**EZEKIEL**

**Background:**

Ezekiel was the strangest of the prophets. Even before the writing prophets (mid-8thC AD), some prophets (*nevi’im)* were known for their ecstatic states when they were inhabited by the divine spirit. All prophets believed God had spoken to them. Some felt they had received visual revelations or paranormal experiences. *Ezekiel* had many visions, the best known being the Valley of Dry Bones (Chp.37). God addressed Ezekiel as “you mortal” to emphasize his humanity. He regularly was referred to Ezekiel as “son of man”- different from Jesus.

In short, prophets sometimes were considered on the border of sanity. Even so, *Ezekiel* was at the extreme end of the spectrum. His prophecy seemed to be like “God-intoxicated derangement’ (Robert Alter). Indeed, *Ezekiel* became an inspiration for the Jewish mysticism of late antiquity.

God called several prophets to live out His message, both symbolically and publicly, by performing unusual acts, but Ezekiel’s call was more extraordinary than other prophets. As with *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel’s* sign acts enhanced the force of his message. They were a heightened form of communication. To name a few of Ezekiel’s sign acts: he ate a scroll containing words of lamentation and mourning (Chp.2); he constructed a model of Jerusalem with a brick and an iron pan then he laid on one side in bonds for 390 days, and then on the other for 40 days (Chp.4).

Knowledge about the person named Ezekiel is exclusively from his book. He was a priest from Jerusalem and was married. He probably was born c. 623 BC. Ezekiel had a powerful intellect and broad knowledge of many things. Most scholars believe Ezekiel was deported with the exiled elite and King Jehoiachin in 597 BC, 10 years before Jerusalem fell. [This was the 2nd Babylonian deportation. It included Ezekiel, the king, 10,000 elite Judeans, and the Temple treasure, all of which were taken to Babylon.]

Ezekiel’s prophetic activity did not begin until 593 BC, several years after he was deported to Babylon. He settled with a group of exiles in the city of Nippur by the Kebar Canal, a branch of the Euphrates River’s irrigation system. Jewish exiles often settled near rivers because of their need for ritual cleansing in pagan lands.

Ezekiel was 30 years old when he was commissioned by God as a prophet. [Priests normally began their duties at age 30. Jesus’ ministry started when He was 30.] Babylon finally destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple 5 years after the siege began, but Ezekiel continued his prophetic calling until at least 571 BC (25 years in total). His prophecy overlapped with the last decade of Jeremiah’s, which began in 620 BC. *Ezekiel* relied on *Jeremiah*’s thoughts and prophecies.

*Ezekiel* was written in the 1st person, apparently by only 1 author. [Most scholars concur the book and prophecies were written by Ezekiel on or about the days he noted therein.] The book revolved around Jerusalem’s fall- the greatest disaster in Jewish history. Here is a chronology:

* 722-721 BC- Northern Kingdom (Samaria/Ephraim/Israel) fell to Assyria.
* 612 BC Assyria (Nineveh= its capital) fell to the Medes and Babylon.
* 605 BC- Babylon defeated Egypt at Carchemish; Nebuchadnezzar became Babylon’s King; Judah’s King Jehoiakim became his vassal; Daniel and his 3 friends were taken as captives to Babylon.
* 597 BC- Judah switched allegiance to Egypt and Nebuchadnezzar marched on Jerusalem against King Jehoiakim’s son, Jehoiachin, who was defeated and exiled. [Ezekiel and others also were exiled also.]
* 586 BC- Nebuchadnezzar made Jehoiachin’s uncle, Zedekiah, his puppet ruler in Judah, but he too rebelled.
* 588 BC- Babylon turned against Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem.
* 586 BC- The Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed after a devastating, 2-year siege & the last great exile of Judahites to Babylon occurred.
* 562 BC- Evil-Merodach, Nebuchadnezzar’s son, succeeded him and in 561 BC, released Jehoiachin.
* 539 BC- Persian King Cyrus defeated Babylon.
* 538 BC- Cyrus issued the proclamation allowing Jews to return to Judah.

Unlike *Jeremiah, Ezekiel* displayed priestly concerns about clean/unclean, the Temple, and the ritual sacrificial system. He also wrote in prose, with a great deal of repetition and priestly legalistic style. Most prophets spoke/wrote in poetic verse, especially when conveying the word of God.

Like *Jeremiah a*nd other prophets, however, *Ezekiel* preached both God’s judgment on Judah but also the hope of restoration for the remnant of God’s people. *Ezekiel’s* preaching, however, may have been the most symmetrical, e.g., destruction of the Temple was balanced by a vision of the restored, purified Temple; God was wrathful and then He was comforting; Ezekiel was called to be a watchman of divine judgment and then he saw the dawn of a new age.

*Ezekiel* is the most chronological book in the OT. More than any other prophetic book, *Ezekiel* provided dates for the events about which he wrote. Indeed, *Ezekiel* often noted the day/month/year of the matters he reported. 12 of 13 dates revealed the times when Ezekiel received a message from God.

Note *Ezekiel’s* repeated phrases: “Master, the Lord”; by My Life; by My Holy Name; I raised my hand (to take a solemn vow); I acted for the sake of My Name (Israel’s behavior gave it no right to the Promised Land, but God would allow a remnant to survive for the sake of His name); I gave Sabbaths as a sign between Me and them; so they may know that I am the Lord, etc. (In the late monarchy and exile, Sabbath became increasingly important, especially after the Temple was gone.) Repetition gave emphasis to the message.

All OT prophets taught God’s sovereignty over Creation. About 65 times, *Ezekiel* announced, “Then they will know that I am the Lord.” The book has 4 main visions, 12 symbolic acts, and 5 parables. It can be divided as follows:

* Chp.1-24 (593-587 BC) = God revealed the eminent fall and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. *Ezekiel* castigated Israel for turning away from God and becoming like other nations. The land and the Temple had been polluted by Israel’s economic injustice, violence, and idolatry. God had been patient, but the situation had become intolerable.
  + Chp.1-11= God departed from Jerusalem
  + Chp.12-24= Jerusalem’s destruction
* Chp.25-32= *Ezekiel* proclaimed the nations would know God is true and His judgments are right. These oracles of judgment were pronounced between chapters announcing Jerusalem’s fall to Babylon. God was sovereign over all.
* Chp.33= a bridge chapter about Jerusalem’s fall
* Chp.34-37= God would transform His people and restore and renew Israel’s spirit.
* Chp.38,39=An apocalypse.
* Chp.40-48= God resides with His people in His new city and Temple.

The 3 major writing prophets and *Zephaniah* followed a similar basic sequence.

*Ezekiel* was not often quoted in the NT, but *Revelation* begins and ends

with visions like *Ezekiel’s.* The “son of man” phrase recured 93 times as Ezekiel’s title, focusing on the prophet’s human nature*. Ezekiel* indicated, “The word of the Lord came to me,” 40 times. He also cited other previously written Scripture:

* Ezk.4 & 5 are from Lev.26.
* Ezk.44:9-1-16 referred to Num.18:1-7 & 22-23.
* Ezk.22:25-29 re-quoted Zeph.3:1-4.

