

Ezekiel – by Blake Temple

1 - The first verse immediately brings us to a moment in history, Ezekiel turning 30, the age when a man entered the priesthood, and the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin. The prophet Daniel had been exiled to Babylon in 605BC, followed by King Jehoiachin and Ezekiel in 597BC. They have been in exile for five years and Jerusalem and the temple still exist but will be destroyed in six years. Read 2 Kings 24 and 2 Chronicles 29 and following for the rest of the context. We enter into Ezekiel's context as a young man who becomes a prophet called by God into a declining culture that rejected God to pursue their own desires. They rejected God's covenant with them and He chose Ezekiel to carry His message about the covenant curses that have occurred and are to come. In vs. 4-28 Ezekiel labors to present what he was witness to but yet had no category to properly explain with human words. He was seeing the glory of the Lord that ends with the proper response of planting his face in the dirt. This manifestation of the Lord's glory will stay with Ezekiel the rest of his days.

2 – The Chapter begins where we left Ezekiel, in the dirt before the glory of the Lord. Now he hears the voice of the Lord as His Spirit lifts him from the ground. Notice the term, son of man, will appear throughout the book but it is not referring to the Lord, it is the Lord saying, "human." The Lord calls Ezekiel to be obedient and not like the 'people of Israel.' He will speak what the Lord requires him to say and do what the Lord requires him to do. Then Ezekiel is put immediately to the test (8), "*eat what I give you.*" A scroll where Ezekiel is able to read the words of lamentation and mourning and woe is presented. The house of Israel is soon to learn that their problem is not the Babylonians but it is the Lord. Ezekiel is told not to fear these rebels, their words, their actions, or their expressions. Ezekiel's calling is one that poses no illusion of glory for Ezekiel among the house of Israel, his only reward from them will be grief and hardship. Briers, thorns, and having to sit on scorpions is the promised expectation of his labor.

3 – Obedience. Ezekiel is a model of obedience. His calling will be a difficult one but every time Ezekiel responds in obedience. The Lord says (9), "*fear them not, nor be dismayed,*" as I send you into a head-butting contest with a hard-headed people. He made Ezekiel's face and head as hard as any he will encounter. Wise instruction is given to us as we face a declining culture (10-11); receive His word, hear it, then go tell those who refuse to hear. Ezekiel is made the watchman for Israel, note the penalty to him if he does not warn Israel. Ezekiel is carried away by the Spirit once more for a vision where he is told he shall be bound with cords in his home and he will be mute except for when the Lord will provide him words to speak (22-27). He will not be the type of prophet that the people may seek out for what he might say. Ezekiel is no mediator, the Lord Himself will speak directly to Israel through Ezekiel and this chapter makes it plain that the people bear individual responsibility for rejecting the word of God from His prophet.

4 – The first of the enacted prophecies is recorded. The sign is to the people still in exile in Babylon, people who have rejected the Lord's word and are still holding to false ideas about Him and the nature of His relationship with them. This enacted scene is

designed to undermine the misplaced confidence of Israel. It should drive them to repentance if heard and understood properly. Their God is no passive God, they are being shown that He is active and He is in control of all things and when they see these things happen in a few years they will know that it was the Lord who brought these things to pass. If only we would learn that if we abandon the Lord we should not be surprised if we experience His anger. This sign was no easy task physically for Ezekiel, he had to endure physical hardship and hunger for fourteen months. We hear from Ezekiel for the first time (14), to protest eating food prepared in a way that would make it unclean. The Lord heard him and provided an alternative for him so as not to violate his scruple.

5 – The enacted prophecy adds fire and the sword to show the totality of the impending judgment that is coming to Jerusalem. A third of the people will burn in the city, a third put to the sword around the city, and the balance scattered to the wind while being beset by the sword. The result is a very small number of survivors (2-4). Sometimes we cry out for fairness, in 7-10 we are shown what fairness looks like. *By My life, I guarantee, I will have no pity* is a paraphrase of the Lord's resolve expressed in 11-12. *"And they shall know that I am the Lord – that I have spoken in My jealousy"* is the key to this chapter, He is driven by His passion for His covenant relationship with His people. He loves deeply and at a great cost and He will respond vigorously when His people have violated His covenant. We presume on His grace when we do not accept our responsibility to Him (Luke 12:48). They are known by the world to be His people, now they will be known to be a *"reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror (15)."*

6 – The Lord is faithful to Himself, He will do what He has promised and as we saw last chapter, the Lord is passionate about His covenant. The first ten verses are a picture of what God said would happen in Leviticus 26:30. We see His heart in 9 over the infidelity of His people. He acts against them and all that was entrusted to them. Ezekiel calls on us to view ourselves as the Lord views us in our abominations and our idolatry. He is committed to the covenant He made with His people. We witness His grief over the condition of His people. They will be slain at the very alters of their false gods and their bones scattered along with the debris of their alters. This image should not be lost on the modern church as it pursues the culture rather than abiding in the word of God. The chapter ends with the picture of the totality of the cleansing so that, *"Then they will know that I am the Lord"* (14). And they will also know that their idols were powerless and gave them no aid nor any protection from the one true God.

