

Introductory Thoughts on Ezekiel

2009 May 2nd for 19th

My going-in impression of Ezekiel is that he is the most colorful and hair-raising of the prophets, and saying that about a prophet among prophets is saying a lot. Ezekiel, for example, writes about the valley of dry bones. While overlooking a battlefield where all the dead have decayed into bones that are scattered haphazard all about the plain, he has an interview with God in which God asks him, “Can these bones live again?” To this rather spooky prospect, the prophet cowers and answers timidly that he doesn’t know.

Ezekiel is not to be confused with Elijah, who rode into heaven on a chariot of fire after mentoring Elisha. That was colorful too wasn’t it?

As we venture further into the prophets, my knowledge of what we’re getting into gets more and more limited as, I suspect, would the general Biblical knowledge of many otherwise literate Christians.

Ezekiel 1

2009 May 5th for 20th

Ezekiel lived in Babylon with the exiles. Shortly after he turned 30, the age of priesthood, he had a vision.

In the vision a great storm came up and in the storm were “living beings” that looked like shiny metal. The living beings had four heads, each head made of four images, the face of a man, the face of a lion, the face of an ox, and the face of an eagle. Each being had wings and the wings touched those of the other beings and made a loud sound like rushing water. The beings didn’t turn as they went back and forth like lightning wherever they wanted to go, they just went without turning, or not. They had a face facing in each direction, after all. Below the beings were intersecting wheels full of eyes. Wherever the beings went, the wheels went under them. They didn’t turn, they just went. “When the creatures moved, they also moved; when the creatures stood still, they also stood still; and when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.”

There was an expanse in the sky above the beings.

“Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.”

“This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown.”

And then he spoke....

Ezekiel 2 - 3

2009 May 5th for 21st

Speaking from the sapphire heavens in the great storm above the living beings, God said to Ezekiel:

“Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.” And the spirit came into Ezekiel and lifted him up on his feet.

“Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their fathers have been in revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says,’ And whether they listen or fail to listen -- for they are a rebellious house -- they will know that a prophet has been among them. And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house. You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.”

Then a hand reached out and gave Ezekiel a scroll. It was then unrolled and contained “words of lament, mourning, and woe.” Ezekiel was then instructed to eat the scroll and did. It tasted like honey.

God then instructed Ezekiel to go to the Israelites and instruct them. “You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel...” The Israelites are hardened and obstinate and may not listen, but whether they do or not, Ezekiel is to tell them what he is told to tell them. God will make Ezekiel as tough as they are. He is not to be afraid of them.

“Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a loud rumbling sound -- May the glory of the Lord be praised in his dwelling place! -- the sound of the wings of the living creatures brushing against each other and the sound of the wheels beside them, a loud rumbling sound. The Spirit then lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit, with the strong hand of the Lord upon me. I came to the exiles who lived at Tel Abib [modern Tel Aviv] near the Kebar River. And there, where they were living, I sat among them for seven days -- overwhelmed.”

God told Ezekiel to repeat to the people exactly as he had been told. When people turn away from God and sin and God destroys them, they die in their sin. If they are warned and turn back

to God, both the people and the prophet are saved. If the prophet does not warn them as instructed, their death (their blood) is on his head.

Then God told Ezekiel to shut himself up in his house, that he would be bound with ropes and God would stick his tongue to his mouth so he could not speak, but when he had been given the words of warning, his tongue would loosen up and he could preach.

“Whoever will listen let him listen, and whoever will refuse let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house.”

One can see how interpreters of the Bible see helicopters and other such “modern” technology in this vision.

Ezekiel 4

2009 May 5th for 22nd

Ezekiel is now instructed to make a living demonstration. He is to take a clay tablet and draw Jerusalem on it, then he is to put up siege works against his drawing and put it under siege.

Then he is to make up a scant vegetarian diet and make bread from it. He will lie on his side one day for each of the 390 years of the sins of Israel, eating the bread at fixed times each day. Then he will turn toward Jerusalem and be bound with ropes so that he cannot turn for 40 more days and will lie there prophesying against his model city for an additional symbolic 40 years.

He was to bake his bread on a fire of human excrement, but this was too much for the prophet. He said,

“Not so, Sovereign Lord! I have never defiled myself. From my youth until now I have never eaten anything found dead or torn by wild animals. No unclean meat has ever entered my mouth.”

God relented and said, “Very well. I will let you bake your bread over cow manure instead of human excrement.” This symbolizes that food and water were cut off from Jerusalem and the people ate rationed food and drank rationed water, and there was very little of either, anxiously waiting what was coming.

“They will be appalled at the sight of each other and will waste away because of their sin.”

Ezekiel 5

2009 May 6th for 25th

Ezekiel was instructed to take a sharp sword and use it as a razor to shave his head. Then he was to divide his hair into three parts. He was to burn a third, spread a third around his model of Jerusalem and beat on it with the sword, and throw the other third to the wind. This symbolized what had happened to Israel because of their sin of idolatry.

He was also to tuck away a little of the hair in the folds of his clothes. This must be the remnant, though it doesn't say that explicitly.

God says, "You have been more unruly than the nations around you and have not followed my decrees of kept my laws. You have not even conformed to the standards of the nations around you."

Because of this, God punished them as publicly as possible. "Because of all your detestable idols, I will do to you what I have never done before and will never do again. Therefore in your midst fathers will eat their children, and children will eat their fathers. I will inflict punishment on you and will scatter all your survivors to the winds."

God spent his wrath on them in his zeal and then it was over. A third of them died by famine or plague, a third by the sword outside the walls, and a third were scattered to the wind under pursuit of arms.

What was left was a reproach to all nations.

Ezekiel 6

2009 May 6th for 26th

God was grieved by his people worshipping and lusting after idols and building altars in the hills and turning away from him. He instructed Ezekiel: "Son of man, set your face against the mountains of Israel; prophesy against them and say: 'O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Sovereign Lord. This is what the Sovereign Lord says to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys: I am about to bring a sword against you, and I will destroy your high places. Your altars will be demolished and your incense altars will be smashed; and I will slay your people in front of your idols. I will lay the dead bodies of the Israelites in front of their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars.'"

God threatened and he delivered. "They will loathe themselves for the evil they have done and for all their detestable practices."

Ezekiel was instructed to stamp his feet and clap his hands and cry out that the Israelites would die of sword, famine, and plague and their dead bodies would litter the high places in front of their altars and idols. The entire land would be made desolate.

Ezekiel 7

2009 May 6th for 27th

The word from God was, "The End!" This was the end of things the way they were throughout Israel, from one border to the other.

The word from God was, "Disaster!" This disaster would be like no other. There was not joy in the mountains, there was panic. This is how they were to know that God was God.

No one was safe, God was against the "whole crowd." "I will not look on you with pity or spare you; I will repay you in accordance with your conduct and the detestable practices among you. Then you will know that it is I the Lord who strikes the blow."

Those out in the country died by the sword, the ones holed up in the city by famine and plague. None had any strength.

"They were proud of their beautiful jewelry and used it to make their detestable idols and vile images. Therefore I will turn these into an unclean thing for them. I will hand it all over as plunder to foreigners and as loot to the wicked of the earth, and they will defile it."

