

- In July 2015, *Psychology Today* published a list of 5 ways to deliver bad news successfully
 - The five steps were:
 - Tell (at least) part of the truth if you think the person needs to hear it
 - Sugarcoat the news if you think the person can't handle hearing it
 - If the bad news involves a potential threat to their self-esteem, help the recipient save face (develop a cover story to preserve the person's reputation)
 - Take your time to prepare your message (choose your words carefully to avoid offense)
 - Rely on others to help you (deliver the message as a team)
 - The article says that if you follow these steps, you are far more likely to deliver the bad news successfully
 - Now at this point, some of you are wondering if I'm about to deliver bad news
 - Well, rest easy...I have no bad news to deliver
 - But there was a man, a priest of Judah, who lived long ago in the nation of Israel
 - And the Lord called this man to deliver some very bad news to the nation
 - But this man never read *Psychology Today*
 - So he violated every single one of these rules
- He delivered the bad news according to the wisdom of God, not the so-called wisdom of men
 - As God required, this man delivered the whole truth to Israel
 - He held back none of the terrible details of the judgment God was preparing to deliver
 - He sugarcoated nothing, explaining in graphic detail the sins of Israel and the consequences that would follow
 - He cared nothing for Israel's self-esteem
 - On the contrary, this prophet targeted Israel's pride
 - He called them out for their apostasy and refused to let them hide behind their excuses
 - While he did choose his words carefully, he chose them to ensure maximum impact
 - He spoke in graphic and even vulgar terms intending to awaken the nation to its depravity
 - The man sought to offend Israel, just as they had offended their God
 - Finally, this prophet stood virtually alone in his declarations
 - Though he lived at a time when multiple prophets operated, he worked alone
 - Moreover, he was rejected by his own people, who responded to his declarations in cynicism

- History does not record his birth or death or even if he had children
- In fact, there are no records of his life outside the book he wrote
- This prophet was a man named Ezekiel
 - His name means strengthen by God, and so he was because he had a very difficult mission
 - Ezekiel was a major prophet called to speak to Judah in the days of the Babylonian captivity
 - He is a unique – even enigmatic – character in scripture
 - God asked things of him that God asked of no other prophet
 - But he received rare and marvelous visions that no other prophet received
 - He was told to explain to Judah the reason for God’s harsh judgment, and Ezekiel delivered that message just as God required
 - He didn’t mince words, he didn’t soften the blow, and he didn’t worry about hurting feelings
 - God told Ezekiel to arrest a disobedient Israel with dramatic words of judgment so they would be without excuse
 - But in the midst of the bad news, God also gave Israel a glimmer of hope
 - Ezekiel provided Israel with a stunning preview of the glory God has prepared for the nation in the Kingdom
 - He assured the captive nation they would one day return from their scattering
 - They would see a renewed temple filled with the Glory of God
 - Then even as Israel was unfaithful to the covenant, nevertheless God would remain faithful to His promises
- As we study this book together, we’re going to learn some history, we’re going to learn about covenants, and we’re going to learn about sin and judgment
 - Above all, we’re going to learn about the glory of God and the power of God’s promises found in His word
 - Ezekiel more than any OT work emphasized the glory of God
 - The phrase “Then they will know that I am the Lord” appears over 60 times in the book
 - Reminding us that the Lord chooses to reveal Himself to us for the purpose of receiving the glory He deserves
 - But when God’s people turn from Him into idolatry and other sin, we spurn His revelation and break fellowship
 - As Thomas Constable observed:

God used the events of Ezekiel's life to teach His people — and all people — that He is the only true God. In the future, He will bring things to pass that will teach people that only He is God. We can learn that even now, as we gain God's

viewpoint on life from this great book. Then we can help others make sense out of what is happening, because we understand the One who is creating history.

- Ezekiel is the classic Old Testament text recording God's faithfulness to His word concerning Israel
 - He fulfills His promise to judge Israel's disobedience
 - He reiterates His promise to bring blessings and glory to that same nation in a day to come
 - And He promises a better covenant to put an end to Israel's cycle of sin and disobedience and the judgment that followed
- For us the Church, this book offers a lot to be excited about too
 - The prophecies have existed for over 2,500 years but today the things Ezekiel promised are coming to pass before our eyes
 - We are living in the days of Ezekiel's prophecy
 - Some of Ezekiel's prophecies have already been
 - And even the most dramatic and mysterious visions in this book are soon to become reality
- So let's dive in to the opening chapters, which offer the most dramatic and mysterious start of any book of scripture

Ezek. 1:1 Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

Ezek. 1:2 (On the fifth of the month in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile,

Ezek. 1:3 the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and there the hand of the Lord came upon him.)

- Ezekiel begins his book with geography and chronology
 - That's one of Ezekiel's distinctive characteristics
 - His book is known for its precise time and historical references
 - His book is a collection of prophecies which he received over 20 years while in exile with the rest of Judah in Babylon
 - And Ezekiel dated each prophecy as he received them, so we have exact dates down to the very day God spoke
 - Altogether, Ezekiel recorded 14 prophecies during those 20 years, and the first prophecy runs from Chapter 1 through the middle of Chapter 3
 - The prophecy came on July 31, 593 BC on the modern calendar
 - This was during the reign of King Jehoiachin, who was also living in captivity

- The king was taken into Babylon in the same year as Ezekiel, during the second deportation in 597 BC
- This year is the base year Ezekiel uses to date all 14 of his prophecies in this book
- Ezekiel says he received this first vision while living on the river Chebar in the midst of the exiles of Judah
 - The Jews taken into slavery by Nebuchadnezzar when Babylon conquered Jerusalem and Judah, were settled along this river
 - They lived in a community called Tel-Aviv, which means “old spring” which is a euphemism for “something old and something new”
 - The Chebar was a great canal that brought water out of the Euphrates River to serve the population east of Babylon
- The Jews living here had a surprisingly comfortable existence despite being held in captivity
 - They opened homes and businesses
 - They could travel within Babylon
 - They were free to worship
 - And so when the nation was permitted to return to Jerusalem 70 years later, many chose not to leave Babylon
- Ezekiel was not one of the apostate Jews responsible for the judgment, yet he was caught up in it
 - Though some in the nation were faithful to God, all were subjected to the judgment
 - This happened because the Old Covenant, which required this judgment was a national covenant
 - It bound the whole nation to whatever circumstances came as a result of its terms
 - Ezekiel was a faithful participant in the covenant, but still he maintained his association with God’s people while under judgment
 - He says he lived among these exiles, in their midst
 - And while there he began receiving visions
 - The prophecy came in the thirtieth year, meaning Ezekiel was thirty years old
 - In v.3 Ezekiel says he was a priest, and priests began their service in the temple at the age of 30
 - Since Ezekiel turned thirty while in captivity in Babylon, we know he never had a chance to serve as a priest in the temple
 - And now the Lord has called him into a different form of service as a prophet to Israel in exile
 - Ezekiel spent his early adult life preparing to serve God in sacrificial rituals performed in the temple

- Priestly preparation was demanding, and no doubt Ezekiel dedicated himself to the hard work expected of him
- But just as his time for service approached, suddenly Ezekiel finds himself dragged off to a foreign land and the temple destroyed
- His opportunity for service as priest seemingly stolen from him
- In reality, the Lord was preparing Him for an even greater service as a prophet to the exiles
- Ezekiel's predicament is a reminder that God may set us on a course of preparation which suggests to us a certain role in serving Him
 - And yet when the day comes, the Lord may direct us into a completely new and better way of service, something we didn't expect
 - If we are to fulfill our call properly, we need to be open to these detours in our life
 - Likewise we must be ready to receive those called to serve us even if their background doesn't match our expectations
- Jesus calls unqualified people to serve Him, but He won't leave us untrained
 - But the Lord's training can be very unorthodox
 - He uses all our experiences to prepare us to serve Him and then He puts that training to work in surprising ways
 - A servant may be trained in farming or business or in a trade of one kind or another
 - And then in a day to come, God takes that training and puts it into service in a ministry no one saw coming
 - History confirms this pattern
 - Many good servants of God gained their start in ministry in unorthodox ways
 - The church has known good shepherds who were never trained as pastors
 - And good Bible teachers who never attended seminary
 - Remember, even the apostles themselves never trained to be religious leaders, yet they were called to found the Church
 - Ezekiel's time preparing to be a priest might have seemed wasted for a man who would spend his life in exile absent a temple
 - But as it turned out, his priestly training became critically important for his role as a prophet
 - Because many of his visions concerned priestly matters, namely the construction and operation of the Kingdom temple
 - God's ways make no sense to us...until we come to understand God's purposes, and then they make perfect sense
- So remember Ezekiel's career shift as you consider your own call to serve God
 - You may be trained as an accountant, a soldier, a teacher, a nurse, an athlete...or

even a pastor

- But God may take that preparation and call you to use it serving Him in new and surprising ways
- A farmer trained to work the land may be called by God to pastor a church meeting in his barns
- And a seminary-trained pastor may be called out of the pulpit to plant fields to feed believers in a poor village
- God may use our preparation in unexpected ways, but the common requirement for every servant of God is to serve faithfully
 - Remain open to the Spirit's leading and obey His call
 - Don't rely on stereotypes and don't be afraid to change your 5-year plan
 - Be ready to accept any servant of God regardless of whether his or her preparation fits with your preconceived expectations
- Now we turn to the opening description of Ezekiel's first vision

Ezek. 1:4 As I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire.