Ezekiel ministered to Israel in Babylon for 22 years of its most stressful time – Judah’s darkest days. He saw a remarkable vision (1:4-28) and was called to be a sentinel among the exiles to warn his devastated audience of impending danger. *Ezekiel* dealt with many questions from the exiles. Why did God allow the exile? Was God unjust? Why wouldn’t/couldn’t God protect the Promised Land? Was God capable of doing anything? How could Ezekiel explain Israel’s defeat, Jerusalem’s destruction, and the mass deportations?

For his first 7 years, Ezekiel relayed the stern, heart-breaking message of God’s judgment against Judah- an overwhelming task. He exposed the nation’s moral depravity and decreasing concern for God and His spiritual values. *Ezekiel* dashed the exiles early hopes that Judah would be spared destruction and they would be able to go home. He declared that Jerusalem would fall, and the Jewish people had no chance for relief. The only thing to do was to live at peace with one another and with God while they were in exile.

God told Ezekiel his beloved wife, the delight of his eyes, would die. Then, He told Ezekiel Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed- taken from him. And then, God forbade Ezekiel from mourning any of it.

God told Ezekiel when Nebuchadnezzar began the 3rd siege of Jerusalem in 588 BC. He announced the coming invasion and siege and then the fall and destruction of Jerusalem, together with the impending arrival of a 3rd group of exiles in 586 BC. God also ordered *Ezekiel* to pronounce judgment on the neighboring nations, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Trye, Sidon, and Egypt.

After Jerusalem fell, however, God’s message to Israel through *Ezekiel* changed to one of hope. God would provide Israel’s people a new spirit and they would be HIs faithful people. They would have a new Jerusalem and a new Temple. Israel would experience revival, restoration, and a glorious future as the redeemed, perfect kingdom of God in the world. *Ezekiel* conveyed several major promises which would be fulfilled in the Messianic kingdom:

- The Lord would regather His scattered people,

- The Lord would return Israel to the Promised land and would cleanse its

people and the land from defilement,

* The Lord would give the people a new heart and spirit so they would walk in His ways,
* The Lord would bless Israel with great prosperity and success,
* The Lord would establish His permanent residence in the midst of Israel.

In addition to standard prophetic themes, *Ezekiel* spoke of Israel as the holy people, with the holy Temple, in the holy city, in the holy land. Everything that had been made unclean by the people defiling themselves, which had forced God to withdraw from Judah and judge it with destruction, would be eliminated. God then would have compassion and cleanse His people and restore the glory of the holy city and the land. God would be faithful to His covenant and save and revive a remnant of His people. *Ezekiel’s* message ultimately was eschatological, speaking of a future time.

*Chapters 1-3: Ezekiel’s Prophetic Call*

The first thing to note is the reference (here and throughout) to a specific date and place= 598 BC in the land of the Chaldeans (Babylon). A second date calculation provided was= the 5th year of the exile of King Jehoiachin (the 2nd exile). It was another means to calculate the same date as the first. Ezekiel was one of the exiles. (The language is a mixture of 3rd and 1st person).

Ezekiel saw a divine vision: “And the hand of the Lord was there (on him).” He saw storm, wind, and fire, a typical theophany. Then he saw a wheeled throne, with 4 faces of creatures/iconic animals, like the 4 faces of the Babylonian chief god, Marduk, or the 4 iconic beasts of the 4 Gospels. [Contrast to Isaiah’s vision of God whose robe filled the Temple and who had 4 seraphim overhead, but who saw no celestial vehicle.]

This was an extensive apocalyptic vision of God. Repeatedly Ezekiel noted the vision was “like,” but it clearly was an analogy, not a description of anything known to man. Exegetes and artists have tried to draw what Ezekiel saw, but none has been successful. The image was one of fearsomeness, disorienting and disturbing, with all-seeing divine omniscient eyes.

The wheels were not attached to the creatures, but their movements were synchronized through a shared spirit. The 4-sided moving structure had wheels below and something like a platform above. The ancients called it a chariot; moderns might think of it as a bizarre hovering helicopter.

Soon after he was commissioned, Ezekiel settled in Tel-abib, a previously uninhabited area in Babylon where other exiles also had settled. This helped the exiles remain together, resist assimilation, and preserve their way of life. For a while, Ezekiel stayed among his fellow deportees in a catatonic state.

God then spoke to Ezekiel and commanded him to open his mouth and eat what God gave him= an extremely symbolic act. (Other prophets also performed symbolic acts, but Ezekiel’s were extreme.) God told him not to be rebellious like his countrymen and threatened Ezekiel with death if he failed to fulfill his task and to warn Israel adequately. He ate- ingesting equaled total submission.

When Ezekiel ate the scroll, it became sweet in his mouth. Then God called Ezekiel to speak with the people of Israel (the exiles), but He told Ezekiel they would not listen to him and be forgiven. Prophets often were portrayed as sentries because of their ability to see the future and warn (*Jeremiah, Habakkuk*, and *Hosea* used his image.) Using priestly judicial language, *Ezekiel* explained that a sentry who failed to warn would be condemned, but the sentry who warned would not be condemned if the people chose not to heed his warning.

Then God told Ezekiel to go out into the countryside where He would speak to him. Again, Ezekiel saw a vision of God as he had at the Kebar River. He was to go into his house where he was to be bound by cords, symbolizing Israel’s captivity resulting from its infidelity. God would deprive him of speech for a while so the people would not repent, but later, God would allow Ezekiel to speak.

*Chapters 4-7: Approaching Judgment*

God commanded Ezekiel to take a brick and either, carve the city of Jerusalem into it or draw a picture of the city on the brick. (Commentators and translations differ on this. In Israel, stone was the primary building material, but in Mesopotamia, the main building material was brick, which could be carved into a shape before it was fired. Archaeologists have found a brick carved in the shape of the Babylonian city of Nippur.) God told Ezekiel to put the brick into an iron pan representing a siege wall around the city. Ezekiel was to sit outside the iron wall and face it as if he were God besieging the city. This he did in his Tel Abib home.

Then, God told Ezekiel to lie on his left side for 390 days (more than 13 months) = the years of Israel’s crimes. He could not roll over or get up. God would immobilize/paralyze Ezekiel. [Supposedly, Israel began its infidelity in Egypt, and it continued for 390 years, plus its 40 years of wandering. Others, calculate the time from the erection of Solomon’s Temple in 970 BC to 580 BC, about the time of Ezekiel’s prophecy= about 4 centuries.] Then, Ezekiel was to lie down on his right side for 40 days. Although the time is difficult to correlate with known facts, the message was that Ezekiel was to take Israel’s guilt and punishment on himself. a typical priestly role (See: *Hebrews*).

Ezekiel also received specific minimal allotments for food and water during this time. He was to have no more than 8 oz. bread/day + 1 and 1/3 pints of water. His bread was to be made without wheat, as in the case in a long siege. [The Talmud said not even a dog would eat this bread, but a Christian group purports to make bread like this.] He was to use dried animal dung for fuel to make the bread. (Originally, God said he must cook with human feces, but he relented when Ezekiel reminded that as a priest, he never had eaten unclean food, and this would make his food unclean.) So, he cooked with cattle dung, but his condition would have been near starvation, as during a siege. [Lev.26 predicted such a disaster if Israel abandoned God’s ways.]

