's wife dies.

23. What was to be Ezekiel's reaction when his wife died?

24:15-18. *The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, behold, I am about to take the delight of your eyes away from you at a stroke; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down. Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban, and put your shoes on your feet; do not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men." So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died. And on the next morning I did as I was commanded.*

In only one other place in Scripture do we read of this demand for suppressed emotion. It is when Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, have been slain by the Lord, and Aaron is told not to vent his feelings.

Emotions are not normally a problem with God. Jesus cried at times. The pain of loss is excruciating. And notice the endearing term God uses to describe Ezekiel's spouse: "the delight of your eyes."

We are not told how Ezekiel's wife died. The term "stroke" here is not meant in any medical way. She was struck down by the Lord. We also should not speculate as to whether she too was being judged in some way. We don't even know how sudden the death was. It could have been that she had nursed an illness for many years and at the time it was needed, her death occurred.

All we know, or can imply, is that Ezekiel was devastated on the inside and told to show absolutely nothing on the outside. Such an assignment! No crying. No customary signs of mourning. If you must sigh, sigh silently.

The death took place one evening. Perhaps in the inner recesses of his house he did what all men would do at such a loss. But by morning, "I did as I was commanded." Not a tear. Nothing.

24. How does God explain this bitter experience to Ezekiel and the watching people?

***24:19-24. And the people said to me, "Will you not tell us what these things mean for us, that you are acting thus?" Then I said to them, "The word of the LORD came to me: 'Say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the pride of your power, the delight of your eyes, and the yearning of your soul, and your sons and your daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword. And you shall do as I have done; you shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men. Your turbans shall be on your heads and your shoes on your feet; you shall not mourn or weep, but you shall rot away in your iniquities and groan to one another. Thus shall Ezekiel be to you a sign; according to all that he has done you shall do. When this comes, then you will know that I am the Lord GOD.'*"**

This message will be hard to communicate, but easy to understand. Just as the desire of Ezekiel's eyes has passed away, so their delightful Temple, the other buildings they treasured, their left-behind sons and daughters and all other family members, will soon pass away.

And also, as in Ezekiel's case, Judah is told not to mourn any of these losses. When God judges, He does so for a reason. The time for mourning is before the judgment, not after. They are to be in agreement with God's decisions and put all of this tragedy behind them.

Or, another interpretation of this command, or at least this statement, about not weeping, is that Judah will be in such shock at all that is happening, that at the moment it will not be able to weep. But later, verse 23, the inner aching will be so great that you will share your mourning with others, and literally rot away from sorrow. The survivors are thus here told they are to have no advantage over the dead.

25. How will Ezekiel be notified of the destruction of Jerusalem?

24:25-27. "As for you, son of man, surely on the day when I take from them their stronghold, their joy and glory, the delight of their eyes and their soul's desire, and also their sons and daughters, on that day a fugitive will come to you to report to you the news. On that day your mouth will be opened to the fugitive, and you shall speak and be no longer mute. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD."

Judgment has begun. The siege of eighteen months is in progress. Ezekiel will not be prophesying judgment during that time. Judgment has already begun.

But on the day of the final loss in 586 B.C., an escapee from the onslaught will find his way to Ezekiel, tell him of all that has happened, and thus free the prophet to continue his ministry, this time to the nations around Judah, which also will not escape God's judgment. We will speak of those nations in part 4 of this series.

Thus ends the series of visuals. Now we trace word pictures that the Holy Spirit gives to the prophet. Parables from God, and proverbs from the people, corrected by Yahweh.

PARABLES

Parable 1: The useless vine.

26. For what is vine-wood useful?

15:1-8. And the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? Is wood taken from it to make anything? Do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it? Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel. When the fire has consumed both ends of it, and the middle of it is charred, is it useful for anything? Behold, when it was whole, it was used for nothing. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it ever be used for anything! Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will set my face against them. Though they escape from the fire, the fire shall yet consume them, and you will know that I am the LORD, when I set my face against them. And I will make the land desolate, because they have acted faithlessly, declares the Lord GOD."

Note that these words are addressed to the prophet, either as explanation to Him of His dealings with Israel or as a message that Ezekiel will translate to the people in his own words later.

God compares the inhabitants of Jerusalem to the wood of a vine. Vines are useful to man when their wood carries life-juices that produce grapes and therefore quench our thirst with satisfying liquid.

But a piece of vine wood that has no grapes or whose grapes are sour and rotten is good for nothing. Nothing profitable can be made from vine-wood, as would be true of a number of other trees of the forest. When the vine-wood refuses to produce what it was created to produce, it is, as Jesus said in John 15, “cast into the fire.”

Jerusalem had not stayed connected to the Life-Source. Lesser fruit, bad fruit, rotten fruit, no fruit. What’s the point of holding on to such a wasted piece of material? To the fire. And if they escape the fire, the fire shall still consume them! Here He refers to those inhabitants that will try to escape but will be hunted down by Nebuchadnezzar and destroyed. Once God sets a fire, it burns until it has accomplished its end.

Parable 2: The wayward daughter and bride.

27. When did God first meet this little girl?

16:1-6. *Again the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born.*

"And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I made you flourish like a plant of the field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare."

This section of God's message is among the most touching in Hebrew literature. Pictured first is an outcast child. Though in fact God was guiding the founder Abraham to his destiny, from a human standpoint, things looked pretty bleak.