- The prophecy that begins here runs until the middle of Chapter 3
 - Ezekiel's description of what he saw is found within Chapter 1
 - Then in Chapters 2 & 3, Ezekiel tells us what the Lord says as He called Ezekiel to prophesy to Israel
 - The entire scene is reminiscent of Isaiah's call to prophesy in Isaiah 6
 - But Ezekiel's vision is far more detailed and mysterious
 - Ezekiel's visions are filled with mysterious – even disturbing – images, making interpretation of this vision difficult
 - Interpreting the vision in these chapters requires a careful adherence to the fundamental rules of interpretation (called hermeneutics)
 - In particular, distinguishing between literal and symbolic details and applying other scripture appropriately
- So we'll begin with observations of the details of just one verse; v.4
 - A storm comes blowing from the north bringing a great cloud filled with lightning
 - Such a vision would be dramatic but not entirely unknown to a resident of Babylon
 - The Middle East desert commonly produces dust storms that fit the general description of this vision
 - The storm rises up suddenly, moving across the land like a great shadow of dust, like a freight train obliterating everything in its path

- Sandstorms can generate spectacular lightning displays
- So the Lord gives Ezekiel familiar imagery, but quickly the details depart from the normal
 - For example, natural sandstorms are shrouded in darkness, but this storm had a bright light surrounding it
 - Furthermore, dust storms are monolithic, nothing but sand
 - But in the center of the storm was something like glowing metal
- Already, we can begin to understand the meaning of some of these symbols
 - First, we have a cloud or storm of lightning
 - The Bible use the symbols of lightning and clouds or storms in a particular way
 - These details are commonly associated with the appearance of the glory of God
 - For example, the camp of Israel witnessed the glory of God in a cloud filled with lightning and fire while on top of the mountain at Sinai
 - And Elijah was carried by God in a similar whirlwind
 - And John saw burning fire and lightning in the throne room in Revelation
 - Secondly, this cloud has glowing metal inside it
 - Glowing metal, as in a furnace, is a picture of God's judgment
 - In particular, glowing bronze in a furnace is a common picture of God's judgment fire
 - Finally, the storm approached from the north, which would have been a particularly significant detail to the exiles in Babylon
 - The Babylonian army came from the north to invade Judah
 - Just as Assyria had done centuries earlier in defeating Israel
 - So God is reminding the captives that God has brought judgment to Judah by way of Babylon
 - Babylon was an instrument in God's hands executing His judgment
 - I say God is reminding Israel because in earlier centuries, the prophets, most notably Isaiah, told Israel God would act in this way
 - Isaiah told Israel that God would use Babylon to judge them for their sin

Is. 13:1 The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.

Is. 13:2 Lift up a standard on the bare hill,

Raise your voice to them,

Wave the hand that they may enter the doors of the nobles.

Is. 13:3 I have commanded My consecrated ones,

I have even called My mighty warriors,

My proudly exulting ones,

To execute My anger.

- So Israel was on notice this would happen
 - And yet they did not repent nor did they seek obedience
 - They continued in sin and apostasy
 - And so now as they sit in exile, perhaps they wondered why...
 - The answers they sought should have been obvious
- The exiles had been in captivity for several years by this time
 - The temple, the house of the glory of the Lord, had been robbed and the priesthood decimated
 - The people of Israel were scattered and in slavery
 - The kingdom of Israel had ceased to exist
 - The people of Judah were imprisoned and with no hope to return
 - And in a few short years, Nebuchadnezzar would return to Jerusalem a third time to destroy the city and temple completely
- So they must have been asking questions of God?
 - Did the God of Israel only dwell in Judah?
 - Where were they now without a God?
 - And even if they could return to God, how could they pursue Him without a temple or a priesthood to make sacrifices?
 - Did their captivity mean an end of all that God promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?
 - Had the Lord forsaken His people?
- To answer those questions, the Lord brings Ezekiel this vision as an explanation for his personal circumstances and those of all exiles
 - But the Lord has much more to say
 - And His message centers on Himself
 - On His omniscience, His sovereignty and ultimately His glory
 - God's glory is always the first priority of Creation
 - The Lord proclaimed by His word in the covenant given to Israel that He would judge them for their sin under the covenant

Deut. 28:15 “But it shall come about, if you do not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

Deut. 28:25 “The Lord shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

Deut. 28:30 “You shall betroth a wife, but another man will violate her; you shall build a house, but you will not live in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but you will not use its fruit.

Deut. 28:31 “Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will not eat of it; your donkey shall be torn away from you, and will not be restored to you; your sheep shall be given to your enemies, and you will have none to save you.

Deut. 28:32 “Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and yearn for them continually; but there will be nothing you can do.

Deut. 28:33 “A people whom you do not know shall eat up the produce of your ground and all your labors, and you will never be anything but oppressed and crushed continually.

Deut. 28:34 “You shall be driven mad by the sight of what you see.

- These were hard words, but God issued these warnings to give Israel incentive to obey the covenant they freely entered
 - But Israel forgot their commitment to the covenant
 - And so now what should the Lord do?
 - His glory was on the line
 - God could no more ignore His own promises for judgment than He could lie
 - So for His glory sake, He was obligated to fulfill the terms of this covenant in judgment
- Israel couldn't begin to understand their circumstances unless they understood the importance of the glory of God
 - They were in exile because they entered into a covenant with a covenant-keeping God
 - We too are in covenant with the Lord by His blood
- And unless and until we gain a high view of God's sovereignty and glory, we too may struggle to experience strength and joy and peace in our relationship with Him
 - Like Israel, we must appreciate how life circumstances are moving under His hand to accomplish His will
 - According to His glory, not to our desires
 - When circumstances require, the Lord may bring difficulties into our lives too, by one means or another
 - But when He does, it's only because His glory requires it
 - To grow us, to prepare us, to discipline us according to His word
 - But even if He does, he won't leave us in the dark about why
 - By His Spirit in His word He'll explain Himself, just as He did to Israel through Ezekiel

- And usually He will be reminding us of things we already know
 - That we serve a holy God Who calls us to be like Him
 - That He asks us to bring glory to His name among the nations
 - And that He remains faithful to His word even when we aren't faithful to ours

- Imagine you're talking to someone who has been blind since birth, and you're trying to explain the concept of colors
 - How would you describe to that person what the color red or blue looks like?
 - The person would have no point of reference to understand what you're describing
 - He can hear what you're saying, but what you're saying would probably make little or no sense
 - I think that's the kind of problem Ezekiel faced when he was called by God to relate the vision he experienced in Chapter 1
 - Ezekiel saw things no one sees, heavenly things, things that just don't make sense to someone bound to earth
 - He tried to describe his vision using simple language, but still the overall description may seem nonsensical to us
 - Some have even accused Ezekiel of being psychotic or on LSD
 - But we know the Lord presented Ezekiel with this scene to communicate some truth to Israel and to us
 - That means despite the otherworldly nature of these events, they ARE understandable by the Spirit
 - We CAN know what the Lord was trying to teach us by these visions, even if the details remain mysterious in some cases
 - You could say the same for all Scripture
- God has the power to make Himself known in His word irrespective of our own abilities or effort
 - Let me illustrate what I mean...

Alexander MacKay was a Scottish missionary pioneer to Uganda. How did he learn of God's call to become a missionary? His story starts with the story of another missionary, David Livingstone, the Englishman who traveled into the heart of Africa as an evangelist in the mid 1800s. After a number of years, a British newspaper sent reporter Henry Stanley to find Livingstone. When Stanley came upon Livingstone, he uttered those famous words, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?"