7 – We have all seen signs carried by cartoon characters saying, "The end is near" followed by a punch line. Chapter 7 begins with the Lord saying, *"An end! The end has come"* (2). The Lord has Ezekiel tell the exiles in graphic terms what it will look like when the end arrives. No punch line, no humor here, just the harsh reality of a people being judged on the basis, *"According to their way I will do to them"* (27). They may think that God has abandoned them and Nebuchadnezzar is having his way but in 5-16, He makes it clear that it is the Lord who does this and the rod is his tool. *"All hands are feeble, and all knees turn to water"* (17) is the response to the judgment of a Holy God when He comes. The rest of the chapter shows their horrible reality as the supports of

all of their idols are destroyed one after another. Stories and rumors of horrors will have no end, there will be no relief, even the King will mourn and the prince will be in despair (24-27) as the unclean barbarians have their way.

8 – Chapter 8 begins with another date marker, exactly fourteen months following his first vision he will experience another vision that transports him to Jerusalem. The vision will not conclude until the end of Chapter 11 when the Lord departs the temple. The elders in exile have come to his house with their questions for Ezekiel but he only answers to God. In this vision Ezekiel describes the holy with human terms that cannot express exact categories for us to understand. He uses terms like, ‘*appearance*’ and ‘*form*,’ as best he can to communicate what he saw. In Jerusalem he is shown the abominations of His people in His sanctuary as he is taken progressively closer to the holy of holies. First, he is shown an idol (3); second, detestable carved images of creatures on the walls (10); third, thinking themselves hidden from God, 70 elders practice abominable worship (11-12); fourth, women who are closer to His presence but weeping over a false god; and lastly a picture of 25 men with their backs toward God worshipping the sun (16). “*Therefore I will act in wrath*” (18). He will grant them no pity nor will He hear their cry.

9 – The vision from Chapter 8 continues, the leaders and the people have defiled His house and in a loud voice He voices His indignation (1) and He acts. Note he calls forth six executioners and only one to mark those He will save from destruction. The great irony is that Israel has been living in fear of what lay outside - the Babylonians, while looking to Egypt to save them, when what they needed to fear was God Himself. God demonstrates His sovereign control over this future event by deciding who will live and who will die when the Babylonians are let loose on Jerusalem. The awful slaughter may look random and uncontrolled but what we are being shown is that the living and the dead were predetermined by the Lord. The picture of slaughter is so great that it moves Ezekiel to speak a question to the Lord’s intent. A question that goes unanswered as the Lord continues to move to “*bring their deeds upon their heads*” (10). Note also that in 3 we see movement of the glory of God from the alter to the threshold of the house, He is preparing to leave the temple.

10 – We continue to see the effect of defiling the worship of the Lord and His response. We see in 2 the scattering of burning coals over the city in an act of divine wrath but more so we see the city and the people being deprived of His presence as we witness the progressive departure of His divine Glory (His Shekinah Glory) in 4, 15, 18-19. The movement is from the Holy of Holies, to the threshold, until the whole temple is filled with His Glory. The wings of the Cherubim are ‘revving up’ for His departure. Ezekiel recognizes that the mobile throne of the Lord is the same one he saw in his vision on the Chebar canal in Chapter 1. Abandon hope, all you who live here when God departs (see Hosea 9:12). See also, Exodus 31:17, it is not as if He had not warned them from the beginning of the consequences of breaking His covenant. The departure of His presence from among His people was an unthinkable event but they will hear worse things from Ezekiel. The Lord does not return to His temple in Jerusalem for another 400 years (John 2).

11 – The section that began in Chapter 8 now ends. Ezekiel has been reporting what he has seen in Chapters 9-10 from a position in the inner court of the temple. In verse 1, as the chariot moves, the Spirit now relocates Ezekiel to the eastern gateway. The focus will be on the leaders in Jerusalem (1-13). The leaders in their smugness could have led the people in repentance and humility but they sought only to benefit themselves. Their injustice to the people they had been entrusted with has made them the meat in the pot (Jerusalem). Instead of protection, it is the instrument of their end. “*And I will bring you out*” (9) and give you to the tender mercies of the Babylonians. They receive His verdict and His judgement (11-12). The Lord is faithful to His covenant and so we next receive the gospel according to Ezekiel in 14-21. This gospel is an offer of restoration and renewal which will lead to a transformed spiritual condition for the people of God. The good news ends with a dire warning (21) for those who do not seek His way. Then the Lord departs the temple (22-25).

12 – Yesterday we saw the unimaginable happen for Israel, the Lord abandoning His temple, His city, and His people. They failed to see how they had abandoned Him. The Lord will next have Ezekiel communicate to the exiles the wickedness of Judah’s leaders (Chapters 12-19). Ezekiel is given an act/sign to communicate to the exiles over two days. First he shows them how the prince (note that Zedekiah is not referred to as a King) attempts to escape his judgment (read 2 Kings 25:4) and the next morning Ezekiel gives them the interpretation of what he had acted out the night before (10-16). Blind he was to God and blind he will be made. Note His use of, “*I will*” as He shows us exactly who is bringing these things about. In 17-20 we see the coming horror and anxiety that the people will experience as He cleanses the land of their corruption. No longer will the people be able to turn to false prophets and false visions telling them what they want to hear, they are about to learn first-hand that “*I am the Lord.*” There will be no more delay (28). Think of the days of Noah when the rain came.

13 – I recently heard a quote, “In times of terror people turn to their delusions,” and in thinking about today’s text who better to serve our delusions than false prophets when we have blinded ourselves to God. The Lord has something to say about this, He shows us His heart as He speaks through Ezekiel, in 1-16, He addresses the men who say they are speaking for God but are simply serving themselves. This is a *foolish* act (2), see Isaiah 32:6. The Lord Himself, directly and personally, says (8), “*I am against you.*” I cannot imagine a more terrifying thing to hear from Him. Note in 13-16 how it is that He that will destroy their false house and security. Next He turns to the female prophets who also go against His word (17-23). There were false prophets in the exile community and the message is for them as they will witness that a true God is one who predicts the future and then makes it happen. The same warning exists for us when we live in a culture that is in decline due to its rejection of God. God will rescue His people (23).