Abraham is called from a pagan country to go to another pagan country where he is at first viewed suspiciously and through which he walked as a cautious guest. Nervous. Outnumbered. Alone in so many respects.

This was the parentage of Israel. An unknown migrant surrounded by Canaanite nations like the Amorites and Hittites. The imagery then moves to Israel's birth.

There was no nation Israel, except in the mind of God, until the trip by Jacob into Egypt. Through his son Joseph's historic saving of the world of his day, Israel became a resident of that ancient land, and flourished there.

But who in Egypt rejoiced at the birth of the Israelite nation? Eventually Egypt feared this people of the Goshen territory, and even enslaved them. It was not long before the Israelites were indeed wallowing in the blood produced by harsh Egyptian taskmasters who demanded of them more than they could give, to build Egypt's wonders.

Yet Israel lived. She lived because God said to her, "Live!" and for no other reason. Her work was so difficult and her connections so non-existent that the slow dwindling as a people should have occurred. But when God says "Live!" you live.

Even the cruel decree of the Pharaoh to kill all males did not stop Israel from growing and prospering in the land of her beginnings.

In Ezekiel's picture, the little child is now a full-grown young woman.

28. How was the grown-up child prepared for marriage?

16: 8-14. "When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became mine. Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a

beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord GOD.

Israel is now at the age of productivity. A woman ready to be married and to bring forth children that will bless Yahweh and his growing nation.

She is taken out of bondage, out of Egypt. At Sinai a covenant is drawn up with the nation. The contract is signed in Heaven. The people in the wilderness are led out of that wandering time to the land promised for hundreds of years. Canaan is to be theirs. Wars are fought and won. God fights for them and with them and eventually the kingdom is established.

And what a kingdom! The might and music of David followed by the wisdom and wealth of David's Son! Glories that spread around the world and become the envy of kings and kingdoms everywhere.

All are prosperous and safe and healthy. And then...

29. How did the bride betray her Husband?

16: 15-22. "But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whoring on any passerby; your beauty became his. You took some of your garments and made for yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore. The like has never been, nor ever shall be. You also took your beautiful jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men, and with them played the whore. And you took your

embroidered garments to cover them and set my oil and my incense before them. Also my bread that I gave you—I fed you with fine flour and oil and honey—you set before them for a pleasing aroma; and so it was, declares the Lord GOD. And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter that you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them? And in all your abominations and your whorings you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, wallowing in your blood.

Adultery. It started with Solomon himself. The betrayal of the one true God. Power that corrupts. Wealth that makes the conscience slowly erode. Solomon's engagement with the nations, all in the name of peace, eventually brought ambassadors of evil in the form of politically arranged wives. Hundreds of them. Each with a religious heritage that Solomon in his overreaching tolerance could not deny.

A shrine here. An altar there. Incense over here. Little cakes for the Queen of heaven over there. Statues made out of the very treasures given to Solomon to glorify Yahweh. Slowly, slowly, the nation was enticed into a downward spiral of evil.

Before it was over, the most vile and odious practices ever concocted by man became a part of the daily routine in God's Israel. New temples encouraged prostitution and homosexuality as a form of worship. Sacrifices of human children replaced in many homes the required sacrifices of animals.

Truth was turned on its head. The gracious love of God that had pulled Israel out of Egyptian bondage, opened the waters of the Red Sea and the Jordan River, fed her manna and meat and quenched her thirst with water for forty years, brought down the walls of Jericho, routed the armies opposing Gideon, raised up strong man Samson, and all the rest... all of it forgotten. History

rewritten, allowing in the place of the records of Moses and other prophets, the sayings of evil men who hated the God of Moses.

30. What sinful behavior followed the original betrayal?

16:23-29. "And after all your wickedness (woe, woe to you! declares the Lord GOD), you built yourself a vaulted chamber and made yourself a lofty place in every square. At the head of every street, you built your lofty place and made your beauty an abomination, offering yourself to any passerby and multiplying your whoring. You also played the whore with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, multiplying your whoring, to provoke me to anger. Behold, therefore, I stretched out my hand against you and diminished your allotted portion and delivered you to the greed of your enemies, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behavior. You played the whore also with the Assyrians, because you were not satisfied; yes, you played the whore with them, and still you were not satisfied. You multiplied your whoring also with the trading land of Chaldea, and even with this you were not satisfied.

An affair with evil inside Canaan was not enough. The adulteress is now pictured as going into the adultery business known as prostitution with other nations surrounding her. By entering into political alliances with her old nemesis Egypt, and by flirting with such communion with Assyria and Chaldea, Israel began to export her filthy ways. She was becoming a supplier of poison to the nations!

But that was not enough, said God.

31. How was Judah's prostitution practice unusual?

16: 30-34. How sick is your heart, declares the Lord GOD, because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute, building your vaulted chamber at the head of every street, and making your lofty place in every square. Yet you were not like a prostitute, because you scorned payment. Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! Men give gifts to all prostitutes, but you gave your gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from every side with your whorings. So you were different from other women in your whorings. No one solicited you to play the whore, and you gave payment, while no payment was given to you; therefore you were different.

Prostitutes expect payment. Not Israel. In her lust for protection and power and prominence among the nations, she actually sent gifts to them enticing them to become one with her. Forgotten was the covenant between God and Israel. Forgotten was the call of God to Israel to be a holy nation. She simply wanted to be a nation like all the other nations. Free. Independent. Relevant. A part of the world's culture. Released from the bondage of the past. And safe from war and violence. Protected by the forging of many friendships.