Stanley was so moved by his time with Livingstone that he himself later became a missionary, and he went to the heart of Africa, to Uganda. In April of 1875, Henry Stanley wrote a letter appealing for workers to come and evangelize the region with him. He gave the letter to a French colonel who then left by caravan for the coast. But the Frenchman was suddenly attacked by a savage tribe. He was killed and his body was left unburied on the sand where it was discovered by some English soldiers who happened to be passing that way. The soldiers

buried the French Colonel, but before doing so they pulled off his boots. In one of them was Stanley's letter, stained with the dead man's blood. They sent the letter to an English General in Egypt who sent it to a newspaper in London. Six months later, in December of that year, Alexander MacKay read Stanley's letter in the London newspaper. Through that letter, God spoke to MacKay and called him to be a missionary to Uganda.

- My point is that God's message will find its way to its intended destination, one way or another
 - So as we dive into Ezekiel's first vision, be prepared for the likelihood that you may not understand every detail of the vision
 - But you can have confidence you will come away with the understanding God intended
- Last week we stopped at v.4, where we learned that this vision concerns the judgment God has brought upon Judah for their sins under the Old Covenant
 - The Lord executed His judgment at the hands of the Babylonians, just as He promised He would through Isaiah and Jeremiah
 - The cloud represents the glory of God moving to keep His promises in Israel
 - In the midst of God's glory was a glowing representation of God's judgment
 - And since the storm came from the north, it reminded the exiles their northern oppressor, Babylon, has been appointed by God
 - So now let's pick up there and move forward into the next section of the vision

Ezek. 1:4 As I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire.

Ezek. 1:5 Within it there were figures resembling four living beings. And this was their appearance: they had human form.

Ezek. 1:6 Each of them had four faces and four wings.

Ezek. 1:7 Their legs were straight and their feet were like a calf's hoof, and they gleamed like burnished bronze.

Ezek. 1:8 Under their wings on their four sides were human hands. As for the faces and wings of the four of them,

Ezek. 1:9 their wings touched one another; their faces did not turn when they moved, each went straight forward.

Ezek. 1:10 As for the form of their faces, each had the face of a man; all four had the face of a lion on the right and the face of a bull on the left, and all four had the face of an eagle.

Ezek. 1:11 Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each had

two touching another being, and two covering their bodies.

- Perhaps now you feel like that blind person contemplating colors I mentioned a moment ago? It's hard to wrap our minds around what Ezekiel is describing
 - Ezekiel sees four figures emerging from the center of the storm, from the place of light
 - Since we know the cloud pictures the glory of God, then we understand that they are stationed at the heart of God's glory
 - From the descriptions Ezekiel gives us, they sound like aliens or monsters from a sci-fi movie
 - We're going to consider his description in detail, because I want you to obtain a clear picture of this scene in your mind
 - First, these four creatures are living beings, which means they were created by God and given life
 - They have a human form or likeness, so that's our point of reference for understanding their appearance
 - Yet it's quickly apparent they are very unlike human beings in many ways
 - Key among those differences, they possess four faces each and four wings each
 - The four faces were that of a man, a lion, a bull and an eagle
 - Interpreters have long sought to explain the meaning of these four choices
 - Usually such interpretation is little more than speculation
 - I'll offer an interpretation too, but let's finish building our picture of their appearance first
 - Their legs were straight, Ezekiel says
 - The Hebrew word translated as "straight" is literally the word for "right" which can also mean upright
 - So Ezekiel's saying the four creatures were standing erect on two legs each
 - Though the legs were like those of a man, the feet were like those of a calf hoof
 - And the legs were like shining bronze
 - Burnished bronze is a picture of withstanding judgment
 - So it suggests these creatures have been tested in a judgment fire and have been proven pure and holy
- Moving on, they have four wings each, and under each wing they possess the hand of a man
 - Two of these wings are raised high above them, while the other two are lowered to cover their bodies
 - The two raised wings are touching the adjoining creatures
 - So the upper left wing of one creature is touching the upper right wing of the

- creature standing to the left
 - While the upper right wing is touching the upper left wing of the third creature on the right
 - And so it goes around from creature to creature
- Which means these four creatures are standing in a square formation
 - Each one facing a cardinal direction
 - And they are adjoined at the tips of their upper wings so they must move as a single unit
 - Their lower wings are covering their bodies in an act of humility since they stand in the presence of the glory of God
- And their four faces are positioned in a similar, fixed manner
 - The faces of each creature are planted on a single head and neck
 - Ezekiel says the lion and bull faces were on the right and left
 - This implies that the human face is always looking outward from the formation
 - While the other faces are fixed in the other cardinal directions
 - The human face was outward, the lion on the right, the bull on the left and the eagle on the back
 - Since the four creatures are standing in opposing directions, someone looking upon this group would see all four faces from any angle
 - And the faces do not turn Ezekiel says in v.9
 - Rather they each look straight ahead without turning as the creature follows the Spirit of God without deviating
 - Which means the four faces continued to look in each of the cardinal directions regardless, as the creatures moved about in perfect obedience to the leading of God's Spirit
- Let's try to understand the meaning of their unique faces
 - It seems each of the faces represents the highest creature among the major divisions of the animal kingdom God established in Genesis
 - Man is the greatest of all living things God made, as scripture testifies
 - Man is the greatest of all creatures on earth, and so the face of the Man is in the first position on each creature
 - Furthermore, each creature has a general appearance of a man, Ezekiel says
 - And among the animal kingdom, God created beasts (wild animals), cattle (domesticated animals) and fish and birds
 - Lions are king among beasts
 - A bull is the king of domesticated animals
 - And eagles are the kings among birds
 - While we might suggest other choices (like an elephant), these animals were

known within Israel as the greatest beasts

- So what are these creatures? And what do they represent?
 - It may surprise you to know these four creatures are common characters in scripture
 - They are mentioned 91 times in the Bible, mostly in the Old Testament as well as once in the New Testament
 - Ezekiel himself names them later in this book, in Chapter 10

Ezek. 10:20 These are the living beings that I saw beneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar; so I knew that they were cherubim.

Ezek. 10:21 Each one had four faces and each one four wings, and beneath their wings was the form of human hands.

Ezek. 10:22 As for the likeness of their faces, they were the same faces whose appearance I had seen by the river Chebar.

- These four creatures are cherubim
 - Cherubim are part of the angelic realm
 - We use the word “angel” in a very loose and general way, but the Bible describes angels far more specifically
- Altogether, there are three classes of angels described in the Bible
 - First, the lowest rank of angelic beings are angels
 - The Bible always portrays angels as having the appearance of adult men (never as women or babies)
 - They do not have strange features; they do not even have wings
 - They are so “human-like” that they are usually mistaken for regular people
 - And the Bible says angels exist to be ministering spirits sent to the elect of God
- Next are seraphim, the second class of angelic beings
 - This group is mentioned least in the Bible, only in Isaiah and Revelation
 - Seraphim have a single face and six wings that cover different parts of their form
 - Some seraphim have the face of a man, some of a lion, some of a calf and some have an eagle’s face
 - They are covered with eyes on all sides, all around
 - They serve God around the throne continually praising Him, pronouncing judgments, leading worship, and attending to the altar of sacrifice in Heaven
- Finally, we have cherubim, the highest order of angelic being
 - As we’ve seen, they resemble seraphim in some ways, but they are distinct in other ways
 - They have all four faces rather than just one

- They have four wings rather than six
- They too operate around the throne of God, but they function as guards
- In fact, the word cherubim comes from a root Hebrew word meaning “to guard”
- What the cherubim guard is God’s glory
 - We see this role reflected in numerous places
 - Cherubim guarded the way into the Garden after Adam and Eve were sent out of the Garden
 - They served to remind early man that sinful flesh could not coexist with the presence of God’s glory
 - Golden cherubim guarded the mercy seat in the tabernacle and were embroidered on the curtains leading into the tabernacle
 - They are seen serving in the throne room of God in various places in the Old Testament
- But Ezekiel gives us the most detailed descriptions of the appearance and role of cherubim, including this description here
 - Later in this book Ezekiel will highlight the story of one infamous cherub in particular
 - In Chapter 28 Ezekiel tells us that the most powerful cherub was appointed to guard the glory of God in the heavenly tabernacle
 - But this cherub became so taken with his privilege and beauty that he allowed his position of importance to go to his head
 - And as a result of his pride, he fell into sin thinking he could become God
 - That cherub was named Satan (we’ll study this more later)
- So God shows Ezekiel this vision of His glory bringing judgment for Israel, with cherubim guarding the glory of God
 - And now Ezekiel describes how these creatures serve the glory of God

Ezek. 1:12 And each went straight forward; wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go, without turning as they went.