14 – Ezekiel has visitors, the elders of the exile community, outwardly people of God, but the Lord reveals their inward corruption. They offer the appearance of seeking God but it is only appearance. We are shown in 1-11 that the ‘godly’ people who approach

Him will not be received with answers to their questions. He addresses the whole house of Israel (6), *“Repent and turn away your faces from all your abominations.”* As we saw last chapter, judgment is at hand and there is no longer time for intercession but in His mercy He holds out repentance to them. As Abraham could not intercede for the destruction of Sodom, neither would the presence of three righteous men; Noah, Daniel, and Job if they were in the land. Each person’s responsibility to the Lord is on display as Ezekiel describes the four *“disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence”* (21) are let loose upon the country. If the exiles believed that there were enough righteous men in Jerusalem to divert judgment, they are dealt a hard reality in this prophecy. But even with the sweeping judgment against the land, God in His mercy will keep for Himself some survivors (22-23).

15 – In the last chapter the Lord spoke through Ezekiel to communicate that the presence of righteous men in Jerusalem would not halt the coming judgment. Now the Lord speaks to another false hope that the exiles hold to, that they have value in and of themselves. He takes the vine which is a symbol for His people and demonstrates its value aside from Him (also read Isaiah 5:1-7 or Jerimiah 2:21). He shows them that it is a false hope to think that their heritage has meaning. The vinedresser brings home His point in 6-8, it is He who has pruned the vine (John 15:1-2) and thrown the worthless vine (Jerusalem) into the fire. They had falsely believed since it was He who had planted them that they would never be destroyed. His people had borne no fruit so He set His face against them (7) concluding with what He further intends, *“And I will make the land desolate, because they have acted faithlessly (8).”* Their faithlessness left them only fit for one purpose, burning. The ending of this chapter remains a warning to modern churches and individuals who do not abide in His word thus producing no fruit.

16 – This chapter is longer than 6 of the 12 minor prophets, the language is stark and shocking as the Lord’s relationship with Jerusalem is shown to be as a marriage. The Lord claims His spouse despite her poor heritage and condition (expressed in vivid language). We are shown the picture of a husband whose lavish provisions for His bride show no limits. A bride truly cherished and loved. Her beauty and condition is not anything that she has done but what He has accomplished for her through His love for her. But then we are shown what sin really looks like, it is repulsive, it takes over a life with a pursuit that can never satisfy. All of the provisions of the Lord are expended in her seeking her selfish desire as she chases idol after idol. The language should shock us and disgust us - for this is what the Lord sees as we reject Him to seek things not Him. We should be repulsed. Her actions are so horrific that her sisters (Samaria & Sodom) look good by comparison. No Cinderella is Jerusalem. Consequences are coming but thankfully He will remember His vow to His people. Please take note of what the Lord says the sin of Sodom was in 49-50, it is not what you may think. May we not be like Sodom.

17 – The exiles are now challenged with a riddle, in the form of a parable (1-8). The Lord has Ezekiel ask His people questions which should have us also reflect on the vine’s ingratitude and stupidity. The greater truth of the parable is now put forth by the Lord - if the vine’s action was suicidal, then how much more so when they consider the

Lord. The parable is explained to them (11-21). Zedekiah in dealing with what he thought to be his Babylonian problem, sought a prudent political solution in reaching out to Egypt and violating his oath to the Lord concerning Babylon. This is exposed as the true suicidal action, to break covenant with God for self-interest. The Lord then shows us His faithfulness (22-24) by providing a picture of His salvation to come (Isaiah 11:1). The picture of the parable of the mustard seed comes to mind (Matt 13:31-32). Jesus who will reverse the fortunes of God's people by His covenant keeping as opposed to the covenant breaking Zedekiah. We may violate the commitments we make but the Lord remains true to His word, He has spoken, He will do it (24).

18 – How often do we find ourselves guided by the world's wisdom and not the Lord's? This problem has a long history and now the Lord in this chapter takes His people to task for holding to a proverb that is not true (2). In this chapter our individual responsibility to the Lord is on display. A reoccurring phrase is *"the soul who sins shall die.(4, 20)"* Our genes are not destiny, our 'accidental' birth in a particular situation is not destiny, our response to a Holy God is eternal destiny. The Lord challenges various attitudes that have affected the spiritual outlook of His people by presenting three generations of one family. The father, a righteous man (5-9), the son, an evil man (10-13), the grandson, a righteous man (14-17). The Lord reveals His heart (23) as well as His justice (24) and the people's response by claiming that He is not just (25). The Lord closes the chapter with a strong invitation to live, repent, turn, receive a new heart and a new spirit (31). *"For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live"* (32).