There was no need for this, says God. We understand prostitutes who ply their wares because they have a financial need. Still evil, but we understand.

However, you had no such need to begin with. I would have taken care of you as I always did. No, your desire for normalcy and safety drove you to bribe nations to give you the help that I wanted to give. By taking their assistance you were committed to their gods. And you parted company with me.

32. How will the prostitute pay for her actions?

16:35-43. *“Therefore, O prostitute, hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your whorings with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them, therefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated. I will gather them against you from every side and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness. And I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy. And I will give you into their hands, and they shall throw down your vaulted chamber and break down your lofty places. They shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful jewels and leave you naked and bare. They shall bring up a crowd against you, and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. And they shall burn your houses and execute judgments upon you in the sight of many women. I will make you stop playing the whore, and you shall also give payment no more. So will I satisfy my wrath on you, and my jealousy shall depart from you. I will be calm and will no more be angry. Because you have not remembered the days of your youth, but have enraged me with all these things, therefore, behold, I have returned your deeds upon your head, declares the Lord GOD. Have you not committed lewdness in addition to all your abominations?*”

It's going to backfire, this attempt to find safety outside of the safety I offered. Your “lovers” didn't love you after all. They will now betray you and use you. All your wealth and beauty will disappear at their hands. You will see what they had in mind to begin with.

So it was. Egypt was not the friend of Israel. Assyria was not the friend of Israel. Assyria's successor, Babylonia, now in power, is definitely not her friend. Over the years, "love-making" took place with the nations, but only with the final end of taking over this pretty little territory, and adding it to their own.

Israel has been deceived countless times over the centuries. Peace treaties, what do they mean? They mean a moment of glory for the peacemakers and then it is business as usual. And "usual" is the destruction of Israel at any cost.

Bitter, bitter, has been Israel's history since those days when Ezekiel cried out! God's vengeance continues to rest on her, yet restoration is coming. A Kingdom will be established that no one will be allowed to destroy. The King has a Bride in mind, and she will reign with Him. Ezekiel saw portions of this future story, but we must wait a while to tell it...

We will look at the end of chapter 16 later...

Parable 3: The Eagles and the Vine.

33. Who is the first “great eagle”?

17:1-6. The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, propound a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel; say, Thus says the Lord GOD: A great eagle with great wings and long pinions, rich in plumage of many colors, came to Lebanon and took the top of the cedar. He broke off the topmost of its young twigs and carried it to a land of trade and set it in a city of merchants. Then he took of the seed of the land and planted it in fertile soil. He placed it beside abundant waters. He set it like a willow twig, and it sprouted and became a low spreading vine, and its branches turned toward him, and its roots remained where it stood. So it became a vine and produced branches and put out boughs.”

Here is yet another parable to pique the curiosity of Ezekiel’s audience. The references were not hidden to the people, but surely they had never heard it quite like this.

Babylon, or Nebuchadnezzar its Emperor, is the first **eagle**. Great and mighty Babylon that ruled magnificently, that was even Judah’s own captor, is seen as the king of the birds, coming into Lebanon, north of Israel, the land known for its cedar trees. **Lebanon** or a cedar thereof, stands for Judah and its king Jeconiah in this parable.

Judah the cedar is robbed of its **topmost twig**. That is, King Jeconiah is taken away captive to Babylon, as was Ezekiel, in the same wave of destruction. But not so **the seed of the land**. Zedekiah, of the seed of Josiah, is placed by Nebuchadnezzar as a puppet king in Judah to do the will of Babylon, enriching its coffers, spreading its culture. Though the **roots** of this plant stay in Judah, the **branches** are cultivated to **turn towards** Nebuchadnezzar’s ever-growing world.

So Judah is now the **vine** of the parable, created by and for Babylon, yet within the framework of God's will. But God's will is now challenged by the puppet king.

34. Who is the second "great eagle"?

17:7-10. *"And there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage, and behold, this vine bent its roots toward him and shot forth its branches toward him from the bed where it was planted, that he might water it. It had been planted on good soil by abundant waters, that it might produce branches and bear fruit and become a noble vine. Say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Will it thrive? Will he not pull up its roots and cut off its fruit, so that it withers, so that all its fresh sprouting leaves wither? It will not take a strong arm or many people to pull it from its roots. Behold, it is planted; will it thrive? Will it not utterly wither when the east wind strikes it—wither away on the bed where it sprouted?'"*

Enter Egypt. God shows Ezekiel in parable form how Zedekiah reaches out to Egypt for help. This second eagle is not as glorious as the first. **Great wings**, but not extended as far. Not so colorful. Egypt was a major power but had not become nearly so extensive in its outreach as Babylon.

The **vine**, Judah ruled by Zedekiah, is seen here asking Egypt to water it. It is not satisfied with the fact that it will be **planted** by the mighty waters of Babylon, that it is secure from harm if it will simply be still. Zedekiah wanted to make Judah and himself great again. But God says no. Greatness comes from goodness and Godliness. Forsake God and you forsake your right to be "great" in any sense.

God's reaction to this rebellion is swift. Zedekiah's attempts will be thwarted. The nation will be uprooted and wither. Soon the **east wind**, Babylon's fury, will strike it and Judah will be finished.