Ezek. 1:13 In the midst of the living beings there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings. The fire was bright, and lightning was flashing from the fire.

Ezek. 1:14 And the living beings ran to and fro like bolts of lightning.

Ezek. 1:15 Now as I looked at the living beings, behold, there was one wheel on the earth beside the living beings, for each of the four of them.

Ezek. 1:16 The appearance of the wheels and their workmanship was like sparkling beryl, and all four of them had the same form, their appearance and workmanship being as if one wheel were within another.

Ezek. 1:17 Whenever they moved, they moved in any of their four directions

without turning as they moved.

Ezek. 1:18 As for their rims they were lofty and awesome, and the rims of all four of them were full of eyes round about.

Ezek. 1:19 Whenever the living beings moved, the wheels moved with them. And whenever the living beings rose from the earth, the wheels rose also.

Ezek. 1:20 Wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go in that direction. And the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels.

Ezek. 1:21 Whenever those went, these went; and whenever those stood still, these stood still. And whenever those rose from the earth, the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels.

- The cherubim can move as fast as lightning, by means of special wheels
 - In v.15 Ezekiel says there was one wheel under each cherub for a total of four wheels upon which the entire group of cherubim move
 - The wheels were made of beryl, which is topaz; a bluish-yellow crystalline stone
 - In v.18, he says they are lofty and awesome
 - But in the original Hebrew, the words mean exceedingly high and terrifying
 - So these wheels are huge
 - Furthermore, each wheel was actually made of two wheels, as if one wheel were inside the other
 - The two wheels were set perpendicular to one another
 - Imagine something like a gyroscope assembly
 - This assembly allowed the cherubim to move in any cardinal direction effortlessly without turning
 - And neither of the wheels turned, nor did the faces or bodies of the cherubim turn
 - So the cherubim could move to any place without diverting their attention, and they could do so as fast as lightning
 - They could even move straight up, because the wheels rose off the ground with them
 - Finally, Ezekiel says the wheels are full of eyes and of the Spirit
 - When the Bible describes something as “full of eyes” it means it cooperates with the omnipresence and omniscience of God
 - How can a created being possess these characteristics that are unique qualities of God?
 - Ezekiel says they do so by means of the Spirit of God
 - These cherubim can know and follow the will of God perfectly because they are led by the Spirit of God

- So the cherubim rely on these special wheels to accompany the glory of God as He moves within Creation
 - The wheels transport the cherubim in perfect harmony with God in keeping with God's omnipresence and omniscience
 - Though the cherubim are created beings, nevertheless, they can accompany an infinite God because these wheels are under the control of the Spirit, Who has perfect knowledge of God's will
 - The cherubim never divert their attention away from God, because the Spirit ensures they were always in the right place
 - It's as if the Spirit is the navigator for these creatures, ensuring they are always in perfect sync with God's glory
 - And between these cherubim we find a coal fire with lightning, which again pictures the glory of God
 - Speaking of the glory of God, Ezekiel finishes Chapter 1 with a description of the glory of God inside this cloud

Ezek. 1:22 Now over the heads of the living beings there was something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, spread out over their heads.

Ezek. 1:23 Under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward the other; each one also had two wings covering its body on the one side and on the other.

Ezek. 1:24 I also heard the sound of their wings like the sound of abundant waters as they went, like the voice of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army camp; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings.

Ezek. 1:25 And there came a voice from above the expanse that was over their heads; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings.

Ezek. 1:26 Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man.

Ezek. 1:27 Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him.

Ezek. 1:28 As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.

- Ezekiel sees a manifestation of the glory of God seated on a throne over an expanse of crystal
 - This expanse is another common scene in both the Old and New Testament

- This is the way God represents His place in the heavenly realm
- We know this is not an actual image of God the Father, because scripture says it is not possible to witness such a thing

1Tim. 6:15 ... He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,

1Tim. 6:16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

- Despite the fact that no man has seen God on the throne, nevertheless He manifests His glory from time to time in a representative way
 - He represents His glory with brilliant light, reflected by gems and crystal and rainbows and with tremendously powerful sounds
 - In the midst of these things we typically find a figure like a man, surrounded by fire and glowing metal
 - Isaiah and the Apostle John saw similar things in their visions
- According to the New Testament, these manifestations are always the appearance of Christ

Heb. 1:3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power...

Col. 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

- Christ is the member of the Godhead Who represents God to, and in, the physical world
- So every physical manifestation of God is actually a manifestation of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God
- So we have a manifestation of God's glory seated on the throne, and upholding the glory of God are the cherubim
 - They are underneath the expanse, supporting it
 - In fact, Scripture says that the glory of God is resting above the cherubim

**Psa. 99:1 The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble;
He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake!**

- They are guardians of God's glory and they move everywhere He goes in perfect harmony with the Spirit to accomplish that mission
 - And in that detail we begin to gain an understanding of this entire scene

- We come to understand why the Lord manifested Himself to Ezekiel in this way with cherubim on display
- Ask yourself this: Is God's glory ever in jeopardy? Does it need protecting from some enemy? Could anything threaten or diminish God's glory? No
 - No, because God's glory stands apart from His Creation
 - It's possible for someone or something in Creation to deny or blaspheme God's glory
 - But His glory isn't lessened...it's just unappreciated
 - So why did God need cherubim to guard His glory?
 - Why are they upholding the glory of His presence?
 - Why must they accompany Him in perfect harmony always guarding His glory?
 - The answer is they serve as ideal examples to mankind for how we are to glorify the Lord
 - Remember, cherubim guarded the entrance to Eden so that mankind would understand that sin separates us from God's glory
 - And cherubim decorate the curtain guarding the entrance of the Holy Place to teach Israel that access to God's glory was guarded from sin
 - And cherubim guarded the glory of God over the mercy seat of the ark to remind us that God's glory is His greatest concern
 - In other words, the cherubim are poster children for how we should relate to the glory of God
 - The Creation and all it contains was made to reflect glory upon the Creator
 - And while the cherubim have a unique role in guarding God's glory
 - We are all called to emulate that example
 - And Israel specifically was called to glorify God among the nations through her obedience to the covenant

Deut. 7:6 “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Deut. 7:7 “The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,
Deut. 7:8 but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

- So Lesson #1 for Israel and for us is to guard the glory of God
- The cherubim guard the glory of God in a very literal fashion...it's their specific mission and purpose for existence

- But we too exist to glorify God, though in a less direct fashion
 - Jesus said we glorify our Father in Heaven through our life of obedient service

Matt. 5:16 “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

1Pet. 2:12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

- Moreover, the cherubim demonstrate that guarding the glory of God depends on living in harmony with the will of God
 - The cherubim never divert or turn from their appointed post in service to God
 - They follow God everywhere, under direction of the Spirit with perfect knowledge of His will
 - They move with lightning speed
 - They never turn away from God, their attention always fixed on Him
 - That’s how we guard the glory to God...through our obedience
 - Imagine the glory you would bring to God if your every thought and action were perfectly in tune with His
 - If you remained fixed on the Lord while you let the Spirit “turn” you in the proper direction
 - If you could move with the speed of lightning to follow the Lord in your life
 - If our lives were consumed with concern for obedience so we could protect and uphold His glory
 - And if we were humble enough to cover ourselves in the process
 - Obviously, we aren’t cherubim, so we can’t do what they do, at least not to the degree they can
 - But we are supposed to make a goal of living in that way
 - And so was Israel as a nation
 - God called them to be concerned with the glory of God, to glorify Him among the nations
 - But they traded that mission for one of worshipping false gods, engaging in selfish pursuits and living like the pagan world
 - In the process, they brought shame upon God’s name
 - Which is why they now find themselves sitting in Babylon
- The more you understand the importance of the glory of God, the more likely you will be to guard it in your own life

- Conversely, if you give little or no thought to God's glory, then your walk as a Christian will inevitably drift away from God's priorities
 - The fact that so many rabbis in Israel's day rejected Ezekiel's visions as mere fantasy tells us they missed the point
 - It's proof of how little appreciation Israel had for the glory of God
 - Which is why the Lord appeared to Israel in this way, so they might appreciate the God they were in covenant with
- And unfortunately, many modern theologians have likewise rejected Ezekiel's vision as allegory or fantasy
 - They reject that cherubim even exist
 - Or that this vision was an accurate depiction of God
 - Which may explain why so many in the church has moved so far away from a God-fearing life of obedience to His word
 - We just don't understand or appreciate the importance of the glory of God or how we are called to guard it
- A.W. Tozer made the following observation:

The church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted it for one so low, so ignoble as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshipping men. This she has done not deliberately, but little by little and without her knowledge; and her very unawareness only makes her situation all the more tragic. The low view of God entertained almost universally among Christians is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us. A whole new philosophy of the Christian life has resulted from this one basic error in our religious thinking. With our losses of the sense of majesty has come the further loss of religious awe and consciousness of the divine Presence. We have lost our spirit of worship and our ability to withdraw inwardly to meet God in adoring silence. Modern Christianity is simply not producing the kind of Christian who can appreciate or experience the life in the Spirit. The words, "Be still, and know that I am God," mean next to nothing to the self-confident, bustling worshiper in this middle period of the twentieth century. This loss of the concept of majesty has come just when the forces of religion are making dramatic gains and the churches are more prosperous than at any time within the past several hundred years. But the alarming thing is that our gains are mostly external and our losses wholly internal; ...