Everything that is most valuable, most precious, most valued will be destroyed, desecrated, and stolen by the most destructive enemy. There would be no peace. They were judged by their own standards. In this way they would know who God was.

Ezekiel 8

2009 May 22nd for 28th

"In the sixth year, in the sixth month on the fifth day, while I was sitting in my house and the elders of Judah were sitting before me, the hand of the Sovereign Lord came upon me there. I looked and I saw a figure like that of a man. From what appeared to be his waist down he was like fire, and from there up his appearance was as bright as glowing metal. He stretched out what looked like a hand and took me by the hair of my head. The spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and in visions of God he took me to Jerusalem, to the entrance to the north gate of the inner court, where the idol that provokes to jealousy stood. And there before me was the glory of the God of Israel, as in the vision I had seen in the plain."

From here Ezekiel was taken on a tour of all the abominable, detestable things that the Judeans were doing in the name of worship. These things, God told Ezekiel, were driving him away from his people and his sanctuary in Jerusalem.

Inside one room in the temple were pictures of all sorts of detestable crawling things. There were idols of these unclean animals and seventy elders of Israel were standing in front of them burning incense. God said that these elders would claim that God had abandoned Israel and that was why they were worshipping these other idols.

Ezekiel was also shown women weeping for Tammuz (a seasonal death and rebirth god) and in another place a group of about twenty five men bowing down to the sun in the east.

God said that this was going on everywhere, that in addition they had filled the land with violence, that he was angry, and that even if they shouted in his ears he would not hear them.

Ezekiel 9

2009 May 22nd for 29th

Ezekiel's tour of idolatrous Jerusalem continues:

“Then I heard him call out in a loud voice, ‘Bring the guards of the city here, each with a weapon in his hand.’ And I saw six men coming from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with a deadly weapon in his hand. With them was a man clothed in linen who had a writing kit at his side. They came in and stood beside the bronze altar.

“Now the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple. Then the Lord called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side and said to him, ‘Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark [like an X] on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it.

“As I listened, he said to the others, ‘Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary.’ So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple.

“Then he said to them, ‘Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go!’ So they went out and began killing throughout the city. While they were killing and I was left alone, I fell facedown, crying out, ‘Ah, Sovereign Lord! Are you going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel in this outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?’

“He answered me, ‘The sin of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice. They say, “The Lord has forsaken the land; the Lord does not see.” So I will not look on them with pity or spare them, but I will bring down on their own heads what they have done.’

“Then the man in linen with the writing kit at his side brought back word, saying, ‘I have done as you commanded.’”

Ezekiel 10

2009 May 22nd for June 1st

In the heavens Ezekiel saw a throne above the living creatures. God was on the throne and it was above the creatures. He described them again as he did at the beginning of his book. They were surrounded by wheels and covered with eyes. They flew and went wherever they wanted without turning because they had four faces, one of a cherub, one of a lion, one of an ox, and one of a man, all of the crowning achievements of the creation.

God commanded these beings. They flew around everywhere he wanted them to. When they flew around it was as loud as God speaking. This symbolized God's command over everything in creation.

God then commanded the man in linen (the one with the writing kit) to go in among the wheels and bring out what looked like coals of fire and spread the coals over Jerusalem. The man went in and picked up some of the coals. Ezekiel saw his hands in there doing this, and the man came out and spread the coals as commanded.

Ezekiel 11

2009 May 23rd for June 2nd

Ezekiel was transported by the Spirit to the east facing gate of the temple from which he saw twenty five men who God identified as being the ones who were plotting evil against the people and giving bad advice. They were saying that it would soon be time to build houses and settle in them because nothing bad was going to happen.

The truth was that Jerusalem would soon be a cooking pot, and all the dead bodies of the inhabitants the meat. Because the people had followed the standards of their neighboring nations and not those of God, they would be abandoned to those nations who would conquer them.

“Now as I was prophesying, Pelatiah son of Benaiah died. Then I fell facedown and cried out in a loud voice, ‘Ah, Sovereign Lord! Will you completely destroy the remnant of Israel?’”

God answered that he would bring back the people who had been scattered among the nations. They would return to this land and clean it up and restore the temple and God would be their God and they would be his people.

Then the cherubim with God above them took off and went above the city and stopped above a mountain to the east. In a vision, Ezekiel was taken to see some of the exiles in Babylonia.

Ezekiel 12

2009 May 23rd for June 3rd

God commanded Ezekiel to act out a metaphor of the coming exile. He was to pack his bags as if leaving for exile, then go in the evening and dig a hole in the wall of the city, going through it at sunset.

He did this.

Ezekiel was directed to tell the people that this was a sign of what would happen to Israel. Further the prince, the very ruler, would leave in this way. He would leave through a hole in the wall but he would be caught and taken into exile. He would not see it (I think this means he would be blinded) but he would die there.

Because of their detestable practices, God would disperse them throughout the nations.

Ezekiel was then commanded to tremble and shudder while he was eating and drinking. He was then to tell the people that this was the way those in Jerusalem would be acting during the siege.

God told Ezekiel that there was a proverb in the city that all visions come to nothing. God told him that he would put an end to that proverb. This vision would come to something. It would be fulfilled.

God told Ezekiel that the people in Israel were saying that his vision was of a time in the far future. God told him to tell them that it would be fulfilled immediately without further delay.

Ezekiel 13

2009 May 23rd for June 4th

Ezekiel is directed to condemn all false prophets, first the men, then the women.

Men are prophesying from their own imagination, saying they are from God and expecting what they say to be fulfilled. They have experience nothing from God and do not speak for him and what they say will not happen.

They lead the people astray by saying “peace” when there is no peace. They comfort those who should be in terror and terrorize those who are faithful. What they do is like whitewashing the wall of the city. It looks nice but God will pull it down on them. They and their whitewashed wall will be gone.

As for the prophetesses, they also prophesy out of their own imaginations. They sew magic charms on their wrists and profane God for a little food in payment. “By lying to my people, who listen to lies, you have killed those who should not have died and have spared those who should not live.”

God will do this. “I will tear off your veils and save my people from your hands, and they will no longer fall prey to your power. Then you will know that I am the Lord. Because you disheartened the righteous with your lies, when I had brought them no grief, and because you encouraged the wicked not to turn from their evil ways and so save their lives, therefore you will no longer see false visions or practice divination. I will save my people from your hands. And then you will know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 14

2009 May 25th for June 5th

Some of the elders of Israel came and sat with Ezekiel. This word of God came to them through him.

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices!

“When any Israelite or any alien living in Israel separates himself from me and sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet to inquire of me, I the Lord will answer him myself. I will set my face against that man and make him an example and a byword. I will cut him off from my people. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

“And if the prophet is enticed to utter a prophecy, I the Lord have enticed that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and destroy him from among my people Israel. They will bear their guilt -- the prophet will be as guilty as the one who consults him. Then the people of Israel will no longer stray from me, nor will they defile themselves anymore with all their sins. They will be my people, and I will be their God, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

Further words came through Ezekiel. If a country sinned against God, it wouldn't matter if Noah, Daniel, and Job all lived there. Those great men of faith could only save themselves, due to their righteousness, from the devastation that God brought on the country. They couldn't even save their own children.