19 – Where lies our hope? We answer, "in the Lord," of course but then why do we turn to Him last if at all when the troubles of this life find us or we when we have decisions to make? The Lord has shown the false hope of possessions (Chapter 16), of politics (Chapter 17), of genealogy (Chapter 18) now He addresses the false hope in leaders. We are treated to a song, a dirge (a lament for the dead – a funeral song), for the 'princes' of Israel. Note He still will not refer to them as Kings. This funeral song shows that they are a false hope, they are going to die. In fact, two of these '*young lions*' reign for only three months (2 Kings 22 and 23). The folly of trusting in the false king Zedekiah is shown in (12) and the resulting exile (13). The song concludes with the message that there is no strong branch to rescue them from the coming judgment, it is imminent, there is no hope, He is coming. *"This is a lamentation and has become a lamentation"* (14). Doom, defeat, and despair await them. There will be no 4th quarter comeback.

20 – We receive another date marker in this chapter, it has been two years since Ezekiel received his call. The exile community may have heard of the recent victory of the Egyptian's in the Sudan and their leaders have come to speak to God through His prophet. But the Lord has hard news for them, *"I will not be inquired of by you (3)."* The Lord now gives them a history lesson as it really was and not how they have falsely seen it. He chooses four periods; when they were in Egypt (5-9), the 1st generation following the Exodus (10-17), the 2nd generation in the wilderness (18-26), and lastly their time in the land including the time of the exile (27-31). We are shown the cycle of

His grace to the people, their rebellion, His anger, His mercy up until the last period when there will be no mercy, judgment is here. *"I will not be inquired of by you (31),"* and for the reasons just laid out. Do not miss that we are shown much about the character of our triune Lord here, *"But I acted for the sake of My name (14)"* and repeated in 20.

21 – The chapter begins (1-12) by explaining the parable from the end of the last chapter. The sword of His judgment will be comprehensive and total. There will be no stopping the sword until it is complete. The judgment's intensity is emphasized by the doubling and the tripling of the sword's effect (14-17). The final section of the chapter shows the exiles who it is that is doing these things (18-32). The sword (Babylon) is returned to its sheath (30) and returned to its home where it will be destroyed by *"brutish men, skillful to destroy,"* the Medes and Persians. God's sword (or tool) does not get a pass because it was used by God for His purposes, it too will be judged, *"You shall be no more remembered, for I the Lord have spoken (32)."* Men and nations who live by the sword die by the sword. The Lord is faithful to His word, both in its promises and its warnings. The people will lose both their King and their High Priest (26) and will not return until, *"He comes, the one to whom judgment belongs, and I will give it to Him (27),"* the King Jesus.

22 – If we Americans consider us a 'city on the hill' then we should pay special attention to this chapter. Jerusalem, the city on a hill, is personified by the Lord and her guilt is exposed, *"You have become guilty by the blood you have shed, and defiled by the idols that you have made (4),"* bringing your days to an end. Each of her recent leaders have used their power for evil, each broke His covenant, each ignored the sanctity of life (6-12) but worse still, *"but Me you have forgotten."* When God is forgotten, every type of abomination is the outward expression of these verses. God asks them if when judgment comes can they stand, will they have courage (14)? He answers for them and the judgment will have three effects; they will be scattered, they will be cleansed of impurity, and the Babylonians will desecrate them with their neighbors as witnesses. There is no justice in the land and they have ascribed the Lord's name to their evil. His answer to them, *"I have returned their way upon their heads (31)."* A culture in decline may define sin out of existence but the Lord is not fooled and He will not be silent.

23 – A tale of two sisters, Oholah (Samaria) and Oholibah (Jerusalem), and their adultery against the Lord. It is a lurid metaphorical style that is not gratuitous but written to create revulsion at their behavior. The indictment of Oholah is covered in 5-10 and the judgment that had already occurred in their past. The indictment of Oholibah is covered in 11-35 with the Lord giving His verdict in 24, *"I will commit the judgment of them, and they shall judge you according to their judgment"* (the nations surrounding her). She has been abandoned by Him and her enemies will deal with her according to their customs. Her cup of wrath that she will drink is laid out in 28-35. These are the consequences of turning her back on the Lord (35). The chapter ends with this terrible truth, *"you shall bear the penalty for your sinful idolatry, and you shall know that I am the Lord God."* Only by God's grace are we able to remove the patterns of sinful behavior

that can dominate our life. We must consider what our hearts desire, turn from evil, and cast ourselves upon God's mercy. Our covenant with the Lord is exclusive.

24 – Some dates we remember easily, some are etched into our minds never to be forgotten. July 31, 593 BC was one for Ezekiel, it was the day he became a mute prophet. Today we see another one of those dates for Ezekiel, January 15, 588 BC, the day the siege of Jerusalem began and also the day that his wife died. As we read these verses we see the very hard call of obedience (18). Ezekiel is to not mourn his wife but to serve as an example (16-18) to the exiles, *“And you shall do as I have done (22).”* Note verse 14, it is the most emphatic affirmation of Divine resolve in the book of Ezekiel, *“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.”* In the midst of this terrible personal day for Ezekiel, the Lord speaks directly to him, *“on that day a fugitive will come to you to report to you the news (of the fall of Jerusalem). On that day your mouth will be opened (26-27).”* He will then be able to offer hope to the exiles.

25 – The Lord will now address the nations from chapter 25 to chapter 32. Israel's neighbors will also now *“know that I am the Lord”* (7,11,17). The Ammonites who showed their satisfaction and joy over the Judah's troubles; Moab and Seir because they thought God to be weak and Israel like the other nations; Edom who took the opportunity to take their revenge against Israel; and the Philistines due to their never ending enmity against the Lord and His people. *“I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I lay My vengeance upon them (17).”* Even in the midst of us enduring the Lord's discipline, Christ is with us. Those who contend with His people, contend with Him, they will not prevail. Those neighbors that sought harm to Israel now find themselves recipients of what they hoped to do to Israel. The modern nations and peoples who persecute the Christian church make the same mistake Judah's neighbors made when they saw their opportunity to exploit His people, they do not pause to consider God Himself. Great vengeance will be made on them from an angry God, justly.