The idea of intergenerational cannibalism was expressed here and in Lev.26 as a sign of God’s extreme castigation of Israel. More than once, pagan idols had been introduced into the sanctuary, a sin denounced in Deut.32 (Song of Moses). Ezekiel was to shave all his body hair, a sign of mourning or dishonoring by a conqueror. He was to take 1/3rd and burn it in the fire, representing those who would die of pestilence/disease; 1/3rd he was to strike with the sword, like those who would die in the city; and 1/3rd he was to scatter to the wind, symbolizing those who would flee, be pursued, and slain by the sword. But Ezekiel was to take a small bit of hair and tuck it into his garment, representing the few who would be saved. At the end of the siege, Jerusalem was burned, royalty was executed, and the rest were exiled. Judah paid the full price of its infidelity.

Then, Ezekiel was told to set his face, with a hostile stare, to the mountains, where Israel worshipped false gods, and to prophesy. God would destroy Israel’s cities, towns, and high places as well as its people. Because of its unfaithfulness, Israel would become a desolate place. But God would spare some after they had been scattered and exiled. He did all of this so that all would know He is the Lord- a regular refrain in *Ezekiel.*

Now, God’s judgment/punishment focused on the land. From the time of the exile, the concept, *Eretz Yisrael*, the concept of the land of Israel, became a prominent part of Israel’s national consciousness. As people bore the punishment for their sins, they were forced to recognize God’s existence and power. All other sources of authority and counsel were removed, and people lived in terror. On the day of God’s wrath, people’s gold and silver could not save them; possessions and wealth were meaningless. Disaster fell on everyone. What people believed was their security, was fragile. The fall of Jerusalem turned the world upside down for Israel and Ezekiel; nothing would be the same again.

*Chapters 8-11: The Temple Vision*

The next vision occurred In Ezekiel’s Tel-abib home during a meeting with elders of the exile community in *Ab* (late July/early August) 591 BC, about 1 year after the 1st vision and the 6th year of Jehoiachin’s exile (from which *Ezekiel’s* dates were counted.) Ezekiel fell into a trance and God unexpectedly and vigorously took hold of him. [As with the chariot vision, this was not an in-person sighting; it was a very detailed vision.]

A fiery figure (an angel) gripped Ezekiel by the hair and transported him from Babylon to a point north of the Temple in Jerusalem (c.500 air miles). [Parallels occurring at home in the presence of elders to authenticate the experience included: Elijah levitated- 1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:1-12; 16-18; Elisha displayed psychic powers (2 Kings 5:26; 6:17, 32,33.]

In this hallucination, Ezekiel, who recently had been paralyzed for more than a year, was taken to Jerusalem. As an exiled priest, he clearly remembered the Temple. He approached the Temple from the North and entered an inner courtyard in the direction of the Eastern entrance leading into the atrium. At each stage of his tour, he saw idolatrous, pagan acts performed within the Temple.

The 1st involved the statue/icon of an unnamed pagan god, perhaps an Asherah, queen of heaven/a fertility goddess who was very popular in the last decades of Judah. (Manasseh officially sanctioned her worship and set up a statute to her in the Temple- 2 Kings 21:7. His son, Josiah removed the statue- 2 Kings 23:6- but it was returned after Josiah’s death in 609 BC. During the 8thC BC, some claimed Asherah was YHWH’s consort.

Entering a large room through a recess in the wall, Ezekiel saw pagan voyeuristic practices. He also saw pictures of unclean animals on the Temple walls, like those on Egyptian tombs. [Even after Egypt’s defeat at Carchemish and Josiah’s death, a strong pro-Egyptian/anti-Babylonian party continued in Israel. Its members may have prayed to Egyptian gods.] In front of the Temple, where sacrifices were made, a special place of sanctity for priests like Ezekiel, were 25 men (LXX= 20) facing East in the direction of the sun with their backs to the Temple and God’s presence. They probably were worshipping an Egyptian god.

Then Ezekiel saw 70 elders (perhaps precursors of the Sanhedrin or descendants of Moses’ counsel) practicing a forbidden ritual, like a black mass with fumes, not incense. They were secretly worshipping pagan gods in private chambers hidden from view.

At the North Gate, the entrance to the Temple, women were mourning Tammuz, a vegetation god worshipped throughout the Middle East. (Dumuzi/ Sumer; Baal-Haddad/Canaan; Adonis/ Greece). The god died in the winter and went to the underworld. During that time, he was mourned by his lover/consort. (Inanna/Sumer; Ishtar/Canaan; Aphrodite/Greece.)

God then dispatched 7 executioners, who appeared at the Benjamin Gate of the outer court facing North. Each had a club/ax/instrument of destruction to bash heads throughout Jerusalem. (Like the destroying angels of Rev.15, 16). One of them wore white linen like a scribe with a case and pen to mark the foreheads of the righteous who were to be saved (the opposite of Cain). Some, like Origen and Jerome, suggest the cross of Christ was inscribed on their foreheads.

The 7 began at Solomon’s bronze altar which King Ahaz had moved to the Northeast corner of the Temple court to make room for his stone altar. There they were very close to the 25 sun worshippers. After the righteous had been marked, the remaining 6 began the massacre. Genocide ensued against everyone- men, women, children, even those inside the Temple. The 1st to die were the sun worshippers, whose corpses defiled the Temple (which already had been defied by the activities that had been occurring there).

Ezekiel tried to intercede and stop the massacre, but like Jeremiah, he failed. This taught both prophets the profound, desperate reality of sin. God was implacable. It was too late. The land was filled with blood.

In a new vision, Ezekiel saw a platform over the heads of the cherubim which was like a sapphire stone throne. The Lord said to the man in linen to go among the wheels under the cherubim and gather burning coals from there. He was to scatter them over the city.

At that point, God’s glory rose from the inner sanctuary of the Temple, under the wings of the cherubim, to the East end of the building. The apocalyptic vision of the cherubim was like the one he had seen originally at Kebar. Each had 4 faces: that of a cherub, a man, a lion, and an eagle (The bull’s face from Chp.1 was replaced with a cherub’s); they had wheels that sparkled like chrysolite, and their entire bodies were filled with eyes. The glory *of El Shaddai* (God Almighty- an old designation emphasizing His great power) then departed from over the threshold of the Temple. It stopped at the entrance to the East Gate.

The vision returned to a time before the fall of Jerusalem. Weak King Zedekiah (598-586 BC) was caught between those advocating submission to Babylon and the war parry seeking an Egyptian alliance. 25 men, probably those worshipping the sun god in 8:16, but certainly royal counselors, were arguing/ plotting to resist Babylon and strengthen Jerusalem’s fortifications. The king refused to listen to Jeremiah and fatally decided to rebel against Babylon.