35. What will be the immediate fate of Judah's king and people?

17:11-21. Then the word of the LORD came to me: "Say now to the rebellious house, Do you not know what these things mean? Tell them, behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, and took her king and her princes and brought them to him to Babylon. And he took one of the royal offspring and made a covenant with him, putting him under oath (the chief men of the land he had taken away), that the kingdom might be humble and not lift itself up, and keep his covenant that it might stand. But he rebelled against him by sending his ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and a large army. Will he thrive? Can one escape who does such things? Can he break the covenant and yet escape? "As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant with him he broke, in Babylon he shall die. Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company will not help him in war, when mounds are cast up and siege walls built to cut off many lives. He despised the oath in breaking the covenant, and behold, he gave his hand and did all these things; he shall not escape. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: As I live, surely it is my oath that he despised, and my covenant that he broke. I will return it upon his head. I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon and enter into judgment with him there for the treachery he has committed against me. And all the pick of his troops shall fall by the sword, and the survivors shall be scattered to every wind, and you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken."

Here is a recap and interpretation of the parable, as explained above. Only the names are missing. The king of Babylon is

Nebuchadnezzar. "Her king" is Jeconiah. "one of the royal offspring" is Josiah's youngest son, Zedekiah.

The "place where the king dwells who made him king," that is, in Babylon itself, home of Nebuchadnezzar who made Zedekiah king, Zedekiah will die. He will not be slain in his own land, but will be dragged to Babylon, a blind man, to face his punishment for breaking the oath he took to be a vassal of the Emperor.

God goes on to say that the agreement between Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar was in reality an agreement between Judah and God. Here was Judah's last chance to be obedient. Simply submit to my punishment at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and it will be well with you.

Instead Judah's final rebellion will bring on her the siege, the starvation, the scattering, the sword.

Parable 4: Oholah and Oholibah

36. Who are Oholah and Oholibah in this parable?

23:1-4. *The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother. They played the whore in Egypt; they played the whore in their youth; there their breasts were pressed and their virgin bosoms handled. Oholah was the name of the elder and Oholibah the name of her sister. They became mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem.*

The text itself answers this question. The capital cities of the northern and southern kingdoms are in view here.

Samaria was a Roman province in Jesus' day, but in the time of Ezekiel, Samaria was a city, and had become the final capital of Israel, the name given to the northern ten tribes that split from the nation after the rebellion against Rehoboam, Solomon's son.

Jeroboam set up a worship capital at Bethel. Later Shechem and Tirzah became central to the government. But Samaria finally took the reins during a time of upheaval in the north, eventually lending its name to the entire area which with Galilee formed the entire non-Judean territory of Israel when Jesus was here.

Simply put, Oholah is the north, Israel; Oholibah the south, Judah.

But in this prophecy they are two daughters who grew up to be prostitutes. Their mother, if taken literally, would be Sarah. Egypt is said to be the location of their business. And Yahweh claims them as His own, but unhappily at present.

37. What are the meanings of the Hebrew names?

Oholah = her tent, or tabernacle. *Oholibah* = My tent or tabernacle is in her.

That is, the northern kingdom went its own way, had its own form of worship in its own tabernacles, whereas Judah had been designated as the place, the only place, where genuine worship took place. God's tabernacle, later God's Temple, the ark, the altar, all of it was in Jerusalem of Judah.

Jesus said to a woman of Samaritan extraction hundreds of years later, "You worship you know not what; we know what we worship..."

38. Why is Egypt singled out as the defiler of Israel?

From its beginnings in Egypt, Israel had been attracted to idolatry. In this very book of Ezekiel, in chapter 20, God relates how He told the Israelites to reject their idols while they were slaves in Egypt. But they would not. God, because of promises made, led them out of Egypt in spite of their sin. But one look at the golden calf made at Sinai reminds us that Egypt and Israel still had a relationship, one that would defile her throughout her history and eventually lead to her ruin. More of this later in the chapter.

39. How did "big sister" get in trouble first?

23:5-10. "Oholah played the whore while she was mine, and she lusted after her lovers the Assyrians, warriors clothed in purple, governors and commanders, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses. She bestowed her whoring upon them, the choicest men of Assyria all of them, and she defiled herself with all the idols of everyone after whom she lusted. She did not give up her whoring that she had begun in Egypt; for in her youth men had lain with her and handled her virgin bosom and poured out their whoring lust upon her. Therefore I delivered her into the hands of her lovers, into the hands of the Assyrians, after

whom she lusted. These uncovered her nakedness; they seized her sons and her daughters; and as for her, they killed her with the sword; and she became a byword among women, when judgment had been executed on her.

Israel in the north is called the older sister, not because she came into existence before Judah. Israel and Judah were twins in that respect. But Israel advanced in apostasy much more quickly and was ripe for judgment much sooner. She was older in the ways of the world, and received the reward of “old age”, death.

God had still claimed the north as His own, in the middle of the rebellion, but what a disappointment was this daughter. Beside the original defilement in Egypt, Israel flirted with Assyrian gods and Assyrian power and Assyrian alliances, not content with the protection of God.

Assyria is pictured as a faithless lover who betrayed the wicked woman and eventually killed her. In 721 B.C. the Assyrian Empire that was taking over the world, took over Israel and deported her people, replacing them with Assyrians, creating an abhorrent mixture of races that caused “true” Jews to bypass the entire territory and despise its peoples, well into the first century.