26 – The mighty nation of Tyre is now addressed by the Lord and Nebuchadnezzar is named for the first time (7). As we read through this chapter carefully, we see that Nebuchadnezzar is only the first of many that will fulfill His prophecy (3, 12). Mighty Tyre celebrated the calamity brought against His people and have earned this judgment. Nebuchadnezzar could not destroy Tyre, he besieged it for 13 years and had to relent as he had no land bridge to Tyre nor a navy. But in history we see that God's timing is not our timing but what he ordains happens; successive waves of conquerors Persia, Alexander the great, Antiochus, Rome, the Saracens achieve completely the judgment against Tyre (19-20). A testament to the truth of the Lord's verdict, is found in a quote from a Jewish traveler named Benjamin of Tudela in 1170 AD, *“A man can ascend the walls of New Tyre and see ancient Tyre, which the sea has now covered, being at a stone's throw from the new city. And should one care to go forth by boat, one can see the castles, market places, streets, and palaces in the bed of the sea.”*

27 – This is the second of three prophecies against Tyre. Ezekiel is given a lament to sing of Tyre which is presented as a marvelously wrought trading vessel and the reason she was famous for being a merchant trader. This prophecy is also a stark picture of what happens when a major economic power falls and the consequences for all that she touches. Verses 28- 36 show her trading partners standing shocked on the shore at such a quick and total collapse of a mighty economic power. Consider how that would look today if NYC or Hong Kong suddenly fell and the ripples that would spread across the world and how we would be affected by such a calamity. Where is your and my security, is it the Lord or is it in our financial reserve. Consider Paul's warning, 1 Cor 10:12 *"let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."* Tyre was not unlucky. God is the God of all, let God in Christ be our God. The mighty economic powers of our day only stand at the Lord's good pleasure and for His purpose. Tyre had never taken up arms against His people, Tyre sought to substitute herself for God's city and Israel's fall was her opportunity to become the center of the universe... or so she thought.

28 – The third and last prophecy against Tyre is now directed against its leader and is a powerful lesson on the self-destructive danger of hubris. He claims to be a god, to have god-like wisdom, god-like power, a god-like heart... God's verdict, *"you are, but a man (2,9)."* Resulting in His final declaration, *"You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of foreigners; for I have spoken, declares the Lord God (10)."* Ezekiel is given another lament to raise over the leader of Tyre, a leader who was afforded every opportunity for genuine greatness but he chose to chase self-interest which resulted in the perverse leadership of what had been entrusted to him. Proverbs 16:18 *"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."* The lesson here should not be lost on us individually nor for those who have been appointed by the Lord to rule us at every level of authority. Remember Acts 12:20-23 where Tyre and Sidon are groveling before Herod (another evidence of the truth of Ezekiel's prophecy) with the people shouting, *"The voice of a god, and not of a man!"* which resulted in Herod serving the worms well that day.

29 – The Lord now has Ezekiel turn towards Egypt with four prophecies (Chapters 29-32). We are provided another date marker, January 7, 587 BC, it has been ten years since Ezekiel was taken into exile and six years since his call by the Lord. The siege against Jerusalem has been in effect for about a year. Note the reason why the Lord is against Egypt in 6, *"Because you have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel."* Even though Israel had been a rebellious house to the Lord, the Lord is faithful to His people, Egypt had promised safety and support to His people but had brought them only harm. All that Egypt boasts in will be removed from them. They have been the world's superpower for 3,000 years but the God of tiny Israel will be there downfall. Note also in 17 that we are given another date marker for these words, April 26, 571 BC, about two years after chapters 40-48. The Lord lets us see behind the curtain to see that Egypt was given to Babylon for the tough siege that took place against Tyre. The Lord is no one's debtor as He perfectly works out his plan of redemption.

30 – Ezekiel is given a funeral dirge to deliver to Egypt before their death. “*Wail* (or howl in terror), *Alas for the day* (2)! It is a dreadful thing indeed for the Lord to declare Himself to be your enemy. The message to the exiles is to quit looking to Egypt to be your savior because they are going to suffer as you are going to suffer. They are no help, in fact they are less than help to you in that they are a false hope that will only devastate you further as your hopes will be dashed to pieces as Egypt itself will be destroyed. Not only will Egypt suffer but all those associated with her for safety and security (8). Verse 13 delineates how thorough and complete their end will be, first the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans will march over Egypt so that they will never again be a world power. And it is still the case for Egypt today. Egypt was not facing God’s representative (Moses), they were facing God Himself. Pharaoh Hophra had identified himself as “Possessor of a Strong Arm” but the Lord had words for Hophra’s strong arm (21-22).

31 – Another prophecy against Egypt but this time directed to Pharaoh and we are given another date marker, June 21, 587 BC. It has been two months since the previous prophecy and the temple still stands... barely. The Lord uses mighty Assyria as an example for Pharaoh and one that the Jews in exile would understand as well. It had not been too many years since Assyria had fallen to the Babylonians in 612 BC. Pharaoh Hophra is given a poem about a tree representing Assyria (1-9). Daniel provides us a similar metaphor in Daniel 4:10-12 but in verse 9 we get the ‘how’ behind their greatness, “*I made it beautiful.*” And in 10-14 we get the Lord’s judgment against the proud and the consequences of their fall brought on by His judgment. We are not self-made and neither are nations. These are divine appointments according to the Lord’s purposes. The exiles who are hearing this prophecy on that June day are hearing that any hope they had for an Egyptian deliverance died in Sheol along with the Assyrians (15-18). For Pharaoh, the sentence for the proud is simple. It is death. In death all are made equal who do not love God.