There were several punishments God could send through the land. He could cut off its food supply and send famine; all the people and animals would die. He could send wild beasts through the country leaving it childless. He could send a conquering army through, killing everything that breathed. Or he could send a plague, killing all the men and animals.

God would send all of these disasters on his land, yet there would be some consolation. Some would survive. “You will be consoled when you see their conduct and their actions, for you will know that I have done nothing in it without cause, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

Ezekiel 15

2009 May 25th for June 8th

“The word of the Lord came to me: ‘Son of man, how is the wood of a vine better than that of a branch on any of the trees in the forest? Is wood ever taken from it to make anything useful? Do they make pegs from it to hang things on? And after it is thrown on the fire as fuel and the fire burns both ends and chars the middle, is it then useful for anything? If it was not useful for anything when it was whole, how much less can it be made into something useful when the fire has burned it and it is charred?’

“Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: As I have given the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest as fuel for the fire, so will I treat the people living in Jerusalem. I will set my face against them. Although they have come out of the fire, the fire will yet consume them. And when I set my face against them, you will know that I am the Lord. I will make the land desolate because they have been unfaithful, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

Ezekiel 16

2009 May 25th for June 9th

God tells a lengthy and poetic allegory of his relationship with Israel. It begins with birth:

“Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised.”

I don't know if this ancestry allegorizes the descent of Abram, renamed Abraham, from the region or something else more spiritual. In any case, continuing:

God was passing by and took pity on the abandoned child in the field. He caused her to live and grow and she filled out and was naked. Later, he passed by and saw that she was “ready for love.” He covered her with a cloak and gave her a sacred oath of fidelity.

God then proceeded to make Israel into a queen, lavishing all of the finest gifts and clothing, food and perfumes on her. She was honored and respected throughout the nations.

“But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute.”

Temples to idols went up in every square. Israel committed adultery with all of the neighboring nations including Egypt. The conduct became so lewd that it was shocking even to the Philistines. Children were sacrificed in the fire, something that God had always explicitly prohibited for his people.

But it was worse than prostitution. A prostitute accepts payment, but Israel, the unfaithful wife, gave gifts to all her illicit lovers.

“Therefore, you prostitute, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Because you poured out your wealth and exposed your nakedness in your promiscuity with your lovers, and because of all your detestable idols, and because you gave them your children's blood, therefore I am going to gather all your lovers, with whom you found pleasure, those you loved as well as those you hated. I will gather them against you from all around and will strip you in front of them, and they will see all your nakedness. I will sentence you to the punishment of women who commit adultery and who shed blood; I will bring upon you the blood vengeance of my wrath and jealous anger. Then I will hand you over to your lovers, and they will tear down your mounds and destroy your lofty shrines. They will strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewelry and leave you naked and bare. They will bring a mob against you, who will stone you and hack you to pieces with their swords. They will burn down your houses and inflict punishment on you in the sight of many women. I will put a stop to your prostitution, and you

will no longer pay your lovers. Then my wrath against you will subside and my jealous anger will turn away from you; I will be calm and no longer angry.

“Because you did not remember the days of your youth but enraged me with all these things, I will surely bring down on your head what you have done, declares the Sovereign Lord. Did you not add lewdness to all your other detestable practices?”

Then, it’s “like mother like daughter.” The sin of Sodom was: “She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.” Then there was Samaria. “Samaria did not commit half the sins you did.” It was embarrassing to God that Israel was so bad that it made Samaria look good. (Recall that Samaritans were despised half-breeds to Hebrews.) By being so sinful, Israel gave some justification to the lesser evils (but still appalling evils) of Samaria.

In the end, God promised to restore all three of Sodom, Samaria, and Israel, based on the covenant he had with them in their youth. After their punishment, he would put them back in favor. “Then, when I make atonement for you for all you have done, you will remember and be ashamed and never again open your mouth because of your humiliation, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

Based on my upbringing, which is admittedly not definitive, God was not a very adept parent here. He spoiled Israel, then got furious at the virtually foregone outcome of that spoiling, human nature being what it is. There are many times here in the Old Testament when we find ourselves asking, “Why did God expect anything different? Why does he expect this punishment to make any difference?” We also ask, “How is this any different from the fate of any other nation except in interpretation of causes?” (Well, true, Israel has survived in some form to our own times.) Remember in Jeremiah when the people under siege said they would keep worshipping their idols because they’d had nothing good from the God of Jeremiah? Is God clueless about the humanity he has created? Are the prophets projecting their own vitriol onto God’s pronouncements? This, it would seem from a Christian perspective, is why God had to come in and be a human himself. We’ll ask again when we get back to Jesus.

Ezekiel 17

2009 May 26th for June 10th

God delivered an allegory of Israel through Ezekiel. An eagle plucked the top shoot of a cedar and carried it off to another place and planted it there. Seed was planted in a good place and took hold and made a strong, healthy vine.

The meaning of the first part was that the king of Babylon had taken the royalty from Israel and replanted them in Babylon. The king of Babylon had made a treaty with these elders and nobles under oath by which they might have survived, but the king of Israel made an unfortunate competing alliance with Egypt. From breaking the treaty with Babylon they were unfaithful to

God and God swore their destruction. Nothing that Egypt could do would help them. No power from Egypt could save them.

In the apparent meaning of the second part, God himself would choose his own remnant and would plant that twig in the mountains and prosper it so that it would become a great Cedar in which birds could rest.

Ezekiel 18:1 - 17

2009 May 26th for June 11th

“The word of the Lord came to me: ‘What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel:

““The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge?”

“As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son -- both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.”

He then gives a list of behaviors that are approved, as performed by a righteous father, and their opposites, as performed by a wicked son:

“He eats at the mountain shrines.
He defiles his neighbor’s wife.
He oppresses the poor and needy.
He commits robbery.
He does not return what he took in pledge.
He looks to the idols.
He does detestable things.
He lends at usury and takes excessive interest.”

Excessive interest indeed!

In this example, the father will live and the son will die, independently of each other’s actions.

Ezekiel 18:18 - 32

2009 May 26th for June 12th

The wicked son and the righteous father do not share guilt or punishment. The wicked dies and the righteous lives. But there is also mercy.

If a person is wicked and does evil, but repents and recants, God will not remember his wickedness. “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?”

Similarly, however, if a righteous man turns wicked, he will surely die.

The same principle applies to the whole house of Israel. If they turn away from their sin they will not die. Don't call God unjust or unfair. It is the ways of Israel that are unjust.

“Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!”

Ezekiel 19

2009 May 28th for June 15th

“Take up a lament concerning the princes of Israel and say:

“What a lioness was your mother among the lions!
She lay down among the young lions and reared her cubs.
She brought up one of her cubs, and he became a strong lion.
He learned to tear the prey and he devoured men.
The nations heard about him, and he was trapped in their pit.
They led him with hooks to the land of Egypt.

“When she saw her hope unfulfilled, her expectations gone,
she took another of her cubs and made him a strong lion.
He prowled among the lions, for he was now a strong lion.
He learned to tear the prey and he devoured men.
He broke down their strongholds and devastated their towns.
The land and all who were in it were terrified by his roaring.
Then the nations came against him, those from regions round about.
They spread their net for him, and he was trapped in their pit.
With hooks they pulled him into a cage and brought him to the king of Babylon.
They put him in prison, so his roar was heard no longer on the mountains of Israel.

“Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard planted by the water;
it was fruitful and full of branches because of abundant water.
Its branches were strong, fit for a ruler's scepter.
It towered high above the thick foliage,
conspicuous for its height and for its many branches.
But it was uprooted in fury and thrown to the ground.
The east wind made it shrivel, it was stripped of its fruit;
its strong branches withered and fire consumed them.
Now it is planted in the desert, in a dry and thirsty land.
Fire spread from one of its main branches and consumed its fruit.
No strong branch is left on it fit for a ruler's scepter.’

“This is a lament and is to be used as a lament.”

Ezekiel 20:1 - 29

2009 May 28th for June 16th

The elders of Israel came and sat in front of Ezekiel. God spoke to them through him: “Have you come to inquire of me? As surely as I live, I will not let you inquire of me, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

He then instructs Ezekiel to confront them about the detestable practices of their fathers, who followed idols. He recounts bringing them out of Egypt to an excellent land that he had scoped out just for them. He revealed himself and gave them just laws by which they would be known as his people.

The people rebelled, though, even in the desert when they were under God’s protection and on the way to the promised land they rebelled. And they rebelled in the promised land and rebelled to this day. They worshipped idols and followed their laws, even committing the horror of sacrificing their children to the gods of wood and stone. God allowed this so that when he scattered them to other countries they would know that he was God and that he had done this because they had rejected him and his statutes and had profaned their land.

And then Ezekiel specifically confronted them about a particular high place, “What is this high place you go to?” he said. Thereafter that high place was called “Bamah” (High Place).

Ezekiel 20: 30 - 49

2009 May 28th for June 17th

“Therefore say to the house of Israel: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Will you defile yourselves the way your fathers did and lust after their vile images? When you offer your gifts -- the sacrifice of your sons in the fire -- you continue to defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. Am I to let you inquire of me, O house of Israel? As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I will not let you inquire of me.

“You say, ‘We want to be like the nations, like the peoples of the world, who serve wood and stone.’ But what you have in mind will never happen. As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I will rule over you with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. I will bring you from the nations and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered -- with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath.”

God will judge them when they pass under his rod (the image of a shepherd tending his sheep). The people of the other nations will not come to Israel.

“As for you, O house of Israel, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: Go and serve your idols, every one of you! But afterward you will surely listen to me and no longer profane my holy name with your gifts and idols. For on my holy mountain, the high mountain of Israel, declares

the Sovereign Lord, there in the land the entire house of Israel will serve me, and there I will accept them.”

By this they would know that God was God. He would be their God and would not deal with them “according to your evil ways and your corrupt practices.”

Ezekiel then prophesies against the forest of the southland. He is about to set it on fire. Both green and dead trees would be consumed and there would be no quenching. Everything everywhere would be scorched.

“Then I [Ezekiel] said, ‘Ah, Sovereign Lord! They are saying of me, “Isn’t he just telling parables?”’”

Perhaps the elders of Israel were sitting in front of Ezekiel only for entertainment.

Ezekiel 21:1 - 17

2009 May 30th for June 18th

God instructs Ezekiel, “Son of man, set your face against Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuary.” God says, “I will draw my sword from its scabbard and cut off from you both the righteous and the wicked.” People everywhere would be wiped out.

“Every heart will melt and every hand go limp; every spirit will become faint and every knee become as weak as water.”

This sword “despises” the scepter of Judah. The king would also be killed. The people would moan and wail and despair. This sword is for slaughter. It flashes like lightning. But in the end, God’s wrath would subside.

Ezekiel 21:18 - 32

2009 May 30th for June 19th

God instructed Ezekiel to make a signpost for a fork in the road, the fork where the king (or “sword”) of Babylon would decide which way to go to attack. One sign would point to Rabbah of the Ammonites, the other to fortified Jerusalem of Judah. When the Babylonians came there they would use divination and consulted their idols and examined sheep livers (yes, really) and decide to go besiege and set up battering rams against Jerusalem.

“Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘Because you people have brought to mind your guilt by your open rebellion, revealing your sins in all that you do -- because you have done this you will be taken captive.’”

The day has come for the “profane and wicked prince of Israel.” His turban would be removed. The low would be made high and the high low.

Then it was the Ammonite's turn. They, too were wicked and would be slain.

“I will hand you over to brutal men, men skilled in destruction. You will be fuel for the fire, your blood will be shed in your land, you will be remembered no more; for I the Lord have spoken.”

Ezekiel 22

2009 May 30th for June 22nd

God instructs Ezekiel to prophesy against Jerusalem, detailing her many sins.

The princes use their power to shed blood. They oppress the alien and mistreat the orphans and widows. They despise holy things and desecrate the Sabbath. “In you are slanderous men bent on shedding blood; in you are those who eat at the mountain shrines and commit lewd acts. In you are those who dishonor their fathers' bed; in you are those who violate women during their period, when they are ceremonially unclean. In you one man commits a detestable offense with his neighbor's wife, another shamefully defiles his daughter-in-law, and another violates his sister, his own father's daughter.” They also extort and take bribes.

God hates this unjust gain and their bloodshed. He will scatter these people among the nations. and “put an end to your uncleanness. When you have been defiled in the eyes of the nations, you will know that I am the Lord.”

Israel had become like dross to God, the trash that is left over when metal is smelted. They would feel God's wrath, it would be hot like being in a furnace.

Because of all this conspiracy to do evil, the day of wrath would come on them. It would be like “a land that has had no rain or showers in the day of wrath.”

“I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none. So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

Ezekiel 23:1 - 21

2009 June 1st for 23rd

“The word of the Lord came to me: ‘Son of man, there were two women, daughters of the same mother. They became prostitutes in Egypt, engaging in prostitution from their youth. In that land their breasts were fondled and their virgin bosoms caressed. The older was named Oholah, and her sister was Oholibah. They were mine and gave birth to sons and daughters. Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem.’”

Though she belonged to God Oholah was a prostitute with the Assyrian warriors, governors, and commanders, all handsome mounted horsemen in blue. They poured their lust on her.

“Therefore I handed her over to her lovers, the Assyrians, for whom she lusted. They stripped her naked, took away her sons and daughters and killed her with the sword. She became a byword among women, and punishment was inflicted on her.”

Oholibah was even more depraved. She saw pictures of men in red with flowing belts and turbans on the wall -- Babylonian chariot officers from Chaldea. She lusted after them and sent messengers for them. “After she had been defiled by them, she turned away from them in disgust” and her prostitution became even more open, her display of nakedness more blatant and public. Her promiscuity increased. In Egypt “she lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses. So you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when in Egypt your bosom was caressed and your young breasts fondled.”

Ezekiel 23:22 - 49

2009 June 1st for 24th

Now the judgement for yesterday’s promiscuity is announced.

All those promiscuous lovers will turn against Oholah and Oholibah and come from every side and “they will punish you according to their standards. I will direct my jealous anger against you, and they will deal with you in fury. They will cut off your noses and your ears, and those of you who are left will fall by the sword. They will take away your sons and daughters, and those of you who are left will be consumed by fire.” Everything will be gone.