This was not merely a religious issue; Ezekiel and Jeremiah were very involved politically. The counsellors used a strange old metaphor of a strong pot, referring to the city, protecting the good meat inside, meaning its people (without recognizing the meat would be eaten).

God told Ezekiel to prophesy against the people, but they opposed him saying his prophecies of doom had not come true. Calling them murderers (before he called them idolaters), Ezekiel declared they would be thrown from the pot as unfit. Then, he put the metaphor in the correct context. The plotters, including the King, would flee Jerusalem to escape the Babylonians, but they would be caught and killed. As a sign, Ezekiel prophesied the death of 1 of the 25, a noble named Pelatiah, which suddenly was fulfilled. God’s glory then traveled from the Temple, through the East Gate over the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives.

*Ezekiel* shifted from doom to salvation through judgment on the exiles. A remnant would return to the land with a new heart and spirit. Ezekiel told the exiles at his home all that he had seen.

*Chapters 12-14: True and False Prophecy*

Again, before Jerusalem fell, *Ezekiel* turned to a variety of subjects dealing with true and false prophecy. Again, the recurrent theme of people’s resistance and disbelief in the prophet’s words was sounded.

God ordered Ezekiel to don exile’s gear= a pack/bag with basic survival items to be carried on his shoulders. (Assyrian reliefs depict exiles carrying such gear.) He was to dig a hole though the wall and take his belongings out through it at dusk. Ezekiel did so.

God told him the oracle was about Judah’s prince, Judah’s last king, King Zedekiah’s (2 Kings 25:4-7; Jer.39:4-7, 52:7-11). As Jerusalem’s situation became more desperate, the king and his family, with a military escort, escaped the city in darkness through a hole in the wall of the south side. They soon were captured by the Babylonians and taken to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah. Zedekiah’s sons were killed before his eyes, and he was blinded and taken into exile.

Ezekiel then attacked the false prophets of the Babylonian exile, saying they should have protected the people, but they had become predators. They should have warned about the coming Day of the Lord. Instead, they had built flimsy walls that would not withstand the test of force. Although they looked solid, they were white-washed and poorly constructed. They gave a false sense of security. By contrast, Ezekiel had faithfully quoted God’s words. Ezekiel particularly singled out women prophets involved in the forbidden Babylonian practices of divination, sorcery, and witchcraft and who went into ecstatic fits.

Israel’s elders then went to Ezekiel for an oracle/prophecy, but God was outraged because He knew they were also worshipping other gods. God told Ezekiel to tell the men He would give them punishment, not an oracle. They should repent and turn from the idols and detestable practices. If they repented and turned to Him, He would be their God. But if a prophet uttered a prophecy to the men who had not repented, God would punish the prophet and the sinner.

God was going to send His sword against Judah and destroy it. Only those who turned to Him and were righteous would survive, not even their children would be saved. But a remnant of sons and daughters would survive.

*Chapters 15-19: Images of Israel*

Chapter 15 is the shortest chapter in the book. It is a parable, not a vision, about a useless vine. Judah was that vine. Typically, the vine was an image of plentiful life and growth, but here *Ezekiel* spoke of a dead vine. The only question was a rhetorical one: What use could be made of such a vine? The answer was none; it only could be burned. That is what would happen to Jerusalem.

*Ezekiel* gave another prophecy– an allegory about unfaithful Jerusalem. He began by declaring that Israel should not consider itself unique. It was just one of the Canaanite peoples. (Some historians believe this to be true and reject the idea that Israel escaped from Egypt.)

God then compared Israel to an unwanted discarded child- not a Jewish practice. But He took up Israel and raised her to womanhood. God, the foster Father, took his foster child as His bride and gave her gold, silver, and fine clothing (a metaphor for Jerusalem/Zion and the Temple adorned in finery). But she became unfaithful, a metaphor also seen in *Hosea, Isaiah*, and *Jeremiah*, but here *Ezekiel* engaged in graphic, even disgusting, depictions of sexual promiscuity. Jerusalem was devoted to all sorts of pagan practices and even performed child sacrifice, one of the greatest evils of the pagan cults. Ultimately, God would punish her as in many Near Eastern countries. He would strip and stone her to death, and then hack her body to pieces.

In this chapter, *Ezekiel* is more disturbing and gross than any other prophet. Most churches never use this chapter for services. Apparently, Ezekiel had serious issues with women, but he used this language to portray Judah as more corrupt than Sodom or Samaria and far more worthy of destruction. Ultimately however, God would forgive and restore Israel.

Next, *Ezekiel* provided a parable or riddle with an explanation. The time was shortly before Jerusalem’s fall. A great eagle (Nebuchadnezzar), which stood for strength and swiftness, went to Lebanon, which was famous for its lofty cedars. He plucked the cedar’s topmost tendril (King Jehoiachin of Judah, whom he took captive in 597 BC). The royal seed (Zedekiah whom Nebuchadnezzar installed as a vassal king) sought an alliance with a 2nd eagle (Egypt’s Pharaoh Necho, with whom Zedekiah allied). The great eagle (Nebuchadnezzar) had given Zedekiah comfortable circumstances, but now Nebuchadnezzar would go to Jerusalem (597) and take the king to Babylon where he would die. Zedekiah broke his covenant with God and with Nebuchadnezzar because to which he had sworn in God’s name. Nebuchadnezzar was God’s instrument to punish Zedekiah (Israel). Thereafter, God miraculously would restore Judah.

The Lord addressed a popular saying, also at Jer.31:28:

The fathers ate unripe fruit, and

The sons’ teeth were blunted.

*Ezekiel* declared the saying was incorrect. No one suffered for their father’s sins or was spared because their father was righteous. But a person could reverse his fortune by turning from his misdeeds. God would fling away his trespasses and regenerate him from within giving him a new heart and spirit. The reverse also was true- a righteous person who turned away from God would be punished.

*Ezekiel* listed the attributes of a righteous person and a wicked one. Ethics in Israel was associated with worship and God’s holiness. Prophets consistently condemned religious observances coexisting, actively or passively, with injustice. (The US has the highest church attendance in the world; what about its morality?)

Life was associated with God’s divine presence and joy. Death was the absence of that association. There was no carryover from 1 generation to the next. Each person bore the responsibility for his/her own decisions/actions. But the opportunity to turn to God always existed.

After the 1st allegory about a vine, *Ezekiel* launched into a lament of great sadness and pathos, a poem about a lion, representing the princes of Israel. [The royal line of Judah was linked to the lion, Gen.49:9.] The lion (Judah) had 2 cubs:

* Jehoahaz, who became king after his father good King Josiah was killed at Megiddo in 609 BC, and
* Jehoiachin, who was taken into exile by Nebuchadnezzar in 598 and imprisoned for 37 years.

Each only reigned 3 months.

*Chapters 20-23: The Last Phase of History*

The last act was the siege of Jerusalem- 588 BC. *Ezekiel* surveyed Israel’s history beginning with Egypt to explain the contemporary crisis was anticipated by God from the beginning, but there was a future.