32 – On March 3, 585 BC Ezekiel receives a lamentation from the Lord to raise over Pharaoh Hophra as news of the destruction of Jerusalem arrives. There no longer remains hope for the rescue of Jerusalem by the Egyptians for the exile community. There is a hard truth for those nations (and individuals) who think much of themselves and their view of reality when it comes into contact with real, objective truth, like the Lord. “*You consider yourself a lion of the nations, but you are like a dragon* (2).” You think yourself mighty like the Sphinx but you are nothing more than a crocodile (look back to 29:3). A picture of the crocodile hunter (a Holy one) who hunts this one down, nets it, hauls it out of the Nile, and makes it food for all the scavengers of the earth (3-6). Verse 7 is an echo of the 9th plague from Exodus 10:21-23 and a reminder that we may harden ourselves to the truth of God but it does not change the truth before us. It matters not what we think of God but it is what God thinks of us that has eternal weight. Notice how the chapter ends with the roll-call of those who thought themselves great but now equally occupy Sheol (19-23).

33 - In this chapter we are taken back to the end of Chapter 24 when Ezekiel's wife died. Word will be received (verse 21, January 5, 585) of the fall of Jerusalem and he will no longer be mute. But before the news arrives (1-20), the Lord lays out the scope of their accountability for the judgment that is coming. Ezekiel is set apart as a watchman for the exiles, to give warning and call for repentance and faith. He warns them not to err by falling into the sin of fatalism, "*I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live (11).*" Nor should they err thinking that they have a righteousness in and of themselves (12). They must turn to the Lord in faith and repentance as their hope, "*None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him (16).*" The watchman delivers His warning in 20, "*I will judge each of you according to his ways.*" Then the news arrives, Ezekiel will speak and he will be popular among them as a prophet but the Lord warns Ezekiel not to be fooled by them (Phil 3:19).

34 – This chapter presents a dire warning to those who are called to shepherd the church. The men who had shepherded them treated the sheep as if they owned them for their pleasure. The Lord makes it very clear that these are His sheep and those called to serve the church are to recognize this very important fact. Verse 4 is a mirror to 16 as to the sins of the false shepherd to what the good shepherd is to be. As you read this Chapter, follow it by reading John 10 to see how the Lord Himself answered the call for what a Shepherd is to be, "*And I will set up over them one shepherd, My servant David, and He shall feed them; He shall feed them and be their Shepherd. And I, the Lord will be their God, and My servant David shall be Prince among them (23).*" For those who suffer or have suffered under false shepherds, His promise is here, "*I will rescue My flock; they shall no longer be a prey (22).*" And for those false shepherds, "*Thus says the Lord God, Behold I am against the shepherds (10).*"

35 – It may seem curious that following the last chapter which featured the true hope for the people, Jesus Christ as the true Shepherd, we turn back to Jacob's ancient rival. Esau and the people of Edom represented by Mt. Seir in this prophecy. In v.35:24, the covenant promise to "*banish wild beasts from the land*" flowing from the promise of His covenant blessings (Lev. 16:4-13) is in view. This chapter is another encouragement to the exiles (and to us) that He will make them safe in the land. Moab had joined with Israel's enemies, attempted to seize her territory, and rejoiced over her defeat. The Lord makes it plain that these actions were seen properly as against Him (13). Edom has earned His judgment (14-15). Edom made the staggering error of not considering God as they followed their desires. We too can make the same error when we do not consider Him first and foremost before we follow our heart! He heard His people's prayer; Psalm 137:7 "*Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem, how they said, 'Lay it bare, lay it bare, down to its foundations.'*" Edom was made to know that, "*I am the Lord.*"

36 – With the mountain of judgment in view (Mt. Seir) the Lord now turns to the mountains of Israel as the mountains of salvation. The destruction of the house of Israel was not due to their God being too weak to save them but was a direct consequence to His people's rebellion (Chapter 6). The land was given a sabbath rest

from the abominations of the house of Israel but now the exiles are given an encouraging picture of the restoration of the land that He will accomplish (8-12). The Lord is jealous for His name (20) and even when we His people do not honor Him (17), when the culture mocks His church and the Lord, He is angered. He is not weak and He will act and He is acting now (23). The great promise to the exiles (24-30) began with their return to the land and was made complete with the life, death, resurrection of Jesus, and His sending of the Holy Spirit to accomplish what is promised. DPC's future is secured by this very promise and we longingly await the final consummation when He returns and all the people of this creation will "*know that I am the Lord.*"

37 – Other than the vision from Chapter 1, this is probably the best-known Chapter in the book of Ezekiel. The Spirit transports him to a valley in this vision, "*it was full of bones (1).*" The word "*breath*" is used ten times in this chapter. Following Jesus' resurrection and in one of His appearances with the disciples, Jesus says this in John 20:22 "*And when He had said, this, He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'*" Tim Keller says that this is the Ezekiel moment for Jesus – He raised them from the dead, returned them from exile, and to their ultimate hope. This is the gospel according to Ezekiel. "*And I will put My Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord (14).*" Isaiah 26:19 and Daniel 12:12 speak to the same truth expressed in this chapter and on this side of the cross, Ephesians 2:1-10 is the fully revealed truth. We too were as dead as these dry bones until Jesus breathed life into us by the power of the Holy Spirit as the Father called us to life.