“They committed adultery with their idols; they even sacrificed their children whom they bore to me, as food for them.” They even did this in God’s own sanctuary!

“They even sent messengers for me who came from far away, and when they arrived you bathed yourself for them, painted your eyes and put on your jewelry. You sat on an elegant couch, with a table spread before it on which you had placed the incense and oil that belonged to me.” They had beautiful crowns on their heads and were exhausted from their adulteries. Their punishment would be that of an adulteress.

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Bring a mob against them and give them over to terror and plunder. The mob will stone them and cut them down with their swords; they will kill their sons and daughters and burn down their houses.

“So I will put an end to lewdness in the land, that all women may take warning and not imitate you. You will suffer the penalty for your lewdness and bear the consequences of your sins of idolatry. Then you will know that I am the Sovereign Lord.”

Ezekiel 24

2009 June 1st for 25th

God told Ezekiel to write down the date: the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year. That was the day that Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem. He was given a parable of a cooking pot. The pot was put on the fire and filled with water, then choice pieces of meat were put in it and boiled.

“Woe to the city of bloodshed, to the pot now encrusted, whose deposit will not go away! Empty it piece by piece without casting lots for them.” Blood had been shed, poured on the ground and not covered. The meat would be cooked so well that the bones would be charred. The empty pot would be set on the coals and melted to cleanse its impurities.

God tried to cleanse their impurities but they would not be cleaned.

Then God told Ezekiel that his wife was about to die. When she did he was not to mourn or distort his face or eat any differently, he was only to moan privately. That evening she did die and following this he behaved as instructed.

The people came and asked what all this meant and what it meant to them. He said that the same thing would happen to them. Their sons and daughters and their sacred temple and everything important to them would be taken away but they would not mourn or do anything different. When this happened, Ezekiel’s prophesy where he had acted like this would be a sign and they would know that God was the only God and was sovereign.

Ezekiel 25

2009 June 2nd for 26th

God will prove who he is to the neighboring nations of Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia. Each of them exulted at the defeat of Jerusalem, or took advantage of their fallen neighbor Israel. God will punish them each in turn. He will expose their flanks, he will wipe them out, he will take great vengeance on them, and he will punish them in his wrath. Then they will know who God is!

Ezekiel 26

2009 June 2nd for 29th

God will also punish Tyre. Their wealth and their culture, their merriment and songs will be no more. They will be scraped clean and thrown into the sea. Horses of Nebuchadnezzar will cover Tyre like dust. Their rocks will be places to spread fish nets. They will take off their fine clothes and live in the ruins as if in a pit. They will never exist again.

Ezekiel 27:1 - 24

2009 June 2nd for 30th

God commanded Ezekiel to lament Tyre. She was a great ship made of all the most precious and expensive wood. The ship was perfect; the mast was a cedar from Lebanon; the decks were inlaid with ivory; the sails were embroidered linens from Egypt. The best craftsmen and strongest rowers built and manned the ship.

All of the coastal metropolises did business with Tyre trading all the most luxurious goods: precious metals, work horses, ivory and ebony, gemstones, honey and balm, wine and wool, livestock, fine fabrics and ornate rugs.

Ezekiel 27:25 - 36

2009 June 3rd for July 1st

“The ships of Tarshish serve as carriers for your wares.
You are filled with heavy cargo in the heart of the sea.
Your oarsmen take you out to the high seas.
But the east wind will break you to pieces in the heart of the sea.
Your wealth, merchandise and wares, your mariners, seamen and shipwrights,
your merchants and all your soldiers, and everyone else on board
will sink into the heart of the sea on the day of your shipwreck.
The shorelands will quake when your seamen cry out.
All who handle the oars will abandon their ships;
the mariners and all the seamen will stand on the shore.
They will raise their voice and cry bitterly over you;
they will sprinkle dust on their heads and roll in ashes.
They will shave their heads because of you and will put on sackcloth.
They will weep over you with anguish of soul and with bitter mourning.
As they wail and mourn over you, they will take up a lament concerning you:
‘Who was ever silenced like Tyre, surrounded by the sea?’
When your merchandise went out on the seas, you satisfied many nations;
with your great wealth and your wares you enriched the kings of the earth.
Now you are shattered by the sea in the depths of the waters;
your wares and all your company have gone down with you.
All who live in the coastlands are appalled at you;
their kings shudder with horror and their faces are distorted with fear.
The merchants among the nations hiss at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more.”

Ezekiel 28:1 - 10

2009 June 4th for July 2nd

Ezekiel received a word from God for the ruler of Tyre:

“In the pride of your heart you say, ‘I am a god;
I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas.’
But you are a man and not a god, though you think you are as wise as a god.
Are you wiser than Daniel? Is no secret hidden from you?
By your wisdom and understanding you have gained wealth for yourself
and amassed gold and silver in your treasuries.
By your great skill in trading you have increased your wealth,
and because of your wealth your heart has grown proud.

“Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says:

“Because you think you are wise, as wise as a god,
I am going to bring foreigners against you, the most ruthless of nations;
they will draw their swords against your beauty and wisdom and pierce your shining splendor.
They will bring you down to the pit, and you will die a violent death in the heart of the seas.
Will you then say, ‘I am a god,’ in the presence of those who kill you?
You will be but a man, not a god, in the hands of those who slay you.
You will die the death of the uncircumcised at the hands of foreigners.

“I have spoken, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

Ezekiel 28:11 - 26

2009 June 5th for July 3rd

“The word of the Lord came to me: ‘Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him: “This is what the Sovereign Lord says:”

“You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
You were in Eden, the garden of God;
every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl.
Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared.
You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you.
You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones.
You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.
Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned.
So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones.
Your heart became proud on account of your beauty,
and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor.
So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings.
By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries.
So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you,
and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching.
All the nations who knew you are appalled at you;
you have come to a horrible end and will be no more.”

(These words were very reminiscent of a similar narrative about Lucifer that we haven't come to yet.)

Ezekiel then gives the word of God concerning Sidon. God will be glorified in Sidon when he comes against them. Blood will flow in the streets. There will be plague. The sword will come from every side.

And with this, Israel will no longer have hostile neighbors “who are painful briars and sharp thorns. Then they will know that I am the Sovereign Lord.”

God will gather up his people who have been scattered among the nations. He will then be seen as holy. They will live in safety in their own land. Punishment will go to the neighbors who have “maligned” them. “Then they will know that I am the Lord their God.”

Ezekiel 29

2009 June 8th for July 6th

Through Ezekiel, God now rails against Egypt.

Pharaoh is fond of saying that he created the Nile and that he owns it. Like a crocodile in the Nile, God will put hooks in Egypt’s jaws and drag her out into the desert with fish sticking to her scales. There they will be food for birds, no one will rescue them. Then they will know that God is God (and, by implication, Pharaoh is not God).

Further, they have been a problem for Israel. Israel has sinned by running to Egypt for help and when they do their backs are broken and their shoulders are torn open by the splintered reed that is Egypt.

Egypt will be made a desolate wasteland and the people scattered abroad. After forty years, they will be brought back, but Egypt will never be a world power again and whenever Israel considers her he will remember his sin and be sad.