40. Did “little sister” learn from “big sister”?

23:11-21. “Her sister Oholibah saw this, and she became more corrupt than her sister in her lust and in her whoring, which was worse than that of her sister. She lusted after the Assyrians, governors and commanders, warriors clothed in full armor, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men. And I saw that she was defiled; they both took the same way. But she carried her whoring further. She saw men portrayed on the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed in vermilion, wearing belts on their waists, with flowing turbans on their heads,

all of them having the appearance of officers, a likeness of Babylonians whose native land was Chaldea. When she saw them, she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. And the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their whoring lust. And after she was defiled by them, she turned from them in disgust. When she carried on her whoring so openly and flaunted her nakedness, I turned in disgust from her, as I had turned in disgust from her sister. Yet she increased her whoring, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the whore in the land of Egypt and lusted after her lovers there, whose members were like those of donkeys, and whose issue was like that of horses. Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians handled your bosom and pressed your young breasts.”

Not at all. Judah/Jerusalem is now in the same situation as Israel had been, and is about to reap the same results as she did. Though one would think that a wise sibling would notice the result of disobedience to Father, and carefully avoid that pathway, here is one that did not. In fact, little sister outdid her predecessor in bad behavior.

Three nations diverted the attention of Judah. King Ahaz made a political alliance with Assyria (2 Kings 16), saying to their king Tiglath-pileser, “I am your servant and your son.” This, hopefully in exchange for the Assyrian’s protection against threats from Syria. That is spiritual adultery. No king of Judah is a servant and a son to anyone but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Ahaz sold out Judah into the arms of an Assyrian “lover”, using Ezekiel’s image.

But there was more. The people of Israel became enamored with the lifestyle of the Chaldeans, or Babylonians. The Lord will enlarge on this later in the chapter. We know from Hezekiah’s friendliness to Babylonian envoys (2 Kings 20) that a certain careless affinity had been growing between the two. Assyria was still the power of that day, but Chaldeans were reaching out in friendly ways to the

peoples of the region. Israel liked the attention and the potential assistance.

We are reminded of our own culture and its seemingly harmless invasions of church life. We take in this and that and do not realize that the snake lives in our pulpits and pews.

God “turns in disgust” against the flirtations of Judah with Chaldean ways. But she wasn’t finished yet, nor did she seem to notice that her only true Friend was turning His back to them.

Assyria decimated her big sister. Babylonia was about to destroy her. But still she ran from God and sought the embraces of a protector. She remembered Egypt. Surely in Egypt there was help. As her light was going out, she forgot even the recent heroic – if ill-timed – actions of Josiah against the advances of Pharaoh. Josiah considered Egypt an enemy. His son and grandson were of a different persuasion. Jehoiakim and Zedekiah both considered receiving help from Egypt when Babylon threatened too much. Jeremiah warned against such alliance but was unheeded. Many Israelites finally wound up where they had begun, in Egypt, and died there.

From the days of Moses in the wilderness there was somewhere in the heart of many Israelites a desire to return to the fleshpots and gods of Egypt. More adultery in the hearts, portrayed so graphically in this chapter.

41. How did Judah’s lovers repay her for her advances?

23:22-27. Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I will stir up against you your lovers from whom you turned in disgust, and I will bring them against you from every side: the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them, desirable young men, governors and commanders all of them, officers and men of renown, all of them riding on

horses. And they shall come against you from the north with chariots and wagons and a host of peoples. They shall set themselves against you on every side with buckler, shield, and helmet; and I will commit the judgment to them, and they shall judge you according to their judgments. And I will direct my jealousy against you, that they may deal with you in fury. They shall cut off your nose and your ears, and your survivors shall fall by the sword. They shall seize your sons and your daughters, and your survivors shall be devoured by fire. They shall also strip you of your clothes and take away your beautiful jewels. Thus I will put an end to your lewdness and your whoring begun in the land of Egypt, so that you shall not lift up your eyes to them or remember Egypt anymore.” For thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I will deliver you into the hands of those whom you hate, into the hands of those from whom you turned in disgust, and they shall deal with you in hatred and take away all the fruit of your labor and leave you naked and bare, and the nakedness of your whoring shall be uncovered. Your lewdness and your whoring have brought this upon you, because you played the whore with the nations and defiled yourself with their idols. You have gone the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand.”

Mutilation. Kidnapping of children. Fire. Stripping of clothes and jewels. Those whom you loved will do this to you. If you had loved Me, God implies, I would never have allowed such things to happen to you.

Macarthur in his commentary on Ezekiel says that facial dismemberment was the “ancient punishment for an adulteress practiced in Egypt, Chaldea, and elsewhere.” Whether God means a literal mutilation or that the standard practice is only a picture of the punishment coming, we are not sure.

We do know that slavery was coming. A fire that would destroy Jerusalem. A complete humiliation.

Pekod, Shoa, and Koa, are most likely Babylonian provinces. The conquered Assyrians are counted in the mix. And every one of these entities are now an enemy of Judah and will carry out His wrath.

Interesting to note here is the concept of vicarious judgment. It is God judging. But the judgment is committed to men. Evil men of carnal empires. Let no one be shocked when evil people prevail against backslidden lovers of God. God has permitted wicked men to slaughter in persecution and in vindication. "Think it not strange," says the apostle, when a fiery trial consumes you. But be sure you are being tested for righteousness, not judged for bad behavior.

There is no question as to what was happening here. The fire of God finally is allowed to fall on a people who from their earliest childhood rebelled against their Maker and Provider.