38 – This Chapter and the next are difficult for us due to the influence of literature and movies of recent years in the United States. Ezekiel has allowed us to see how the Lord used Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon as His tool to bring about judgment on Jerusalem and to the enemies of the house of Israel. Ezekiel now points us to future enemies of God's people that will continue to do harm until the return of Jesus. Gog and Magog will come but we also see the truth about what is being brought about by the Lord for His purposes, "*I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws (4)*" like a bit in a horse's mouth as he is ridden to do the master's bidding. The chapter also reveals, "*thoughts will come into your mind, and you will devise an evil scheme*" but he will still be accountable to the Lord for his evil actions. It is a picture of evil people continuing to come against God's people to destroy them BUT He Himself will rescue, He Himself will save His people for all eternity. "*I will show My greatness and My holiness and make Myself known in the eyes of many nations (23).*"

39 – This Chapter brings to a close the prophecy began in Chapter 38, the enemies of God have completed their purpose and before we receive the vision of the 'not yet' in Chapters 40-48, the Lord has a final word for His enemies, "*I am against you, O Gog (1).*" The power of the Lord will be demonstrated for all to see, His people and the nations (1-8). His people will then safely plunder the plunderer due to a victory so complete and massive in its destruction that it requires seven months to cleanse the land (9-16). This 'banquet' for the birds and beasts (17-20) makes it plainly known to the nations that it is the Lord who acts against those that would wish His people harm,

“And I will set My glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see My judgment that I have executed (21).” The chapter closes with the restoration of His people (25-29) by His mercy. Their shame and treachery, His grace life lived in His Spirit which we know was accomplished by Jesus, *“And I will not hide my face anymore from them, when I pour out My Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord God.”*

40 – It has been 25 years in exile, the number of exiles has grown with the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 52:30), Babylon is still the great world power to be feared, the season of hope for the Jews is over, and it is in this environment that the Lord gives Ezekiel a vision for them of the glorious future that is ahead. A message of hope for the hopeless. A city whose name is, *“The Lord is there (48:35).”* It will take eight chapters for Ezekiel to unpack the vision for us. As you read these chapters keep Rev. 21 at hand as John has a fuller revelation of what Ezekiel is permitted to see and understand. This will be no physical temple, *“And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the lamb (Rev. 21:22).”* So what are we to make of all the detail that will be provided on a physical temple? We should endeavor to do what the Lord instructed Ezekiel to do, *“look with your eyes and hear with your ears, and set your heart upon all that I shall show you (4).”* Note that when the Jews returned by decree of Cyrus, they did not rebuild the temple based on these instructions.

41 – As Ezekiel continues with the exacting requirements for the temple as the Lord instructed him we must remember the audience that will be receiving the vision. It will be the Jews that are in exile and they are getting a revelation of what being able to return to having the ability to dwell with the Lord when they are restored. *“This is the Most Holy Place (4)”* reminds us that God’s holiness must be separated from us because of our sin. If it had not been for Jesus we would still require this protection and we must never lose our sense of awe before Him. Note that even in Ezekiel’s vision he does not enter the Holy of Holies. The exiles are receiving a vision of the ideal place to dwell with God in a context they can understand but still with a warning of not becoming too comfortable in the presence of a Holy God. For us today with the understanding that in our ‘already’ Paul tells us, *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God (1 Cor. 6:19).”* We too need to take care as we conduct ourselves in this world.

42 – Ezekiel is now led out, he was not allowed to wander, to the outer court. He is again given exacting measurements of the architecture of the rooms and chambers. Every detail of the architecture is intended to reinforce the point that this building is designed to take away sin and present the sinner with a way to approach God in worship and relationship. We should not lose sight of the big picture represented in these chapters for the exiles, they are seeing a message of hope and expectation of once again being restored to God and able to be in His presence to honor and worship Him. There will be a land, a temple, and repentant people able to worship Him once again. No longer to be estranged, no longer to be exiles, but once again to be the people of His promise. *“He measured it on the four sides, it had a wall around it, 500 cubits long and 500 cubits broad, to make a separation between the holy and the common (20),”* thus ends the chapter with a statement of perfect symmetry, a structure

of 500 cubits square. The tour ends with the picture of an empty place and a sense of expectation.

43 – Ezekiel is now led to the gate facing east, the same gate that Ezekiel saw the Lord depart the temple (11:22-23). The glory of the Lord is returning to His temple and Ezekiel responds accordingly, *“I fell on my face (4).”* The Spirit lifts him up and the Lord speaks to him from out of the temple. He declares His intentions and what the implications will be (7-9). He then instructs Ezekiel as to what he will tell the exiles and why they need to hear (10-11). We know that the Lord did not enter the second temple until John 2:16 when Jesus enters the temple to cleanse the corruption before Him. Man was no more able to *“keep the law of the temple (12)”* after the return of the exiles than he was before the exile. It is only God’s commitment to Himself that He graciously provides us access to Him. We are not deserving of God’s acceptance either then or now. He provided the means for our acceptance by perfectly becoming the sacrifice (18-26) so that we can hear the great promise of grace the chapter ends with, *“I will accept you, declares the Lord God (27).”*