Again, Israel’s elders went to Ezekiel in midsummer, *Ab*, the 5th month, in the 7th year after Jehoiachin’s exile (591 BC, less than a year after Ezekiel’s 1st vision). The reason for the visit was unclear. [Some believe they wanted to build a new worship center in Babylon to worship YHWH and other gods like the syncretic religion that arose among the Jews on Elephantine Island in Upper Egypt (South Nile)]. Ezekiel demands they must decide between YHWH and other gods/idols. He also enumerated Israel’s reprehensible behavior tracing back to Egypt: a pattern of beneficial divine action, ungrateful humans, judgment decreed, but postponed. Judgment overdue. But he also offered a glimpse of a new beginning.

*Ezekiel* persisted in the priestly tradition that all Israel’s evil began in Egypt which was different from other prophets’ writings, but he was dealing with proposed Egyptian alliances which he opposed. Israel’s 1st generation was unfaithful. It received the commandments but chose death over life- golden calf, harvesting manna, etc. The 2nd generation were prevented from entering the land for 40 years because of their lack of faith. God left Israel to chose and it decided to follow the horrific worship of others, including child sacrifice.

People began to think Ezekiel was babbling with no relationship to reality. Repeatedly, Ezekiel declared, “the word of YHWH came to me…” He spoke of the fire sword and the military force wielded by Nebuchadnezzar, the instrument of God’s divine judgment. Once Nebuchadnezzar had done his work of destruction, the sword would be sheathed. Ultimately, Babylon would pay for its cruelty.

Ezekiel was told to fix a hostile stare to the South, the area controlled by Edom/the Arabs. *Ezekiel* said a forest fire had begun and would spread from the South to the North, sweeping away the good and the bad. YHWH, the warrior God, Lord of hosts, began His gory work.

Nebuchadnezzar asked diviners to tell him whether to go toward Rabah, the Ammonite capital, or Jerusalem. [Ammon, the central part of the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan, had conspired with Judah against Babylon. The Ammonite king was behind the assassination of Gedaliah, Babylon’s appointed governor of Judah. (Jer.27:1-3). Eventually, Ammon was absorbed into the expanding Arab tribes who eventually became the Nabateans and disappeared from history.]

Nebuchadnezzar may have decided by pulling arrows from a quiver, like drawing straws, consulting *terraphim* (small idols), or viewing animal livers (a known ancient practice, hepatoscopy). He chose to proceed toward Jerusalem as God’s agent against Zedekiah and Israel, violators of a sacred oath sworn to God.

*Ezekiel,* then engaged in 3 discourses denouncing the corruption of Jerusalem and its people. He indicted the city for bloodshed and idolatry; it had become the object of reproach and mockery among the nations. Its moral depravity and spiritual decay, which went together, were well known.

*Ezekiel s*ingled out Israel’s princes as guilty parties, though he recognized the guilt of all Israel’s people. He listed their violations of the “Holiness Code” (Lev. 18-20) without distinguishing between ritual and ethical violations. At the end of the long list, *Ezekiel* threatened exile- highlighting the connection between the land, the law, and the religion.

His 2nd discourse included the familiar metaphor of smelting metals in a furnace for purification/refinement. Nothing survived but slag, which had no use.

The final section focused on the post-conquest land without rain. Moral disorder had polluted the natural environment; the land would die. Throughout history, priests had the duty to teach and interpret the Law. Misinterpreting the Law or requiring pay for teaching was evil. Prophets had the duty to call the people to social responsibility.

Then, *Ezekiel* returned to the story of the nymphomaniac bride and her sisters- Oholah (Samaria) and Oholebah (Jerusalem), God’s brides. Again, the crude, chauvinistic language dominated. Israel’s sins were depicted in sexual terms distasteful to modern readers.

*Chapter 24: Jerusalem Besieged*

This was the turning point in Ezekiel’s story. In January 587 BC, the final conquest of Jerusalem was 1½ years away. Babylon had laid siege on the city, and *Ezekiel* prophesied with a “cooking pot song,” speaking of the misplaced optimism of the Jerusalemites who had survived the previous exile. They acted as if they were preparing for a sumptuous meal of meat, but they found out the meat in the pot was disgusting. *Ezekiel* targeted bloodshed (especially child sacrifice), not idolatry, as the reason the city was condemned. But the pot’s contents (the citizens of Jerusalem) were cooked to annihilation.

At that time, Ezekiel was told that a dear possession of his would be taken away. It turned out to be his beloved wife. God announced in the morning that by night she would die suddenly. Her death coincided with the beginning of the siege. God commanded Ezekiel not to mourn out loud. He should not go bareheaded (a mourning custom) or perform traditional acts of mourning, like the funeral meal (*marzeah*, referred to in Amos 6:7 and Jer.16:5-7). His wife’s death was symbolically tied to the coming loss of the Temple, Jerusalem, children, everything, which no one would be able to mourn.

Ezekiel temporarily lost his speech during the siege, but when the news of Jerusalem’s fall and the Temple’s destruction came (4-5 months later), he spoke.

*Chapters 25-32: Judgement on the Nations*

*Ezekiel’s* pattern was: judgment on Israel; judgment on the nations; salvation of Israel. He spliced this section concerning God’s judgment on the nations between the siege of Jerusalem (Chp.24) and the city’s fall (Chp.33). Chp.1-24 cover the period of 593-589 BC. This section covered 588-586 BC, plus a reference to 571 BC. The fall of Jerusalem occurred in 573 BC.

5 of the 7 nations mentioned here were co-conspirators with Judah against Babylon, but they temporarily extricated themselves from trouble. The Biblical sources for these events are 2 Kings 23-25 (written about 560 BC) and 2 Chron. 34-36 (written about 2 centuries later). Babylonian chronicles contain a brief account of evens between 616-594 BC as do other ancient histories.

Assyria fell in 612 BC (celebrated in *Nahum*). Then the dominant Mid-eastern powers were Egypt’s 26th Dynasty (Pharoah Necho) and Babylon, which began in 626 BC with Nabopolassar. Josiah, Israel’s last great king, died in 609 BC at Megiddo when Egypt was trying to help Assyrian retain power against Babylon. But Babylon never completely subdued Egypt.

One year after his defeat of Egypt at Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar focused on Palestine/Askelon/Philistia and gained control of the coast. [Note: *Ezekiel* condemned Egypt, but not Babylon. Egypt led Israel to break its covenant with Babylon, which was God’s arm for judgment.]

God then singled out 4 neighboring peoples for punishment. Each had been hostile to Israel: Ammon, Moab/Seir, Edom, and Philistia/the Cherethites/ Sea Peoples from Cyprus or Crete, who arrived via the Mediterranean in the 13thC BC and were culturally close to the Phoenicians according to Egyptian sources.

Edom was said to have been founded by Isaac’s son Esau and its territory was East and South of the Dead Sea. Edom continuously was hostile to Israel. It allied with Babylon against Judah and sought to take Israel’s Southern lands.