42. Just how deep will be the shame and humiliation of Judah?

23:32-35. Thus says the Lord GOD:

***"You shall drink your sister's cup
that is deep and large;
you shall be laughed at and held in derision,
for it contains much;
you will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow.
A cup of horror and desolation,
the cup of your sister Samaria;
you shall drink it and drain it out,
and gnaw its shards,
and tear your breasts;***

***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, you yourself must bear the consequences of your lewdness and whoring.”

A cup filled with judgment. Drink deeply, little sister, just as Israel drank. But this will be so awful that your judgment will go beyond the drinking of every drop. The cup will stay affixed to your lips as you begin to eat the pieces of pottery that make up that cup. You will tear yourself like a mad drunken woman. Those who see you will think your gyrations to be hilarious.

43. How does God involve the prophet in His prophecy?

23:36-45. The LORD said to me: “Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Declare to them their abominations. For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. With their idols they have committed adultery, and they have even offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me. Moreover, this they have done to me: they have defiled my sanctuary on the same day and profaned my Sabbaths. For when they had slaughtered their children in sacrifice to their idols, on the same day they came into my sanctuary to profane it. And behold, this is what they did in my house. They even sent for men to come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and behold, they came. For them you bathed yourself, painted your eyes, and adorned yourself with ornaments. You sat on a stately couch, with a table spread before it on which you had placed my incense and my oil. The sound of a carefree multitude was with her; and with men of the common sort, drunkards were brought from the wilderness; and they put bracelets on the hands of the women, and beautiful crowns on their heads. Then I said of her who was worn out by adultery, ‘Now they will continue to use her for a whore, even her! For they have

gone in to her, as men go in to a prostitute. Thus they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah, lewd women! But righteous men shall pass judgment on them with the sentence of adulteresses, and with the sentence of women who shed blood, because they are adulteresses, and blood is on their hands.”

Ezekiel is brought into a courtroom, as it were, and asked to listen to God’s case against the two evil sisters Oholah and Oholibah. Sit with Ezekiel and judge for yourself if God’s case is not valid.

They have committed adultery, Ezekiel. How? By idolatry, from the king to the lowest slave, they have gone after other gods as an adulteress goes after her lover.

They are guilty of murder, Ezekiel. Their gods have told them to offer their own children as sacrifice, and they have done it. They have slaughtered the very children they could have raised up for me.

They are guilty of constant profanity, Ezekiel. They have profaned my sanctuary and my Sabbath by entering into the holy place on the Sabbath day on the same day they committed sacrilege to other gods.

They are guilty of compromise with evil men, Ezekiel. They have had intimate relationships and alliances with men who worshiped these other gods. They have invited them into their homes and hearts and received gifts from them. They have bonded with evil.

What say ye, Ezekiel, and all others listening to God’s plea for justice? If you are righteous you will agree with Me that Judah and Israel, the two sisters before you, are condemned adulteresses and murderers.

44. The verdict is clear. And the sentence?

23:46-49. For thus says the Lord GOD: "Bring up a vast host against them, and make them an object of terror and a plunder. And the host shall stone them and cut them down with their swords. They shall kill their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses. Thus will I put an end to lewdness in the land, that all women may take warning and not commit lewdness as you have done. And they shall return your lewdness upon you, and you shall bear the penalty for your sinful idolatry, and you shall know that I am the Lord GOD."

1. They are to be attacked by a huge army.
2. They are to be filled with terror.
3. They will be robbed of all their goods.
4. They shall be stoned.
5. They shall be slaughtered with the sword.
6. Their children will be killed as well.
7. Their houses will be burned.

This punishment will serve to warn any future generations that unfaithfulness to the Lord cannot be taken lightly. You will know that I only am the Lord you are to serve.

These are the parables of Ezekiel. Now a look at the proverbs God brought to his attention. We go back to chapters 12, 16 and 18.

Parable 5: The boiling pot.

45. What is being symbolized by the boiling pieces of meat?

24:1-5. In the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, write down the name of this day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day. And utter a parable to the rebellious house and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD:

"Set on the pot, set it on;

pour in water also;

put in it the pieces of meat,

all the good pieces, the thigh and the shoulder;

fill it with choice bones.

Take the choicest one of the flock;

pile the logs under it;

boil it well;

seethe also its bones in it."

The day of judgment has come. Per Macarthur, using 597 as the starting date and counting the years from 1:2 to 24:1, this exact date was January 15, 588 B.C. On this day Nebuchadnezzar's army began its eighteen-month siege of Jerusalem, portrayed by Ezekiel in striking visuals years before.

As a "parable" yet also another visual, Ezekiel is to set a huge cauldron before the exiles at the Chebar. It is to be filled with water, then with the choicest pieces of meat available from the best of the flock. Logs are now placed underneath the pot, and a roaring fire is set to cause all to boil.

The imagery is clear enough. Jerusalem will slowly be heated to a boil by the siege. Life will be cut off as every avenue of food and drink is kept from entering, just as oxygen is cut off from a boiling pot of meat. The siege will destroy.

But there is more. The meat has been boiled. Now what?

46. What is the meaning of then taking piece after piece out of the pot?

24:6-8. "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose corrosion is in it, and whose corrosion has not gone out of it! Take out of it piece after piece, without making any choice. For the blood she has shed is in her midst; she put it on the bare rock; she did not pour it out on the ground to cover it with dust. To rouse my wrath, to take vengeance, I have set on the bare rock the blood she has shed, that it may not be covered."