On April 26, 571 BC, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon went after Tyre in a hard campaign. Everyone there worked himself bald and bare fighting in defense. Then Babylon went after Egypt and took all her wealth. God says that the army of Babylon was acting for God when they did this.

God sent Babylon against Egypt for the sake of Israel:

“On that day I will make a horn grow for the house of Israel, and I will open your mouth among them. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

Ezekiel 30:1 - 12

2009 June 9th for July 7th

Ezekiel delivers a general prophesy against everyone.

A day of doom is coming. Egypt will fall and so will Cush and Put, Lydia and all Arabia, Libya and also “the people of the covenant land.” All will fall by the sword and their wealth will be carried away.

All the allies of Egypt will fall. Their cities will be ruined, their lands desolate. These hordes will be ended by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He would be most ruthless. He would fill Egypt with the slain. God would dry up the streams of the Nile. Everything would be laid waste.

Ezekiel 30:13 - 26

2009 June 13th for July 8th

God’s destruction of Egypt would include several cities: Memphis, Upper Egypt, Zoan, Thebes, Pelusium, Bubastis, Heliopolis, and Tahpanhes are named.

On April 29, 587 B.C. the word of God came to Ezekiel. God had broken the arm of Egypt and it had not been set for healing yet so that he could hold a sword again. God was going to break both arms and Egypt would groan like a mortally wounded man. Babylon would brandish a sword against them. In this way they would all know that God was God.

Ezekiel 31

2009 June 13th for July 9th

This “Cedars in Lebanon” chapter is similar to Ezekiel 16. The metaphor here is a tree rather than a young virgin and the object is not Israel but Egypt.

God commands Pharaoh to consider Assyria, an enormous tree on a mountain, higher than all the other trees, providing shade and repose for birds and animals, nurtured by abundant water from deep roots. In addition to all this status the tree was so beautiful that it was the envy of all other trees in Eden.

Because it became proud due of its height, beauty, and status, God handed it over to its enemies who dealt with it according to its wickedness. Broken branches and boughs lay all over the valley. None of the birds or animals used it anymore. It was destined for death just like all mortal men. The water was blocked. Death was certain.

“This is Pharaoh and all his hordes, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

Ezekiel 32:1 - 14

2009 June 13th for July 10th

God commands a lament on Egypt.

Egypt is like a lion, or like a sea monster churning up mud. God will catch her in a net and throw her out in an open field where the birds will eat her flesh and drench the mountains in her blood. The heavens will be darkened and the sun covered.

This destruction will be troubling to many people in many nations. Everyone will be appalled. Every king will “shudder with horror” at the sight.

“On the day of your downfall each of them [the kings] will tremble every moment for his life.”

The sword of Babylon will scatter Egypt and destroy her military might.

“I will destroy all her cattle from beside abundant waters no longer to be stirred by the foot of man or muddied by the hoofs of cattle. Then I will let her waters settle and make her streams flow like oil, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

Ezekiel 32:15 - 32

2009 June 15th for July 13th

“When I make Egypt desolate and strip the land of everything in it, when I strike down all who live there, then they will know that I am the Lord.”

The nations will lament Egypt.

“Son of man, wail for the hordes of Egypt and consign to the earth below both her and the daughters of mighty nations, with those who go down to the pit. Say to them, ‘Are you more favored than others? Go down and be laid among the uncircumcised.’”

All will be killed by the sword. They will lie in the grave, uncircumcised, with their weapons under their heads. This is the punishment for their sins. Edom too, and the Sidonians. “They went down with the slain in disgrace despite the terror caused by their power. They lie uncircumcised with those killed by the sword and bear their shame with those who go down to the pit.”

Pharaoh too, though God used him to spread terror, he would go to the pit with the rest of the uncircumcised, just like all the rest who died by sword.

Ezekiel 33:1 - 20

2009 June 16th for July 14th

God through Ezekiel gives a nearly Mosaic metaphor. If there is a watchman on the city wall and he sees the enemy coming and blows the horn to alert the people, and if someone dies by the enemy’s hand because he ignored the watchman, his blood is on his own head. But if it is the watchman’s fault because he didn’t sound the warning, then the deaths are on his head.

Same thing with the prophet. If the people live in sin and wickedness and God’s prophet says nothing then their demise is on his head. The prophet is instructed to confront the people about their sins. When he does so, they know and bear their own guilt.

The people may complain that their sin weighs them down and they can't stand it. God says, straighten up now and do right in the future in that case. He doesn't want people to die because of their wickedness, so all will be forgiven if they stop doing it.

Righteousness consists of a person doing this: "if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die."

If the people say that God is not just, Ezekiel is to tell them that it is they who are not just. God is just. God will "judge each of you according to his own ways."

Ezekiel 33:21 - 33

2009 June 17th for July 15th

A man escaped from Jerusalem and came to tell Ezekiel that the city had fallen. God had spoken to Ezekiel the morning before the man's arrival and had given him the answer to a question of those who lived in Jerusalem, the question being that since Abraham was one man and had owned the country, certainly they who were many people, descended from Abraham, should also own it. God replied:

"This is what the Sovereign Lord say: Since you eat meat with the blood still in it and look to your idols and shed blood, should you then possess the land? You rely on your sword, you do detestable things, and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife. Should you then possess the land?"

"As surely as I live, those who are left in the ruins will fall by the sword, those out in the country I will give to the wild animals to be devoured, and strength will come to an end, and the mountains of Israel will become desolate so that no one will cross them. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I have made the land a desolate waste because of all the detestable things they have done."

The people would come and listen to Ezekiel but they would not do what he said. "With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.

"When all this comes true -- and it surely will -- then they will know that a prophet has been among them."

Ezekiel 34

2009 June 19th for July 16th

When God appoints a ruler over Israel he expects them to be a shepherd and spend time and energy taking care of the nation, not fattening himself while ignoring the subjects. David's experience as a boy is more than metaphor.

Through Ezekiel, God is furious with the current ruler for all they have and have not done: "You eat the curds [the treats, the finest], clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally."

As a result of this lack of leadership, they were scattered.

God would hold the shepherd accountable for this. God would become the shepherd himself and bring them to good grazing lands. He would judge among them. "Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet?"

God would bring peace and rid the land of dangerous animals, from lions to scorpions. He would rescue them from slavery.

"You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign Lord."

Ezekiel 35

2009 June 19th for July 17th

God now lashes out against Edom, symbolized by Mount Sier. They have not hated bloodshed. They rejoiced when Israel fell and was scattered. They were jealous and hated God's people.

Due to this, God would make all of their cities and towns desolate. Bloodshed would mark the land everywhere. The world would rejoice in the destruction of Edom, then they would know who was God.

Ezekiel 36

2009 June 22nd for July 20th

God speaks to the "mountains of Israel." The enemies have captured them and gloated over them and said malicious things about God and his people and deprived them of their children. God says that this will not happen again. Those enemies will instead suffer this scorn.

The ruins will be rebuilt, the towns re-inhabited, and the flocks increased again.

"Again the word of the Lord came to me: 'Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions. Their conduct was like a woman's monthly uncleanness in my sight. So I poured out my wrath on them because they had shed blood in the land and because they had defiled it with their idols.'"