The decline of the knowledge of the Holy has brought on our troubles. A rediscovery of the majesty of God will go a long way toward curing them. It is impossible to keep our moral practices sound and our inward attitudes right while our idea of God is erroneous or inadequate. If we would bring back spiritual power to our lives, we must begin to think of God more nearly as He is.

- Last week we experienced Ezekiel's remarkable opening vision of God's glory
 - Ezekiel described seeing the Lord seated on His throne
 - But remarkably, his vision didn't focus on that detail
 - Rather, Chapter 1 focused on cherubim, the angelic guardians of God's glory
 - Those cherubim dominated Ezekiel's description of the scene
 - Which tells us that the Lord wanted the cherubim to leave the greater impression on Ezekiel to make a point
 - And I can summarize that point by revisiting three essential details in Ezekiel's description of the cherubim
 - First, we saw four cherubim with their four faces
 - The number four in scripture represents the earth
 - For example, we speak of four winds, four cardinal directions, "four corners", etc.
 - Furthermore, those faces featured representatives from the four divisions of earthly creatures God established in the Creation week...man, lion, ox and eagle
 - So we learned that the cherubim represent all the Earth, for all Creation
 - Secondly, Ezekiel spent considerable time describing the elaborate wheels upon which the cherubim were carried, in synchronicity with the Lord
 - The Spirit was in the wheels, so that wherever the Lord's glory went in His Creation, the Spirit carried these cherubim instantly
 - They moved like lightning without turning or diverting so that they were never distracted or delayed in attending to God's glory
 - Their every moment was dedicated to upholding the glory of God
 - Thirdly, with their four wings, the cherubim upheld the throne of God in all His glory
 - God didn't need them to hold Him up
 - But He has assigned them this role to set the example for how all Creation should serve God
 - They set the gold standard for all Creation
 - Just as cherubim have been created to guard God's glory, so should all Creation serve the same purpose
 - And in particular, Israel was created by God to glorify His name among the nations of the world
- Serving the Living God well requires a dedicated focus on upholding His glory
 - We do this by following Him wholeheartedly, according to the leading of the Spirit
 - Without diversions, without delay
 - And when we do this, we fulfill our created purpose and we find our fulfillment in life

- Moreover, we will share in His glory as we enjoy His presence
- But when we live without considering the glory of God, we fail in our mission
 - By our self-centeredness we offend the God Who has called us and saved us by His grace
 - Such was the condition of Israel in Ezekiel's day
 - Israel served themselves rather than serving God's glory
 - That's what God wanted Ezekiel and the nation to understand through this vision
- But there is still more for Ezekiel to know, so now God proceeds to call Ezekiel, the priest, into service as a prophet
 - The Lord gives Ezekiel a sobering assignment
 - One that quickly makes clear why God granted Ezekiel such a profound vision of His glory

Ezek. 2:1 Then He said to me, “Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!”

Ezek. 2:2 As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me.

Ezek. 2:3 Then He said to me, “Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.

Ezek. 2:4 “I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’

Ezek. 2:5 “As for them, whether they listen or not — for they are a rebellious house — they will know that a prophet has been among them.

- The Lord's first words to Ezekiel were “stand on your feet”
 - At the end of Chapter 1, we read how Ezekiel responded to the vision the Lord delivered
 - Ezekiel fell on his face, prostrate before the majesty and authority of the glory of God
 - Certainly this is the proper response to the glory of God
 - It demonstrated appropriate humility and reverence
 - But almost immediately, the Lord calls Ezekiel to stand on his feet
 - There's a striking contrast between the way God works with Ezekiel in this moment and the way He dealt with Moses at their first meeting

Ex. 3:4 When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”

Ex. 3:5 Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

Ex. 3:6 He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

- Moses approaches God standing with sandals
- Which prompted the Lord to order Moses to show greater reverence, causing Moses to hide himself
- While Ezekiel responds to the approach of God by falling face down, to which God responds get up on your feet
- So which is it? Should we show reverence or readiness before the Lord?
 - The answer is “yes” because both responses are required to serve God
 - Service to God requires both an acknowledgement of His holiness and authority, and a readiness to stand and serve
- In Moses’ case, he hadn’t recognized that he was standing in the presence of the glory of God, so his approach to God lacked reverence
 - Therefore the Lord instructed Moses to treat the ground as holy and to acknowledge the holiness of God
 - That scene captures Moses’ story perfectly
 - Moses always seemed ready to serve God’s people
 - In fact, we could say Moses was a bit too ready, since he acted 40 years prematurely while in Egypt
 - He killed the slave master to defend the Jew, yet the people of God would not follow Moses so he fled
 - On the other hand, Moses struggled at times to appreciate the power and authority of God working through him
 - He was tentative and even doubting when God called him, and during times dealing with the stubbornness of Israel
 - Which is why God reminded Moses over and over that His authority and power deserved Moses’ reverence
 - That Moses could be sure that God’s glory would prevail through him
- God also reminded Ezekiel of the importance of humility, when He addresses him as “son of man”
 - That term in Hebrew is literally son of Adam, which serves to remind Ezekiel of his humble origins
 - But God dealt with Ezekiel differently than with Moses, because this prophet demonstrates an opposite weakness at times
 - Ezekiel receives a tough assignment to bring bad news to people who didn’t want to hear it

- He will be treated poorly by the very people he is called to serve
- So though he revered God, Ezekiel needed encouragement to stand up in the midst of such adversity
- Reverence of God is a necessary requisite for serving Him properly
 - But it's not sufficient for our service
 - We must combine humility with a self-sacrificial willingness to stand with God regardless of what may come
- Consider the cherubim again
 - They show reverence for God
 - They covered themselves in humility with two wings
 - And they upheld the glory of God with the other two wings
- But remember also they were standing erect on their legs, ready to serve God
 - They moved with Him without distraction
 - And their most prominent feature wasn't those wings that revered God
 - It was those wheels that transported them in service to God
- So having reverence for God can never become excuse for failing to serve Him
 - Acknowledging His power and might doesn't relieve us of the responsibility to give effort to our assigned work
 - Do you respect the power and majesty of God?
 - Then you do well...better than many in fact
 - But are you serving this God you revere? Or do you merely admire him from a distance?
 - Are you like Moses, ready to serve but without an appreciation for the power of God to make your service useful?
 - Or are you like Ezekiel?
 - So enraptured by the presence of God that you've overlooked the reason He revealed Himself to you in the first place?
 - We don't uphold God's glory when we deny Him our service
- And when we seek to serve God, we can only do so by His power
 - The Spirit of God entered Ezekiel which resulted in Ezekiel standing on his feet
 - During the Old Testament dispensation, the Spirit of God worked differently among God's people
 - The Spirit didn't permanently indwell a saint as He does today
 - Instead, the Spirit would come upon a person temporarily to empower them to serve God in a certain way
 - We see that happening here to Ezekiel, and this was true for every Old Testament prophet

- Every prophet was indwelt by the Spirit to accomplish their ministry of prophecy, as Peter confirms:

2Pet. 1:20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,

2Pet. 1:21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

- Apart from such special situations, the Spirit of God did not actively empower Old Testament saints following the moment of their salvation
- Instead, God's people were to live according to the Law given through Moses
 - The Law served as the believer's guide for obedient service to God
 - Following the Law didn't save the Old Testament saint, but it did direct a saint into a sanctified life of obedience
 - It served as a custodian, guiding and protecting God's people until the new and better Law of Christ was available to be written on our hearts
 - As Paul explains:

Gal. 3:23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

Gal. 3:24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

Gal. 3:25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

- When situations warranted during Old Testament times, the Lord would place His Spirit in a man for ministry
 - Ezekiel was one such man
 - He lay prostrate because of the awesome glory of God
 - But now he stands ready to serve this awesome God by means of the Spirit of God
 - That's how we live to serve the Lord too
 - Our relationship should begin in humility, worshipping the God we serve with our whole heart, understanding our unworthiness
 - But our expression of worship finds its fulfillment in our service to God
 - And we are equipped for that service by the Spirit of God
- So then God tells Ezekiel he will be "sent" to the sons of Israel
 - Remember, Ezekiel is already dwelling among the exiles, so the Lord isn't talking about a physical journey to a new place
 - God's sending Ezekiel as His representative

- Ezekiel is being sent to minister to God's people Israel
- But then the Lord adds that He sends Ezekiel to a rebellious people who have rebelled against the Lord
- The Lord is referring both to Israel's past track record and to their future destiny
- Historically, the people of Israel rebelled against the God Who called them out of Egypt
 - The Old Testament is nothing if not a record of Israel's repeated rebellion against the Lord
 - The Lord notes this track record at the end of v.3 when He says that they and their forefathers have transgressed (or sinned) against me
 - He's referring to the nation's failure to keep the Old Covenant
 - They have transgressed in the sense of violating the terms of that covenant
 - And they have done so repeatedly despite having been forgiven many times by the Lord
- But the Lord also tells Ezekiel that the sons of Israel are a rebellious people
 - They still have hearts of rebellion against the Lord and the covenant
 - This is a remarkable statement when you consider what's already happened to the nation of Judah
 - For the first time in their history the city of Judah has been conquered by a Gentile enemy
 - The temple has been defiled and will soon be razed to its foundation
 - The people have been scattered and taken captive
 - Many have died and many more will die
 - Yet despite this severe rebuke by the Lord, still the people have rebellious hearts
 - If you ever wanted an example of the hardness of the human heart, just consider this example
 - These people have seen their lives devastated, everything they own taken away, and their future forever in doubt
 - All because they would not obey the Lord Who loved them and gave them His word to bless them
 - And still after four years sitting in captivity, they remain intent on rebelling against Him
 - How can this be? Simply put, they lack a humble heart
 - They lack a heart that recognizes that the glory of God is the goal of their existence
 - They lack a heart that seeks the pleasure of the Lord over the pleasures of the world
 - They need a heart that loves the Lord above all else

- In v.4 the Lord adds they are stubborn and obstinate children
 - The Hebrew word for stubborn is a phrase made up of two common words with a wide variety of meanings
 - And these shades of meaning can really help us understand what God is saying about His people
 - The phrase in Hebrew is *qasheh panim*, which means hard face
 - And depending on the context, *panim* can also mean “east”, “honor”, “humiliation” and even “upside down”
 - How does the word face become associated with all these ideas, including with being stubborn?
 - The answer is because all these ideas are related
 - Face, honor, stubbornness, humiliation, and even concepts like upside down and east are all related
 - They all relate to our pride
 - Our face is a representation of our honor
 - In fact, we often describe a public humiliation as a “loss of face”
 - And pride is our appetite for receiving honor
 - Our pride drives us to defend our honor under all circumstances, even when we are acting dishonorably
 - So even as we disobey the Lord, we stubbornly cling to the perception that we are worthy of honor
 - Euphemistically speaking, we have a “hard face”
 - It’s upside down logic born out of pride
 - And the Bible labels such pride a sin, symbolized in scripture by the cardinal direction east
 - Israel was a stubborn people, because even as they sat humiliated in the east, in Babylon, still they remained defiant
 - They continued to guard their pride long after it had given way to humiliation
 - Their self-perception and their very world were upside down
 - And yet they refused to turn their face to God in repentance
 - Their face remained as hard as their hearts
 - All of these ideas are bound up in the single Hebrew phrase: *qasheh panim*
- Then we have the word obstinate, which in Hebrew can also be translated as a question, “Who is stronger?”
 - Israel’s longstanding defiance against the Lord had become a test of wills
 - Who was stronger? The Lord or Israel?
 - Who would get their way? Whose will would prevail?

- The answer is obvious...the Lord's power and will prevails over His people's stubbornness
 - But if we persist in that battle of wills, the collateral damage adds up
 - If we don't learn early we suffer greater losses as time goes on
- Israel's presence in Babylon was proof they didn't get it
 - They continued to resist the Lord's word spoken by His prophets
 - They maintained a defiant attitude despite repeated warnings
 - And even now they resisted His will, which means worse times were coming
- So to this stubborn and obstinate people the Lord sends His prophet, one who shares their predicament if not their hearts
 - But given Israel's history of rebellion, what prospect did Ezekiel have of reaching this people?
 - The answer is not much
 - And even the Lord seems to acknowledge the futility of Ezekiel's task
 - In v.5 the Lord tells Ezekiel to speak whether Israel will listen or not
 - Obviously, the Lord already knows what will happen when Ezekiel speaks to Israel
 - So His statement isn't suggesting that the outcome is a mystery to God
 - The Lord's speaking as from Ezekiel's perspective
 - That regardless of what kind of reception Ezekiel receives in the end, nevertheless he is to persist in his mission for other reasons
 - Specifically, the purpose of Ezekiel's ministry is to demonstrate to Israel that he is a prophet
 - This is the key verse of this chapter and it sets up the rest of the book
 - God's purpose for Ezekiel's prophetic ministry wasn't to reach this generation of Israel necessarily
 - Though some may be reached in the process
 - Ezekiel's purpose in speaking to Israel was to validate his call as a prophet
 - So that as Ezekiel foretold future events for the exiles and those events came to pass, then Israel would understand that Ezekiel was truly a prophet
- At first, this may sound to us like circular reasoning (e.g., prophesy for the purpose of showing them you're a prophet)
 - But it makes sense when we look beyond the exiles in Babylon and consider those generations of God's people to come centuries later
 - Ezekiel has much to say to the people of Judah in exile
 - He prophesied about the judgments coming to them for their continuing rebellion
 - But Ezekiel had even more to say to God's people in an age to come

- To those future saints, Ezekiel prophesied about amazing and marvelous things yet to come
 - Of a great war coming at the end of this age which ends in a spectacular supernatural way
 - Of a new and greater temple in Jerusalem that will be a square mile in size
 - Of a mountain that rises up in Jerusalem so high that it becomes the highest mountain on earth
 - Of a river that will one day flow from Jerusalem into the Dead Sea making it fresh again and cause it to be teeming with fish
 - Most of all, Ezekiel speaks of the glory of God residing again in Jerusalem reigning over a worldwide Kingdom
- Truly, Ezekiel's future visions are so fantastic and unparalleled in scripture they can be hard to believe
 - So how could God's people believe that Ezekiel knew what he was talking about? How could they trust his prophecies?
 - Because Ezekiel prophesied about the exiles, and those prophecies came true just as he said
 - And based on Ezekiel's flawless track record of prophecies, we can also have confidence in those things yet to come
 - That's why Ezekiel had to prophesy to the exiles whether they listened or not
 - Because his ministry was meant to extend far beyond that audience
- It must have been a great blessing to Ezekiel to know this
 - There were many dark days during his ministry to the exiles when Ezekiel offered words of life only to be mocked and rejected
 - Days God called him to do difficult, even humiliating things
 - I'm sure he persisted in his service knowing the Lord had a greater purpose in using him
 - Don't we all wish we could have what Ezekiel had?
 - Wouldn't we all like to know God's true purpose in our ministry?
 - Wouldn't it be easier to persist as a struggling missionary if you knew that your lack of converts wasn't the end of the story?
 - Wouldn't Christian parents feel relief if they knew God's purposes didn't depend on them raising perfectly obedient children?
 - Wouldn't that Sunday school teacher work with greater joy knowing their success wasn't measured by how many people attended class or how much each student learned?
 - My point is that we all tend to limit our service to God based on the results we can see
 - When things look good to us, we serve gladly