Here is a pot so corrupted, rusted, that even a boiling fire does not clean it. So take every piece out, citizen by citizen, and send them all into exile. Then deal with the pot.

The mention of blood being covered is in reference to the law of Moses that the blood of sacrifices be poured on the ground, so as to be absorbed, covered, by dirt. But Judah, figuratively, poured her blood on the rock, that is, committed her atrocities openly, without any care of hiding her sins. Thus God will not hide His judgments on her.

47. What is the meaning of scorching an empty pot?

24:9-14. "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the bloody city! I also will make the pile great. Heap on the logs, kindle the fire, boil the meat well, mix in the spices, and let the bones be burned up. Then set it empty upon the coals, that it may become hot, and its copper may burn, that its uncleanness may be melted in it, its corrosion consumed. She has wearied herself with toil; its

abundant corrosion does not go out of it. Into the fire with its corrosion! On account of your unclean lewdness, because I would have cleansed you and you were not cleansed from your uncleanness, you shall not be cleansed anymore till I have satisfied my fury upon you. I am the LORD. I have spoken; it shall come to pass; I will do it. I will not go back; I will not spare; I will not relent; according to your ways and your deeds you will be judged, declares the Lord GOD."

After a thorough cooking, all the meat and water poured out, it is time to deal with the pot itself. Jerusalem, Judah, will be punished long after the inhabitants have been heated, cooked, and scattered. A thorough cleansing of the entire area, for decades following, will be necessary before God can look with favor on this land again.

Temple destroyed. City burned. As the house of a leper must be done away with, so the entire structure of the city will be torn down so as to do away with all its defilement.

Words cannot express just how angry is Yahweh with the people He loved and delivered and prospered. Let the cleansing begin!

PROVERBS

Proverb 1: “The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing.”

48. What did the people believe about Ezekiel’s prophecies?

12:21-28. And the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, what is this proverb that you have about the land of Israel, saying, ‘The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing’? Tell them therefore, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: I will put an end to this proverb, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel.’ But say to them, The days are near, and the fulfillment of every vision. For there shall be no more any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am the LORD; I will speak the word that I will speak, and it will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, but in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and perform it, declares the Lord GOD.”

And the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, ‘The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.’ Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: None of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word that I speak will be performed, declares the Lord GOD.”

It is today as it was then. Where is the promise of His coming? say the critics of our own day. You Christians have been threatening the world for millennia about a supposed vengeance of the Son of God. The planet just keeps spinning.

The people of Israel thought that Ezekiel was talking about a time so far down the road that it would not affect them at all, if it were even a true vision to begin with. Visions come to nothing. Prophecies fail. Ho-hum. Let's get on with living now.

God makes some more promises. Not only is this vision about to come to pass, but from this day on, no more false prophets will arise. Listen to Ezekiel, Daniel, Jeremiah. They all speak the same thing. Judgment is coming. Don't write the prophet off.

Oh how befuddled is the Christian world today with prophets hiding behind every bush, pushing their wares on the unwary and surface Christians. Prophecies of peace and prosperity and good times are always accepted. Prophets of doom, not so much.

Israel is told, it's coming. No more delay. You will see what I'm talking about!

The problem of false prophets, and God's judgment on them, will be covered in part 3 of this series.

Proverb 2: "Like mother, like daughter."

49. What are the similarities in the family tree of Judah?

16:44-52. "Behold, everyone who uses proverbs will use this proverb about you: 'Like mother, like daughter.' You are the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and her children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite. And your elder sister is Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you, is Sodom with her daughters. Not only did you walk in their ways and do according to their abominations; within a very little time you were more corrupt than they in all your ways. As I

live, declares the Lord GOD, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it. Samaria has not committed half your sins. You have committed more abominations than they, and have made your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations that you have committed. Bear your disgrace, you also, for you have intervened on behalf of your sisters. Because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they, they are more in the right than you. So be ashamed, you also, and bear your disgrace, for you have made your sisters appear righteous.

We use this very proverb to this day. We look at a person's conduct, and if we are old enough to remember that person's parentage, we make the connection. We speak of heredity, of ancestral sins, and all the rest. And the association is often correct, says the Lord. It surely is true in Judah's case.

In this setting, Judah's parents are not holy Sarah and Abraham, but the Hittite and Amorite pagans that came before and after Abraham. Adulterers all, and now Judah had followed in their train.

The two sisters are compared to Mom also, and turn out to be like their pagan mother. The difference here is that the sisters outdid their mother in evil, thus giving a partial lie to the proverb.

Then a comparison to the people of Sodom. Also unfavorable. Judah was worse than the Sodomites! Sodom was proud and fat and selfish and had to be removed. You, Judah, are worse than that. The obvious implication is that Judah must be removed too.

Then there is the stark contrast between her older sister and herself. Judah was so bad that she made Samaria look holy! But

Samaria had already been condemned and decimated by the Assyrians! Judah's punishment will be greater. She was given more time to repent. She had a series of good kings. She had the Temple. She had the prophets and the very words of God. The ark was in Judah. God's presence was in Judah. Judah is without excuse!

As her mother and her sister had been judged, Judah must be, doubly. Like mother, like daughter.

Proverb 3: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”

50. What is the meaning of this proverb?

18:1-4. The word of the LORD came to me: “What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.”

Bottom line: personal responsibility.

Contemporary Jeremiah (31:29-30) had used the same language in his prophecy and responded to it in the same way that Ezekiel will, under God’s anointing. This was a “word” that had made the rounds. Your dad bites into some sour grapes, and your own mouth puckers up.