God's name was thus profaned, but he will clean all this up and show his holiness to his people and to the other nations. He will take away their stone heart and give them a flesh heart. The crops will increase and the people of God will loathe their "detestable practices" and cease them. God will cleanse them of their sin and increase their number and prosperity. They will go to their feasts. "Then they will know that I am the Lord."

Ezekiel 37

2009 June 23rd for July 21st

"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?'

"I said, 'O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.'

"Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to these bones and say to them, "Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

'So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

"Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet -- a vast army."

"Then he said to me: 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off. Therefore prophesy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken and I have done it, declares the Lord.'"

God then instructed Ezekiel to take two sticks and to write "Ephraim" on one and "Judah" on the other and to put them in his hand together as one. The meaning of this was that Ephraim, representing Joseph, and Judah, representing Israel, would be joined into one nation under one king, David [his descendant], and the one nation would never again be divided again. They

would be put back in their land and would prosper and would have God's place of worship and would not defile themselves with idols or idol worship again.

In this way, because of God's sanctuary being among them, they would know that he was God.

Ezekiel 38

2009 June 24th for July 22nd

Ezekiel is instructed to prophesy against Gog and Magog. God says:

“I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks in your jaws and bring you out with your whole army -- your horses, your horsemen fully armed, and a great horde with large and small shields, all of them brandishing their swords. Persia, Cush and Put will be with them, all with shields and helmets, also Gomer with all its troops, and Beth Togarmah from the far north with all its troops -- the many nations with you.”

Prepare! Take command! You will invade a land that had recovered from war. You will do evil by invading towns without walls and taking everything, all the property, all the possessions, all the livestock, as plunder. You, Gog, will advance against Israel, a people who had been living in safety. This will fulfill a prophesy that God pronounced against Israel long ago. There will be a big earthquake. Every living being will tremble at God's presence.

“I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign Lord. Every man's sword will be against his brother. I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

Ezekiel 39

2009 June 25th for July 23rd

Ezekiel continues to prophesy against Gog. God was against them. “I will turn you around and drag you along.” He would strike their weapons from their hands. They would be food for carrion birds and wild animals. Israelites living in small towns would go out and get all their weapons, including the shields and spears and use them for firewood. “And they will plunder those who plundered them and loot those who looted them, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

Gog would be buried in Israel. It would be a steady job for Israelites to go out and bury the warriors. They would do this full time for seven months, then when they thought they were through they would rake through the land and if anyone found a bone they would put a marker on it so that the burial workers would come bury it. In this way they would cleanse their land.

God, who had taken Israel into exile, was no longer angry with them. He would restore them and bring everyone home from captivity to their own land and not leave anyone behind.

Ezekiel 40:1 - 23**2009 June 26th for July 24th**

In the fourteenth year of captivity in Babylon, God took Ezekiel in a vision and sat him on a high mountain. From there he could see some buildings. They were the new temple and grounds. There was a man there with a linen measuring chord. Ezekiel was instructed to report everything he saw.

He watched the man make measurements of the temple and its grounds its gates and porticos, alcoves, walls and jambs, outer and inner courts. Ezekiel reported enough dimensions to make a model, or to begin actual construction.

Ezekiel 40:24 - 49**2009 June 29th for July 27th**

The measurements of the temple in Ezekiel's vision continued with the south gate. The dimensions of the buildings and rooms are all magnificent by contemporary standards. The measurements all around the facility are completed.

On each side of the temple was a room where sacrifices were washed and slaughtered. These rooms had tables of dressed stone, utensils, hooks, and so forth. Burnt offerings included sin offerings and guilt offerings.

Then Ezekiel was shown rooms for the priests. "These are the sons of Zadok, who are the only Levites who may draw near to the Lord to minister before him."

The court area was 150 feet square.

Ezekiel 41**2009 June 30th for July 28th**

Measurements of the temple building continue being shown to Ezekiel, including measurements of the innermost room, the Most Holy Place.

Everything in the inner rooms was covered with wood.

"In the space above the outside of the entrance to the inner sanctuary and on the walls at regular intervals all around the inner and outer sanctuary were carved cherubim and palm trees. Palm trees alternated with cherubim. Each cherub had two faces: the face of a man toward the palm tree on one side and the face of a lion toward the palm tree on the other. They were carved all around the whole temple. From the floor to the area above the entrance, cherubim and palm trees were carved on the wall of the outer sanctuary."

Inside was a large wooden altar. "The man said to me, 'This is the table that is before the Lord.'" The entrances to the room consisted of two hinged doors. "On the sidewalls of the portico were

narrow windows with pal trees carved on each side. The side rooms of the temple also had overhangs.”

Ezekiel 42

2009 July 1st for 29th

The measuring man then showed Ezekiel a building with a north facing door. It had three floors, the first two with columns and rooms and galleries and inner passages and the third floor without columns but with smaller rooms. The man said:

“The north and south rooms facing the temple courtyard are the priests’ rooms, where the priests who approach the Lord will eat the most holy offerings. There they will put the most holy offerings -- the grain offerings, the sin offerings and the guilt offerings -- for the place is holy. Once the priests enter the holy precincts, they are not to go into the outer court until they leave behind the garments in which they minister, for these are holy. They are to put on other clothes before they go near the places that are for the people.”

The man then measured the wall enclosing the outer courtyard. It was 750 feet (500 cubits) square, “to separate the holy from the common.”

Ezekiel 43

2009 July 3rd for 30th

God returns to the temple. The measuring man brought Ezekiel to the east-facing gate and there they saw “the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when he came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell facedown.”

The glory of the Lord entered the temple and the Spirit brought Ezekiel into the inner place.

God told Ezekiel that this was his house and that he would live there forever and that Israel would never again defile him with prostitution with idols and other detestable practices. God would live among them forever.

God told Ezekiel to describe the temple in this vision to the people. All of the dimensions to be reported to the people are given.

God then gave the regulations for the dedication and purification of the temple. These largely reflect the directions given for the tabernacle in Deuteronomy. A young bull is sacrificed as a sin offering for the priests, the family of Zadok. Some of the blood is put on the four horns of the altar and the four corners of the upper ledge. The designated parts of the bull are then to be burnt in designated parts of the temple outside the sanctuary.

On the second day a male goat is sacrificed, then a young bull and a ram, both without defect, of course.

The sacrifice of the male goat is carried out for seven days. “At the end of these days, from the eighth day on, the priests are to present your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar. Then I will accept you, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

Ezekiel 44

2009 July 3rd for 31st

God gives the regulations for the priests serving in the temple.

Because God entered through the east gate, the gate is to be shut and never opened for anyone else. Only the priest may go eat there in the courtyard and even he must enter through the portico.

God is angry that the people have brought in foreigners, people uncircumcised in heart and in flesh, to minister in and therefore defile the temple. This is not to happen anymore. Even the foreigners who live in Israel are not allowed in the temple. The priests who were involved in these illegal actions may serve at the gates and perform the slaughters, but those who stood before idols may not serve God in the inner rooms or come near any of the holy things.