- When the results aren't to our expectation, we tend to give up
 - At the end of the day, that's a self-centered perspective
 - We're assigning ourselves too much credit and assigning God too little
 - And I think any Christian can be guilty of serving God from this selfish mindset, often without even realizing it
- If you want to test your own heart on this point, ask yourself this question
 - How would you feel if God told you something like what He told Ezekiel?
 - What if God told you go to a far away place and preach the Gospel but you won't convert a single soul
 - Still, go anyway just so they will know God sent you
 - Or be a godly parent raising your child in the fear and admonition of the Lord, but they aren't going to obey you or take your advice
 - Still, do it anyway so they will know God sent you
 - Or organize and teach a Sunday school class but only a couple of people are going to show up and even fewer will listen
 - Still, do it so they might know you serve God
 - Would hearing those instructions lessen your desire to serve the Lord in those ways?
 - If so, it means you've been serving God for your glory
 - You've been serving Him for the chance to see your result and to feel a sense of pride in that accomplishment
 - In reality, if that's where your heart is, then you're only serving yourself
 - But what if God told you a little more...
 - What if the Lord told that missionary that even though he wouldn't gain a convert himself, yet in a generation to come, God would use the seeds he planted to bring a great revival?
 - What if He told those parents that even though their children wouldn't heed their advice, God would use their example of faith to inspire a hundred other families to raise godly children?
 - And what if the Sunday school teacher learned that even though his class was small, one of his students would later hear the call of God to become a renowned preacher of the Gospel?
- Knowing God can use our service to bring Himself glory in ways we couldn't imagine encourages us to persevere in our service even though we don't see the results
 - We're willing to withstand personal failure and to look past our difficult circumstances because we have faith it will glorify God in the end
 - Then let me share a secret with you...
 - God *always* has a bigger purpose in your service
 - He is constantly using your service to accomplish eternal outcomes

- Most of those outcomes you won't see in your lifetime and will only learn about after you enter His presence
- So operate in that faith now and see what He can accomplish
- We must come to God in reverence and ready to serve Him
 - We serve in His power by His Spirit for His purposes, not our own
 - Which means we serve obediently without concern for our results today...but only with concern for His eternal glory

- There's an old joke – one I'm sure you've heard before – of a son who wakes up one Sunday morning and declares to his mother that he's not going to church

The mother asks, “Why aren't you going to church?” The son replies, “Because no likes me. Everyone says unkind things about me behind my back. Whenever I try to join a group of people, they all stop talking and walk away. Plus, the sermons are boring.

The mother replies kindly, “Oh son, you must go to church.” The son asks, “Why do I have to go?” And the mother answers, “Because you're the pastor.”

- Like any good joke, there's a grain of truth in there somewhere
 - God expects His under-shepherds to speak the truth, to live according to the Word and to serve Him faithfully
 - And as a result, sometimes the shepherds who lead God's people will endure poor treatment for their faithful service
- Because we tend to prefer different things in our leaders than God prefers
 - God wants leaders to tell us the truth, and we say we want the truth except when the truth hurts our feelings
 - God wants leaders to be good role models, and so do we except when we're convicted by their example
 - God expects faithfulness and we respect faithfulness in our leaders, until their faithfulness to the truth gets in the way of what we want, at which point we call it stubbornness
- In a sense we want it all: God-fearing leaders...who do what WE want
 - Hopefully, we don't all think that way, at least not all the time
 - But in the worst cases, when God's people wander far from His word and from His Spirit, they will reject God's servants
 - They will even go so far as to kill God's representatives
 - As Jesus Himself said:

Matt. 23:37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

- Ezekiel will experience this pattern personally and the Lord is preparing him for that outcome
 - Let's rejoin his story as the Lord continues explaining Ezekiel's commission as a prophet to the exiles of Israel

Ezek. 2:6 “And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house.

Ezek. 2:7 “But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious.

- Earlier in v.5 the Lord told Ezekiel that Israel was rebellious and likely to ignore what he says to them
 - So now the Lord adds that Ezekiel must not fear their response
 - The Lord uses the word “fear” three times in v.6
 - When people don’t like the message, they’re bound to threaten the messenger
 - So the Lord knows Ezekiel is going to encounter fear in the course of fulfilling his duties
 - But He warns Ezekiel not to give into this emotion
 - Specifically, Ezekiel is not to fear them personally nor what they say to him
 - He uses figurative language to allude to what is coming for Ezekiel
 - Specifically, the Lord warns Ezekiel to be prepared for thistles, thorns and scorpions
 - These terms are descriptions of the people of Israel
 - They are a rebellious people, and people who have rebellious hearts reject the conviction that truth brings
 - They will rip at him and prick him like thorns and thistles
 - They will even sting him like a scorpion
 - These terms suggest hurt, discomfort
 - But in the end, their response is not worthy of fear
 - Just as thorns and thistles and scorpions won’t kill a man, neither will Israel’s harsh words harm Ezekiel or even silence him
 - Therefore he has nothing to fear
 - Therefore, speak God’s words whether they listen or not
- This is the second time the Lord has said this to Ezekiel...to speak whether they listen or not
 - We all love to be heard when we know people are listening
 - It makes us feel appreciated and important
 - On the other hand, we all know what it feels like to be ignored
 - The modern way to communicate disinterest in what someone is saying is to pull out a smartphone while they’re talking
 - How do you feel when you see that happen?

- And when someone reacts negatively to what we're saying, then we feel even worse
 - We automatically assume we said something wrong
 - We wonder what we should have said instead
 - And we're likely to stop talking once we realize that no one wants to hear us
 - Sometimes that's the proper response
 - Perhaps we spoke in a thoughtless or rude manner, or just got boring
- But other times, the reason people stop listening to us isn't because we said the wrong thing
 - The problem is we said the right thing but the person didn't want to hear it
 - We spoke truth that needed to be said, and even though we did it in love, they wanted no part of it
- Now if you're the kind of person who can't bear to hurt someone's feelings or who constantly needs approval from others, then you're not likely to handle that response very well
 - You may be tempted to hide the truth
 - You'll offer flattery instead of fact
 - You'll favor tact over truth
 - The Bible says we are to speak truth in love, and concealing the truth isn't loving
- So God demands Ezekiel prepare himself for this mission
 - He must speak the truth regardless of how it makes Israel feel, or how it makes him feel to see their response
 - In fact, Ezekiel is already on notice that Israel isn't going to like it
 - Israel will make him feel very uncomfortable for having said it
 - In fact, the more he speaks, the less they're going to like him
 - For some of us, this revelation would be enough to cause us to disobey the call of the Lord, to say no to this mission
 - Some folks can't bear the thought of being rejected by people, especially friends and family
 - We call that fearing men rather than fearing God, and the Bible says that's sin
 - We all know this feeling, and it comes in different ways at different stages of life
 - Children and teens worry about being cool, being liked, and being accepted among their peers
 - Young adults worry about finding the right spouse, getting the right job, getting into the right neighborhood
 - Then as we get older, we worry about whether our kids like us, whether our boss likes us, whether our pastor approves of us...(scratch that last one...no one worries about that one)
- Here's the point...we all know the feeling of seeking the approval of the world in various

ways

- But inevitably, when standing up for Christ and for biblical truth gets in the way of pursuing these things, then we're tempted to turn away from the Lord
 - If standing for Christ means the cool kids mock us, then maybe we just keep our views to ourselves
 - Or when holding to biblical standards for relationships means losing the girl or boy we want to date, then maybe we compromise
 - Or when obeying the Lord's call on our life means turning down promotions or giving up our lifestyle, then maybe we tell Jesus to stick to Sunday mornings
- If we do these things, we're disobeying the Lord
 - We're joining in the rebellion of those who oppose the Lord, we're aligning ourselves with the world
 - In fact, look at what the Lord said next to Ezekiel

Ezek. 2:8 “Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.”

Ezek. 2:9 Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it.

Ezek. 2:10 When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe.

- The Lord reminds Ezekiel that if he should give in to his fear, then he will be joining the rebellion of Israel
 - That's what it means to fear men instead of fearing God
 - The one sent to convict the nation of Israel would become guilty of the same crime
- And to illustrate what Ezekiel must expect, the Lord prepares a little object lesson for the prophet
 - He hands Ezekiel a scroll written on the front and back
 - Normally, scrolls were only written on one side, like Torah scrolls
 - But a few legal documents might be written on both sides, like a judgment issued by a magistrate
 - This scroll seems to be that kind of document
 - Perhaps on the inside were the terms of the covenant that both parties agreed to keep in the past
 - And perhaps on the outside of the scroll were written the violations of that agreement and the penalties that must follow
 - Perhaps that's what is happening here since Ezekiel said the scroll contained lamentations, mourning and woe

- The Lord then commands the prophet to eat this scroll
 - This is an object lesson for Ezekiel
 - An object lesson is a striking practical example of some principle or ideal
 - It's designed to leave a powerful impression, so that we won't forget the message
 - And certainly eating a scroll will leave a lasting impression
 - So what's the message the Lord wants Ezekiel to remember?
 - Turning to Chapter 3, here's what we find:

Ezek. 3:1 Then He said to me, “Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.”

Ezek. 3:2 So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll.

Ezek. 3:3 He said to me, “Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.” Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth.