Moab and Ammon were said to have been founded by the offspring of Lot’s daughters’ incest with their father. (Gen.19). Both emerged as kingdoms about the same time. Moab controlled an area East of the Dead Sea. It was bordered on the South by Edom and on the North by Ammon. Moab was first conquered by David (2 Sam.8:2) and then by Israel’s Omri. (2 Kings 3:4). Moab won its independence from Omri’s son, Ahab, according to the Moabite stone discovered in 1868. Moab fell to the Kedarites and failed to exist thereafter.

Ammon was an Aramean state formed at the beginning of the Iron Age (c.1200 BC). Its boundaries were roughly the same as the current kingdom of Jordan. Its main city was Rabah, near Amman, Jordan. Hostilities between Israel and Ammon dated to the conquest of the Promised Land and Israel’s settlement of territory in the Transjordan. David conquered Ammon, but it regained its independence after Israel was divided. During Jehoiakim’s reign, Ammon re-took part in Babylonian-sponsored raids of Judah. It also participated in an anti-Babylonian conspiracy with Judah (595-594 BC) but escaped retribution. (Jer.27).

Babylon appointed Gedaliah, a Judean nobleman, as governor of Israel with headquarters at Mizpah, about 8 miles North of Jerusalem. Many refugees returned there. With the backing of Ammon’s king Baalis, a conspirator, Ismael, assassinated Gedaliah and attempted a coup, which failed. (Jer.40,41). According to Josephus, Babylon then launched a campaign attacking Ammon and Moab.

Hostilities between Israel and Ammon continued after the Jews returned to Palestine. One of Nehemiah’s main enemies was Tobiah, the Ammonite. The Tobiad family continued to be a major factor in Israelite politics for generations.

In 586 BC, just before Jerusalem was destroyed, Tyre became the subject of a Nebuchadnezzar siege. Tyre was an island city/state in the Mediterranean about 1½ a mile off the coast, with a small adjacent land base. [Now, it is in the territory of Lebanon.] Tyrians rivalled Greece in exploration and commerce. They were cosmopolitan and developed a written alphabet. Generally, Tyre had a friendly relationship with Israel. King Hiram was close to David and Solomon and contributed building materials for Israel’s Temple. Later, King Ittobaal gave his daughter Jezebel in marriage to Omri’s son Ahab.

Tyre had been forced to pay tribute to Assyria and became a Babylonian vassal. It had been part of a coalition with Judah against Babylon, but it failed to help Judah when Babylon attacked it. *Ezekiel* chastised Tyre for gloating over Jerusalem’s destruction. He predicted Tyre would fall and become a bare rock.

A siege usually began with arrows shot from siege towers. Then, troops rushed to the top of the towers with shields held over their heads and attempted to break the defenses, ride into the town, and destroy everything. But even after 13 years of siege, Nebuchadnezzar was unable to take Tyre. (This was just before Jerusalem fell in 587 BC.) [Ultimately, Alexander the great conquered Tyre by building a causeway between the mainland and the island.]

*Ezekiel* engaged in a lament portraying Tyre as a galleon full of cargo which sank in sight of land with all hands aboard. He described the ship, its wares and trading partners in detail. Observers on the shore saw the tragedy and lamented.

Phoenicians were fearless mariners. Herodotus said they circumnavigated Africa in about 3 years. They went to Brittany and Cornwall looking for tin to manufacture bronze. They also went to Tarshish (probably Spain); Javan and Ionia (Greek mainland); Dedan (Rhodes), and Gog and Magog (Asia Minor). They traded along the African coast and the Red Sea, including Edom. But Tyre was arrogant and self-sufficient. It considered itself at the center of the world; hence, *Ezekiel* declared, an East wind overturned the ship, implying it was overloaded by greed.

Before the siege, the godlike King of Tyre, perhaps King Ittobaal II (Ezekiel’s contemporary) claimed divine status, “I am El.” (Elyon, called El, was the supreme Canaanite god). He claimed divine wisdom like Daniel, the wise, just ruler, of Ugaritic texts (not the Jewish hero). This was a divine pretension, not a human reality. But he used his wisdom and power to acquire wealth for himself, not for the good of his kingdom or for social justice. *Ezekiel* declared the king and Tyre would be judged for their aspirations to godlike status.

Another lament follows the denunciation. The lament was over Tyre’s king, who like Adam, the first man, lost his gifts and wisdom because of his own sin and invasion of evil. Adam’s punishment was expulsion for the Garden with a flaming sword guarding the entrance. Tyre would be burned out completely. The other Phoenician cities, Sidon (captured by Assyria), Arvad (Ruad), and Gebal (Byblos) also would be destroyed. Their kings had conspired with Israel against Babylon, and they would be deported.

*Ezekiel’s* prophecy that Babylon would destroy Tyre did not come true. Nothing in prophecy compares to this. Ezekiel had to update the prophecy. God could change His mind even after a prophecy was issued. (See: *Jonah* who prophesied the destruction of Nineveh. The king repented and God relented.) Here, God changed, but Tyre did not repent and turn to Him.

Meanwhile, Nebuchadnezzar’s mercenaries were 13 years behind in pay. He had promised them fabulous plunder in Tyre, but they received none. Moreover, the Babylonians were working for God as His instruments of judgment. Now God owed them. So, the Babylonian army was sent against Egypt.

Just before Jerusalem’s destruction, *Ezekiel* prophesied against Egypt. Each of the 7 prophecies against Egypt is chronologically dated, except the 2nd (29:17-21), which dealt with events occurring in 571 BC, the latest in the book, which happened after the unsuccessful end of the 13-year siege of Tyre (574-573 BC). These prophecies cover a period of about 26 months, beginning in early January 587 BC, the beginning of the Jerusalem siege. The 1st prophecy was about 1st year into the siege and a little more than 6 months before its end. The 6th and 7th prophecies occurred 21 months later, after Jerusalem fell. According to Josephus between 574-572 BC, after Nebuchadnezzar failed to conquer Tyre, God would give him Egypt as a consolation prize. Judah had allied with Egypt against Babylon, and Egypt’s Pharaoh, like Tyre’s king, considered himself a god.

Egypt, which had persuaded Israel/Zedekiah to break his oath of allegiance to Babylon, thereby causing the siege. Egypt sent an army led by Hophra/Aperies, successor to Psammeticus II (the 2nd eagle), to Jerusalem. He temporarily succeeded in lifting the siege and created false hopes in Jerusalem. (Jeremiah left Jerusalem to claim property he had bought in Anathoth at God’s command, but he was caught, tried, and jailed as a deserter.)

Egypt/Pharoah’s self-image was that of a lion among the nations, but it was a crocodile (*tannin*). *Ezekiel*, who always considered Egypt to be the purveyor of evil,depicted a cosmic crocodile hunt. He declared the croc would be hauled out of the Nile and his blood would cover the land to the mountains. The sun, moon, and stars would darken, and fish would cling to the top of the croc. They all would die on the land without burial and would become carrion food.

Egypt and its allies, Nubia (always important to Egypt- the 26th Dynasty Pharaohs were Nubians), Put (son of Ham, Noah’s son= Cyrenaica, around Tripoli), Lud (probably Lydian mercenaries, ruled by the fabulously wealthy Lydian king, Croesus, who settled around Elephantine Island opposite the Jewish settlement), and Cub (perhaps a misspelling), had provided Egypt mercenaries, together with all the Arabs. All were doomed.