44 – In the last Chapter we saw the return of the glory of the Lord to the ideal temple Ezekiel has introduced us to. Now we see how He is to be worshipped. Note in (1-3) the repeated word, *“shut,”* the gate in which the Lord had exited and then returned is to remain shut forevermore. Unlike the Babylonian god Marduk who had to be carried once a year by his worshippers, our God will be ever with us. There no longer exists a physical temple building, but Jesus’ promise to us is that He will keep us until the last day and then for all eternity. The *“prince”* should not be viewed as Jesus as we will learn later in 45:22 the prince makes a sin offering for himself and in 46:16 he is shown to have natural children. Although not completely clear it is best to think of him as a ‘leader.’ In contrast to the Jews previous horrific treatment of the Lord and His temple, exacting requirements are laid out (4-31) for serving the Lord. This Chapter gives the impression of a prevailing state of order among the people when they approach the Lord who IS with them. Everything that defiles has been forever banished.

45 – The land is now apportioned to the people of the Lord. The land like the temple, is depicted as a spiritual symbolic representation as the description in this Chapter and bears little relationship to the topography of the region. The temple is the center of this spiritual geometry, not the city. The land is apportioned in a way that the exiles would understand but given with a warning against problems of the past and present, *“Enough, O princes of Israel! Put away violence and oppression and execute justice and righteousness. Cease your evictions of My people (9).”* This kingdom will be characterized by honesty. This is not a picture of the new heavens and the new earth to come, this idealized kingdom still requires sacrifices to deal with the sin of the people but we are shown a picture of the heart of a people devoted to the worship of God. The land distribution arranged in a way that the sanctuary is the center and it is the worship and communication with the Lord that is its center. In our present we at DPC enjoy *“the offering of the body of Jesus Christ one for all (Heb. 10:10).”* We are to make His sanctuary the center of our lives.

46 – The previous Chapter and this one assist the exile in coming to repentance, endurance in the believer's life, and hope through a vision of a reordered worship by the people. Compare these chapters to 8:16 where they were described as turning their backs to the Lord in His sanctuary. Now a picture of life lived that is centered on a spiritual axis and not worldly or concerns of self-interest. The role of the prince in worship (1-18) shows us a picture of one who approaches more intimately the God who is and represents the people before a holy God. Another shadow of the Prince that was to come and now has come and is seated at the right hand of the Father. All of the sacrifices described in this idealized picture of worship find their fulfillment in Jesus. He is the One who atones, He pays our tribute before us, He is our fellowship offering (communion today symbolizes this offering), and He is our purification offering. Ezekiel offers a pattern for Christian worship. Paul in 1 Cor. 14:40, *"But all things should be done decently and in order,"* describes the same approach. This should be our pattern as we too approach the Lord.

47 – There IS a river. In this vision it flows from the temple. John in Rev. 22:1-2 gives us not the shadow of the temple to come but a picture of the river *"flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb,"* we are allowed to see what Ezekiel could not see. He could not look into the Holy of Holies but we can through the revelation given to John by Jesus. It is the river of life which was also described in Genesis 2:10, *"A river flowed out of Eden,"* a river which dried up as a consequence of sin. Ezekiel is getting a picture of the restoration to come, a river that is eschatological, promised at the end of history to provide life to the land and to all that will inhabit the new Eden for all eternity. Note what leads the guide to say to Ezekiel, *"Some of man, have you seen this?"* It's as if he says, wake up and take note! Watch the growth of the river (3-5), goes from ankle depth to being able to swim, and then to the point where it cannot be crossed. 4,000 cubits is roughly 1.4 miles away from the source! This is an abundant source of life. In John 7:37-39, Jesus is identifying Himself as the fulfillment of this prophecy.

48 – In the final Chapter we are shown a symbol of the unity of God's people in theological geography. The design has never been realized in history nor will be until the end of history, it is a design that shows equality, security, inclusivity, and with the Lord centered in the land. The Lord will dwell here for eternity with His people. It is a place for all of His people, a place of continuing work and activity, and place to be with Him. *"And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The Lord is There (35)."* Ezekiel is granted the privilege of being able to show the exiles what they probably could not begin to imagine sitting on the banks of Chebar Canal in Babylon knowing that the temple and most of their people had been destroyed. This is a final picture of the heart of the covenant, the everlasting covenant, promised from the beginning but only fulfilled through Jesus Christ, *"I will be your God and you will be My people."* This picture is what we receive as the Bible itself is drawing to a conclusion in Rev. 21:1-3, *"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man (Rev. 21:3)."*

Final Reflection: The Book of Ezekiel has lived with me off and on for two years now and as I think about my journey with the Lord through this book quite a few things have

had great effect on me. To name just a few; how impressed I was with the spiritual maturity of a young man called by God to a very difficult task yet he was obedient to all that was required of him - having to put into human terms things revealed in visions that no man had ever seen - to hear the news beforehand that your wife would die and you would not publicly mourn her loss - to see in graphic terms what neither he nor the Jews could imagine – the departure of the Lord from the temple and then the destruction of the people, the temple, and the cleansing of the land. You also see the heart of our Great and Merciful God offering grace to those who might repent until there was no longer a time to repent... and yet He was true to His promise, He saved a remnant that would return to the land to rebuild the temple so that Jesus could make His entrance during the incarnation. The Lord was ever faithful to His covenant people. Lastly we are shown the things we expectantly wait for - our glorious hope in His return so that we will be united with Him to dwell with Him for the rest of eternity.

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Ezekiel. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Ezekiel before we move forward?

"So Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.'" John 7.16