It's a little like the other proverb we discussed. Like parent, like child. If I do something bad it's because my parents did before me. True, but no blame can any longer be attached to parents, say the prophets. If you sin, you pay, regardless of your parents. No good saying, “But you don’t understand. Look how I was brought up.”

No. The soul that sins, dies. Period. Paul would say later, “The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).”

51. How does God, through Ezekiel, define [external] righteousness?

18:5-9. *“If a man is righteous and does what is just and right— if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor’s wife or approach a woman in her time of menstrual impurity, does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not lend at interest or take any profit, withholds his hand from injustice, executes true justice between man and man, walks in my statutes, and keeps my rules by acting faithfully—he is righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord GOD.*

- No idolatry.
- No adultery.
- No oppression of others.
- Keeps his word.
- No stealing.
- Feeds the hungry and poor and clothes the naked.
- No cheating others.
- Just in his relationships.
- Walks in God’s ways, keeps God’s rules.

This man is righteous. This man shall live. But is there such a man? And suppose he is this good, and he fathers a sinning son?

52. What does God see as wickedness, unrighteousness?

18:10-13. *If he fathers a son who is violent, a shedder of blood, who does any of these things (though he himself did none of these things), who even eats upon the mountains, defiles his neighbor's wife, oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore the pledge, lifts up his eyes to the idols, commits abomination, lends at interest, and takes profit; shall he then live? He shall not live. He has done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon himself.*

Obviously, the opposite of the righteous behavior described, is unrighteousness. If a “good” man sires a “bad” son, who is responsible for sins? The bad son, says God and the prophet. But what about the next generation?

53. Does the same rule keep applying? Each person responsible/rewarded for his lifestyle, regardless of the parents?

18:14-22. *“Now suppose this man fathers a son who sees all the sins that his father has done; he sees, and does not do likewise: he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife, does not oppress anyone, exacts no pledge, commits no robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, withholds his hand from iniquity, takes no interest or profit, obeys my rules, and walks in my statutes; he shall not die for his father's iniquity; he shall surely live.*

“As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother, and did what is not good among his people, behold, he shall die for his iniquity.

“Yet you say, ‘Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?’ When the son has done what is just and right, and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live. The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live.”

The meaning is clear. Each man is rewarded for his own good and punished for his own evil. The repetition of the concept should let us know that God wants us to hear and believe this principle. It simply will not do to play the blame game whenever someone convicts us of sin.

As New Testament believers, though, we have to take it a step further and declare with Paul and the Psalmist that really there is no righteous person, not even one. Every soul sins. Every soul will die an eternal death separated from God, unless Christ is a part of that soul.

54. Can a man trust in his past righteousness?

33: 12-16. “And you, son of man, say to your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness, and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins. Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his

righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die. Again, though I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live.

When speaking of this same subject at another time in his ministry, Ezekiel is given another aspect to the truth. A “good” man may not rely on a life of good works if he suddenly decides to enter a life of sinfulness. A “bad” man will not be condemned by his old life, if he suddenly enters a new one. We can read all of this through the lens of new life in Christ. All our sins will be forgiven and forgotten when we come to Christ. But all our so-called “righteousness” is no guarantee of a safe passage to Heaven if we allow sin into it.

55. How does God view the death of a sinner?

18:23-24, 30-32, 33:10-11. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die.

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you

have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.

“And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: ‘Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?’ Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?”

Ezekiel is not the only man of God who lets us in on God’s heart for the lost. The entire world is lost in sin. It grieves God’s heart, as it did in the days of Noah, that he has made a race of people that rebels against Him. It grieves Him that because of their disobedience He is forced by His justice to consign them all to eternal punishment.

Do we conceive of a heartless God who as the villain in the movies, secretly or openly rejoices over the ones He has tripped up and caused to fall? Is our God not one of compassion? Did not the Son show us by His tears how He sorrows over the lost? But shall He cancel all the rules because of this sorrow? Can He not have a just outcome and a sorrowful heart at the same time?

“God is not willing that any should perish.” No, He does not will them to be lost and suffer. He wills them to obey and be saved. But there is another will that kicks in if mankind refuses His call, namely the will of reprobation, just and sure. Ezekiel states it plainly. The soul that sins shall die. Mankind knows that but sins anyway. Justice is on the way.

Ezekiel does not speak here of the grace of God. That is another subject.

56. How were the Jews challenging God?

18:25-29, 33:17-20. *“Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die. Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life. Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?”*

“Yet your people say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just,’ when it is their own way that is not just. When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it. And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live by this. Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways.”

Things haven't changed. Guilty children are always screaming out, "That's not fair!"

God hurls the accusation back in their teeth. You are the unfair ones, Israel. Look at your ways. Look at My standard. You've broken every rule I gave you. I am the Creator. I made Israel. I made each of you individually. I have the right to have my creation do what I say. But you rebel. Now who is being unfair, unjust? What rights or privileges do you think you own?

Afterword

And so, you have now met Ezekiel, a most non-typical prophet. But, he had his “typical” side. That is, he could simply stand in the public square and declare “Thus says the Lord.” I have tried to gather those simple but devastating prophecies of judgment in the following two parts: regarding Judah’s demise, and the demise of the nations surrounding Judah.

Look next for:

A Study of Ezekiel

Part Three:

Judgments on Judah

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

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