*Ezekiel* painted 2 more pictures of Egypt’s unreliability. Egypt’s military devastation was depicted as Pharaoh with a broken arm, which no longer could hold a sword. The arm was not mended; indeed, it was rebroken. Then, the other arm also was broken. Pharoah could not hold a sword or fight. *Ezekiel* declared Egypt was like a papyrus reed on which no one reasonably could lean without being hurt. Egypt would be destroyed from Migdol in the North to Syene (Aswan) in the South.

2 months later (May/June, *Sivan,* 587 BC), while the siege continued in Jerusalem, *Ezekiel* issued a poem and indictment portraying the descent of Pharaoh and his people into the underworld. The detailed allegory described a great tree, a cedar of Lebanon, whose roots stretched into the primordial waters (like the Nile Delta). It was more beautiful than all the trees of Eden. It would be cut down/severed from its root. This was caused by the same arrogance that led to sinking the Tyrian ship. Egypt would descend into the underworld; the subterranean waters would dry up; and the world would mourn. Egypt would be dishonored/disgraced and given a place with the uncircumcised (although Egyptians practiced circumcision at puberty).

Egypt, which had caused Israel’s disaster, would come to disaster by Nebuchadnezzar, God’s agent of divine judgment. It had been the proudest of nations, but it would be given a place in the lowest realm of the dead (think Dante) with the uncircumcised and unburied- a bad death.

But then *Ezekiel* spoke of the Jewish expansion into Egypt, which provided hope for a future in which YHWH would be worshipped and Egyptians would be among God’s people*.* Amazingly, Egypt ultimately would be restored.

*Chapter 33: Jerusalem Falls*

The prophet introduced a new metaphor of himself as a sentry posted on a tower to warn of approaching hostile armies/disaster. When he saw the enemy, he must blow the ram’s horn and muster the defenders. If the sentry failed to warn, he must be punished. People lived with constant existential choices. The wicked could reverse the consequences of their prior wrongdoing by doing what is right and the righteous could cancel the good of their life by wrongdoing.

The frequent consultations between Ezekiel and his fellow exiles suggested that a specific location constituted a rudimentary synagogue for prayer and instruction. In 585 BC, 1 year after the destruction of Jerusalem, God seized Ezekiel. (More than any prophet, Ezekiel underwent extreme ecstatic states.) He had been muted by God. Though he had prophesied several times before Jerusalem’s destruction, but the people were not ready to hear it. They were too busy. Now the fugitives from Jerusalem arrived with news that Jerusalem was no more.

Now the people became conscious of their sin and its effects. They questioned their own survival. Now, they were ready to listen to Ezekiel. Jerusalem’s fall ended Ezekiel’s 6 years of sentry duty. It brought a new group of exiles and began 15 years of reconstruction.

After the exiles left, others began to take over the Jews’ ancestral lands. This caused great tension in the post-exilic period. Moreover, Israelites who had remained considered themselves justified in taking land because the others had been removed on account of their sins. (On the other hand, huge tensions arose against those who had taken the land when the exiles returned.) Ezekiel had a passionate concern for the land of Israel. It became a major emphasis in the 2nd Temple period. Ezekiel was the 1st in the Bible to use the term, *eres Yisrael,* (18 times) speaking of the soil of Israel.

*Chapters 34-37: Resurrection and Restoration*

God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the shepherds of Israel, the predatory leaders who had preyed on the flock instead of looking after them. 8 of 19 rulers of Israel had been assassinated. The monarchy probably was the architect of Israel’s room. Those shepherds were guilty of dereliction of duty. They had used the kingship for personal gain, so the sheep were scattered. On the day Jerusalem was conquered, the Judahites either fled or were captured and exiled.

God declared He would be the Shepherd of His people. (Monarchs often were referred to as shepherds of their people). Being a shepherd was a dangerous job. Shepherds had to face wild animals to protect the sheep and if any were missing or lost, the shepherd had to prove it had been killed by a predator or pay for the lost sheep. God would search for His scattered sheep and protect the weak from the strong. Israel’s leaders had been greedy sheep, who had taken the good grass and water for themselves and left nothing for the other sheep to eat/drink. They even had attacked the other sheep. But God would send a shepherd, like David, who would care for the sheep.

Then God ordered Ezekiel to prophesy against Edom/Mt. Seir in Trans-Jordan. The Hebrew word, “Seir,” sounds like “hair.” Esau, Edom’s alleged progenitor, was said to have been a hairy man. Also, the region was known for its red sandstone. Esau was red/ruddy, and he cooked a red pottage.

An age-old hostility existed between Edom and Israel. Edom allied with Babylon to destroy Jerusalem. They shed Hebrew blood as soon as Jerusalem fell. God would bring disaster on Edom. When Babylon conquered Judah, it was overrun by Edomites in the South and Philistines in the West, but God passed judgment on both.

Then, Ezekiel was directed to prophesy restoration of the land and soil to Judah’s mountains moving from the natural landscapes to the devastated places where Judahites once lived. God swore the Judean mountains would have people and nature would be restored- a new Genesis.

God would redeem Israel, not because of its merit, but to avoid His loss of standing among the nations (an argument Moses made in the Wilderness to prevent God from destroying the Jews). God remembered His covenants with Abraham and Noah. Renewal began by sprinkling the people with pure water, not a mere ritual. It signified the end of disorder (dirt) and an idolatrous past. The fresh start had to be accompanied by repentance and an inner transformation. God would provide a “heart transplant,” a transfusion of His divine Spirit.

Chapter 37 is the famous “dry bones” section of *Ezekiel-* a vision in a trance.

In a vision, God took Ezekiel by *ruah* (wind, spirit) and set him in a valley filled with dry bones. (This would have ritually contaminated Ezekiel by contact with the dead.) God asked Ezekiel, “Mortal, can these bones live?” Ezekiel responded - only God knew. So, God ordered Ezekiel to prophecy to the bones. (They were not corpses; they had died long ago and were dry.) After Ezekiel prophesied, the disarticulated bones began to self-reassemble. Flesh and sinews came on them. The vast number of them became an army (of zombies). Then God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath. Ezekiel stood among the bones and prophesied while the 4 winds, portrayed as *psyches*, winged female figures, descended on the bones, and brought them to life. It was a reenactment of God’s creation of humans. First, God made the body, then He breathed life into it.

[Although both Jews/Pharisees and early Christians considered this a prophecy of resurrection, Ezekiel probably saw it as symbolizing the exiles in Babylon and the nation’s restoration. Judaism and Christianity inherited 2 views of the post-mortem fate of individuals: corporeal resurrection of the dead, or immortality of the soul, the core of personality. This pointed to the former.]