When priests serve, there is a strict dress code. “They are to wear linen clothes; they must not wear any woolen garment while ministering at the gates of the inner court or inside the temple. They are to wear linen turbans on their heads and linen undergarments around their waists. They must not wear anything that makes them perspire. When they go out into the outer court where the people are, they are to take off the clothes they have been ministering in and are to leave them in the sacred rooms, and put on other clothes, so that they do not consecrate the people by means of their garments.”

They are to keep their hair appropriately long, not shaved, not long and unkempt. They can only marry virgins or widows of other priests. “They are to teach my people the difference between the holy and the common and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean.”

The priests also serve as judges in civil disputes and they are to follow all the decrees about holy days and festivals. They are not allowed to defile themselves by coming near a dead person, but if it is a close relative, they may, after which they will be unclean for seven days and may not serve.

The priests have no inheritance and no property in the land. Their only inheritance is God himself. They are allowed to eat the sin and guilt offerings that the people bring, and the firstfruits. They may not eat anything “found dead or torn by wild animals.”

All of this essentially reprises Leviticus.

Ezekiel 45

2009 July 6th for August 3rd

The people are to provide a sacred district about 7 miles by 5 miles for the sanctuary and surrounding lands and it will all be holy. The area for the sanctuary is to be 750 feet square. The land is all sacred and will be where the priests and those who minister in the temple will live. An area two by five miles will belong to the Levites as their possession for their towns.

The prince will own the bordering land. “This land will be his possession in Israel. “And my princes will no longer oppress my people but will allow the house of Israel to possess the land according to their tribes.”

The prophet then continues his digression into proper behavior for prince, including fair weights and measures in base ten, more or less:

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: You have gone far enough, O princes of Israel! Give up your violence and oppression and do what is just and right. Stop dispossessing my people, declares the Sovereign Lord. You are to use accurate scales, and accurate ephah and an accurate bath. The ephah and the bath are to be the same size, the bath containing a tenth of a homer and the ephah a tenth of a homer; the homer is to be the standard measure for both. The shekel is to consist of twenty gerahs. Twenty shekels plus twenty-five shekels plus fifteen shekels equal one mina.”

There is to be a special offering of grains and oils and one of every two hundred sheep from each flock, all well provisioned and tended due to God’s mercy and blessing. These will be used for fellowship offerings, grain offerings, burnt offerings, and drink offerings. The prince will provide the offerings for festivals, the New Moons and the Sabbaths and “all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel.”

In addition, on the first day of each month a bull is to be sacrificed for sin and unintentional transgressions and mistakes made from ignorance.

The Passover will be celebrated annually for seven days and the prince shall provide the prescribed offerings for himself and all the people.

Ezekiel 46

2009 July 7th for August 4th

God instructed that the east gate into the temple area only be opened on the Sabbath and New Moon festivals. The prince was to enter through the portico to worship and make sacrifices and he was to do this among the people. The animals to be sacrificed and other offerings appropriate to the occasions were prescribed. In addition, no one attending was to leave through the same gate he came in through. Those entering from the north were to exit to the south and vice versa.

A rule about inheritance: The prince can make a gift of property to one of his servants but only until the “year of freedom” at which time it reverts back to the prince. The prince is only to give his sons gifts of property out of his own property and he is not to displace anyone else from the property of their inheritance.

The measuring man then took Ezekiel through a room on the west end of the north side of the courtyard of the temple where the offerings were brought in order to avoid bringing them into the outer court and thereby “consecrating the people.” In the outer court there were courts in each of the four corners and the courts had ledges under which fires could be built for the cooking and baking. The priests took the offerings of the people and prepared them in these areas.

Ezekiel 47

2009 July 8th for August 5th

The man doing the measuring showed Ezekiel water flowing out from under the temple threshold on the east side, “coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar.” He then showed the prophet that this flowed down and became a river, first ankle deep, then knee deep, then waist deep, then deep enough for swimming, too deep for anyone to cross.

This river flowed into the “Sea” at Arabah where there were fish and swarms of living creatures thriving in the fresh water. The surrounding marshes stayed salt. The trees on both sides of the river grew well and did not wither, bearing fruit every month because of the water from the sanctuary.

God then gives the boundaries of the country of Israel and instructs that the land be divided between the twelve tribes of Israel evenly, except for a double portion for Joseph. This is in fulfillment of God’s promise to the reader’s ancestors. They are also to allot land for the aliens who have settled with them, within whichever tribe they have settled. Their native born children are to be considered as native-born Israelites.

Ezekiel 48

2009 July 9th for August 6th

The divisions of the land are now called out. Each tribe would have a strip running from the east to the west border of Israel. Unlike the allocations in Joshua, these had no firm boundaries, they were just stacked up in order from north to south.

Beginning at the north boundary of the country and proceeding to the middle were Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben, and Judah.

Bordering Judah to the south is the center of the country which contains the land occupied by the Levites, the prince, and the Temple. This land and the way it is arranged and laid out is specified in detail including the boundaries, the pasturelands, the fields, the towns, the middle city, and the arrangement of the prince’s property and location and dimensions of the temple. All of this was for the support of the priests who were to serve the people. In the very center would be the land

of the Zadokites “who did not go astray as the Levites did when the Israelites went astray. In the very center of that would be the temple. None of this sacred land could be sold or exchanged.

South of this central area the allotments to the individual tribes continue with Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, and Gad. Gad would be at the southern boundary of the country.

The central city will have twelve gates, one for each tribe. On the north are gates of Reuben, Judah, and Levi. On the east, are the gates of Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan. On the south are the gates of Simeon, Issachar and Zebulun. Finally, on the west are the gates of Gad, Asher, and Naphtali.

Each side of the city was a little under a mile and a half in dimension (4500 cubits).

“And the name of the city from that time on will be:

“The Lord Is There.”

Concluding Thoughts on Ezekiel

2009 July 11th for August 7th

Ezekiel condemns his people, the Israelites, for their immorality and infidelity to God as do the other prophets. Unlike the other prophets, he sees many fantastic visions. Are these real events that happened, hallucinations, visions of things that could happen, or something else? The prophet testifies as if he was not really there but had been transported in a vision to the places and occurrences that he reported.

These included visions of God himself and his servants and conveyances: men, unearthly beasts and beings, and something that sounded and looked, from Ezekiel’s description, a lot like helicopters. Often these visions involved unusual weather or other exceptional phenomena such as earthquakes. He spends a lot of time reporting on a vision of the temple, its compound and surroundings, and the country. In a vision he also visits the exiles in Babylon.

While the helicopters and the metal clad human-like forms in the clouds are like science fiction to us, I have the impression that Ezekiel was as excited about every one of his visions, not just the ones with the best special effects. The temple and all it represented - God’s presence, stability, safety, prosperity, purity, and ascendancy were very important to Ezekiel and the Israelites of his time, so much so that he reported all the architectural and utilization details, the sacrifices and priestly duties, the convocation and establishment of the grand buildings over several chapters. This reporting hasn’t been that interesting to us now.

His writings end with possibly the most important establishment of all: “The Lord Is There.” Many times he says that the days of infidelity and of separation from God and punishment by him are over and done with forever. While it is tempting to think such things in the moment of

good intentions and restoration, these sentiments do not match Israel's actual future after Ezekiel, as we will see. Ezekiel understood how life should have been for Israel and was clearly hopeful.

© 2009 Courtney B. Duncan.