Although the prospect of a reunified Israel seemed impossible after c.3½ centuries apart and after the Northern Kingdom/Ephraim/Samaria (after Omri) was absorbed into the Assyrian Empire, reunification always was the goal, especially for Ezekiel, who almost always referred to “Israel” rather than “Judah.” Hezekiah was the 1st Judean king to rule without a northern counterpart. His grandson, Josiah, tried to bring the northern Jews back, but he died too soon. *Hosea and Jeremiah* also advocated for the country’s reunification.

God told Ezekiel to take 2 pieces of wood and write the names of Judah and its associates on one and Joseph, whose sons Ephraim and Manasseh were the main northern tribes, on the other and join them as a symbol that God would reunite Israel. The land of Israel was essential to Jewish self-understanding, as was obedience to the Law.

*Chapters 38-39: Gog and Magog*

God issued a new order to Ezekiel. He should face Gog in the land of Magog (unknown location in Asia Minor sometimes linked to the kingdom of Lydia.) Gog was a mythical figure from the North, from whence Israel’s destruction traditionally came.

God declared He was against Gog, the prince of Meshach and Tubal, who gathered a great horde for a final battle between good and evil. They came from Persia in the East to Nubia and Put in the South= Persia + the nations of Gen.10. [Judah was back in its land and confident of its security, living undefended without walls or locks- relying on God’s protection.] God would defeat Gog despite his massive forces. A great, cosmic, apocalyptic, eschatological upheaval would occur. Gog would be destroyed. God would be glorified.

The bodies of Gog’s massive army would be left for carrion. It would take 7 months to bury the dead and purify the land. [The enemies’ burial contrasted with the dry bones.] The abandoned weapons left by Gog’s army would provide Israel firewood for 7 years. (Note: 7, the number of completion.] All would understand Israel had been exiled for its sins, not because God was powerless.

Restoration of the land was complete. Israel acknowledged God’s hand in all that had occurred. [The Gog/Magog story is an early example of apocalyptic, eschatological literature. Apocalyptic generally involves a revelation through an angel (or higher being) of secret information about heaven or future events. Eschatological deals with the final phase of history. Apocalyptic literature may include eschatology, but it need not. Note here the similarity to Rev.20.]

The Gog story is repeated with more details. Gog be annihilated with his land and that of his allies. War would be abolished, and peace would reign. The burials would purify the land. Israel would have hope. (*Ezekiel* was the only prophet to depict a subsequent cataclysmic invasion of Israel where it won.]

*Chapters 40-48: A New Temple and a New Country*

The books’ last section involved another visionary translocation of Ezekiel from Babylon to Jerusalem. An angel took Ezekiel on a tour of the new Temple, beginning and ending at the East Gate, where he saw the return of the Lord’s glory, which had left the 1st Temple. The vision was like Moses’ at Sinai where he received instructions for construction of the Tabernacle and Ark of the Covenant.

Little is known about the 2nd Temple built in the late 6thC BC under Zerubbabel and Jeshua, but what is known indicated it was not like the one described in *Ezekiel*. Both were smaller than Solomon’s 1st Temple.

As with the 1st vision, the chariot throne, *Ezekiel* provided a double date- 573 BC, 25th year of the exile (2 decades after Ezekiel’s call); 14 years after the fall of Jerusalem. The date was the same either way. The vision occurred on the 10th day of the 1st month, as the people prepared for Passover, celebration of Israel’s freedom and ½ way through to the Jubilee year, also a celebration of liberation.

The tour began at the East Gate leading into the Temple’s outer court through which the Lord’s glory had left. (The earlier survey of the corrupt cults began from the North.) Ezekiel and the angel ascended 25 steps toward the divine transcendence. The angel took Ezekiel from the East, to the North, then to the South. No gate was on the West, which was behind the inner sanctuary.

Precise dimensions were given for the 3- room Temple. Each room was separated by steps and narrowing entrances. First, came a “nave,” an entrance hall/vestibule/porch, leading to the main hall. At the entrance were 2 pillars slightly larger than Solomon’s Jachin and Boaz, which had been taken as booty to Babylon from the 1st Temple. (The pillars were thought to support the world and prevent its collapse into the watery chaos below.)

A new feature was included- a stone structure was built around the North, South, and East of the Temple, with 90 rooms laid out in 3 stories of 30 rooms each. On the West was a large building preventing access to the Temple from the back side, but nothing was said about its purpose.

The inner sanctuary of the new Temple was much like that of Solomon’s. Leaving the building and returning to the inner court, the angel pointed to the additional buildings on the North and South- perhaps priests’ quarters. Importantly, a perimeter wall separated the holy from the profane.

The angel guide returned Ezekiel to the East Gate where he saw God’s glory coming from the East (a vision within a vision paralleling the account of God’s glory leaving the Temple). Then, Ezekiel was borne by the Spirit into the inner court where he saw God’s glory take possession of the Temple. (1 Kings 8:10-13).

Ezekiel was told to instruct his fellow exiles on the design and layout of the Temple beginning with the altar of sacrifice in the inner court. This was the point of contact between God and the community; the sanctuary was off limits. The altar dimensions were detailed. It was extremely high, requiring steps on the East side, so priests making a sacrifice faced the sanctuary.

3 classes of religious personnel existed: the liturgical assistants (slaves and liturgical musicians who later were absorbed into the Levites), the Levites, and the Zadokite priests (the exclusive altar priests).

Zadok was the priest for David and Solomon. All other branches of priests were eliminated or subordinated as Levites. Though the history of Israel’s priesthood was murky, much strife occurred over the priesthood’s wealth and power. Zadok’s descendants emerged victorious and created a genealogy tracing their lineage from Levi through his son Eleazar. Zadokite leadership and the division between 1st and 2nd order priests, developed during the Babylonian exile, accounting for the relatively low percentage of Levites who returned to Israel with Ezra. Zadokites retained control of the high priesthood until 171 BC when Jason was deposed. The illegitimacy of the later high priests played a role in development of the Qumran community, which included some Zadokite priests.

The quadratic shape of the Temple extended out to a sacred area of 20,000 cubits by 25,000 cubits reserved as holy. 500 cubits was for the Sanctuary and 50 cubits around it were sacred open lands. A strip of land was reserved for the priests’ houses. The prince had the land bordering each side of the sacred district and was not permitted to oppress the people for peoples’ ancestral lands. [During the Persian and Hellenistic periods many small holdings were lost due to debt.] Social justice would prevail.

The prince/civic leader was to receive certain funds (taxes) in amounts relative to each person’s possessions. Concomitantly, the ruler was required to fund festivals, including Sabbaths, new moons, and the Temple dedication.

The angel then took Ezekiel to the Temple kitchens where sacrificial meals were prepared. Then, he saw water trickling under the main entrance threshold and flowing to the right of the sacrifice altar. It disappeared under the East Gate and left through the North Gate.

In Ezekiel’s time, Judah was much smaller than before Jerusalem’s fall and the deportations. It was only about 25 by 35 miles and still was under foreign domination. But *Ezekiel* described a future Israel with boundaries equal to the time of David/Solomon and like those in Num.34, but the geographic description did not include territory East of the Jordan. Resident aliens and their descendants had the same property rights as native-born Israelites. The new state was a confessional community, accepting Gentiles as other than 2nd class citizens.