- The Lord repeats the instructions for Ezekiel to eat the scroll then go to Israel
 - Ezekiel opens his mouth and the Lord feeds Ezekiel the scroll
 - We don't know exactly what this looked like
 - We're only told that Ezekiel opened his mouth in response to the Lord's command, then the Lord fed Ezekiel the scroll
 - He tells Ezekiel feed your stomach, fill your body with the scroll
 - Ezekiel says it was as sweet as honey in his mouth
 - Honey was the sweetest thing found in Israel
 - So Ezekiel was saying the scroll couldn't have tasted better
- So what is the point of this object lesson?
 - First, the Lord is teaching Ezekiel to be bold
 - The word of the Lord left a sweet taste in his mouth, which would have been an encouragement for Ezekiel to speak
 - Even though the message was filled with mourning and lamentations...
 - And it foretold terrible things set to happen to Israel as judgment against them for their sins...
 - Even though the words communicated these devastating things, Ezekiel could take comfort knowing that sharing the word of the Lord is always a good thing
 - The word of the Lord is sweet regardless of what it contains, because it advances the program of God, and that program is good
 - For Israel, these lamentations were advancing the plan of God to the next phase for the nation

- They were moving from an earlier stage of judgment into later stages
 - And each step brought Israel closer to their Messiah and ultimately the Kingdom
- Likewise, when the Lord brings us difficulties, it may not be pleasant in the moment
 - James says to “count it all joy when we face various trials”, because the testing of our faith produces good outcomes
 - But we must first move through the process
 - Anything that comes to us by the hand of the Lord is a good thing in the end
 - Because it’s moving us along a path that ultimately brings us closer to Him
 - We need to maintain that perspective when we have to share difficult truths with someone from God’s word
 - Communicating God’s truth is a blessing even when we’re saying things people don’t want to hear
 - Or even when it’s something WE don’t want to hear
 - After all, it’s better for a person to know the truth so he or she can get right with God
 - And remember, a person’s initial response to truth is usually not a good measure of how that truth will ultimately impact their hearts
 - We need to give time for God’s word to work in a person’s heart
 - Speak in love when led by the Spirit, and trust the Lord will do good things with it – in time
 - And even if that person should never heed the lesson, at least you know you’ve been faithful to the Lord and His word
 - That’s the sweetness of the word of God
- Secondly, this object lesson reveals the prophet has a small but important part to play in sharing the word
 - God assigned Ezekiel a small part in this object lesson
 - If he was to eat the scroll, Ezekiel had to open his mouth, as the Lord commanded
 - God is looking for the prophet to take a step of obedience
 - Today, we likewise are expected to fulfil God’s calling when it comes, even if it’s in the supermarket checkout line
 - We are not responsible for the outcome, only our obedience to God asking us to open our mouth
 - If we pass those moments by, we are missing the opportunity to participate in God’s program for their life
 - If a prophet refused to go, then the word wouldn’t arrive, as Paul reminds us:

Rom. 10:14 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How

will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?

Rom. 10:15 How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!”

- Consider the example of Jonah
 - He ran the opposite direction to avoid speaking God’s word to Israel’s enemies
 - His disobedience stood in the way of delivering the message to Nineveh
 - So the Lord “persuaded” Jonah to obey his calling so Nineveh would hear the message
- But also notice that after Ezekiel opens his mouth, the Lord fed Ezekiel the scroll; Ezekiel didn’t feed himself
 - Illustrating that as the prophet obeys his call, the Lord put His words in the prophet’s mouth
 - Ezekiel didn’t have to be eloquent, and he didn’t have to come up with a compelling message
 - He just had to speak what God gave him
 - The word that a prophet shares is from the Lord, not his own word
- The same principle holds today
 - When we share God’s word with someone, we don’t need to embellish it or sugar coat it
 - Whether we’re a teacher or an evangelist or simply a neighbor giving godly advice
 - No matter our role, the only thing of value we have is God’s word – not ours
 - And it’s already sweet enough, and it’s far better than anything we might invent instead
 - So just open your mouth and share the word of God accurately and faithfully
- Thirdly, the object lesson illustrates that a messenger of God must internalize the message before sharing it with others
 - Notice the Lord says that Ezekiel must fill his stomach and his whole body with the scroll
 - That is, before we can become an effective messenger of God’s word, we need to take it in ourselves
 - We need to understand it, memorize it, meditate upon it
 - If you don’t have a good grasp of the word of God, then when the time comes to share it, you’ll be empty
 - The words you share will just be your own thoughts
 - You’ll be like one of Job’s three friends
 - They had a lot to say to Job concerning his predicament

- But they didn't know the word of God so they offered him nothing of value
- But more than knowledge, internalizing the word of God means living it out
 - Nothing robs our message of power faster than hypocrisy
 - All of us disobey the word from time to time, and thankfully no one expects us to be perfect
 - But our audience can tell the difference between someone speaking a truth out of conviction...
 - Versus someone trying to sell a story they don't believe themselves
 - If you want others to live according to the word of God, be sure you're doing it too
- Finally, the Lord taught Ezekiel that unless he found his supply in the word, he wouldn't last long before a rebellious Israel
 - Ask yourself what strengthens you when your audience turns against you?
 - Where will you find your supply?
 - When you lose their approval, on whose approval will you rest?
 - Either we live for the world's approval or we live by the word of God
 - As Jesus said:

Matt. 4:4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

- Living for bread means living for what the world can offer, but living by the word of God means living for what God provides
 - Those two things are always in opposition
 - Whatever the world approves and desires, the word of God opposes
 - Whatever the world approves, the word of God condemns
 - And vice versa
- The only way a messenger can withstand the world's disapproval is by taking satisfaction in obeying the word of God and speaking it faithfully
 - But the more we reflect who God is, the more the world will hate you
 - You can only withstand the world's rejection and hatred of your message, if you find satisfaction in the very thing they hate
- So we are to be bold knowing God's word is sweet, we go to deliver God's word, and we live it out while taking satisfaction in God's approval
- Then Lord gives Ezekiel a final word of exhortation and encouragement:

Ezek. 3:4 Then He said to me, "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak

with My words to them.

Ezek. 3:5 “For you are not being sent to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language, but to the house of Israel,

Ezek. 3:6 nor to many peoples of unintelligible speech or difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. But I have sent you to them who should listen to you;

Ezek. 3:7 yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me. Surely the whole house of Israel is stubborn and obstinate.

Ezek. 3:8 “Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces and your forehead as hard as their foreheads.

Ezek. 3:9 “Like emery harder than flint I have made your forehead. Do not be afraid of them or be dismayed before them, though they are a rebellious house.”

Ezek. 3:10 Moreover, He said to me, “Son of man, take into your heart all My words which I will speak to you and listen closely.

Ezek. 3:11 “Go to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and speak to them and tell them, whether they listen or not, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’”

- Once more the Lord refers to Ezekiel as the son of man, reminding him that he is just a clay vessel that God has filled
 - But like a jelly donut, it’s the filling that counts
 - And Ezekiel will be filled with God’s word
 - Notice the Lord says you will speak with my words
 - In other words, both Ezekiel’s will to speak as well as the content of what he says will come from the Lord
 - But then notice the Lord says that this power wasn’t intended to compensate for some human limitation or barrier
 - The Lord says He sent Ezekiel to the house of Israel, not to a people of unintelligible speech
 - In Hebrew that phrase literally translates “deep lip” and only appears here and in Isaiah 33:19
 - It is a euphemism meaning a strange or foreign people
 - In other words, God isn’t sending Ezekiel to strangers but to God’s own people
 - Moreover, God didn’t send Ezekiel to a people of a difficult language, which is literally translated “a heavy tongue”
 - This is the same phrase Moses used to describe himself to God in Exodus 4
 - It means someone who lacks eloquence or can’t communicate
 - In v.6 God adds that Ezekiel won’t find himself speaking to Gentiles, peoples of strange languages

- No, Ezekiel was going to God's own people, the people of Israel
 - Men and women who weren't strangers to the message or incapable of appreciating the language
 - They had heard it all before from the Lord and they knew what He said
 - For all these reasons, the Lord says Israel "should" listen to Ezekiel
- But they won't...because their disobedience isn't a result of a human barrier
 - It was the result of an unwillingness to listen
 - They have been unwilling to hear the Lord in the past
 - And Ezekiel's turn won't be any better
 - Remember this truth the next time you find yourself the messenger of God's word to someone, or some group, unwilling to hear it
 - You can't produce a better message than the word of God
 - If they will not believe Moses and the Prophets, then they won't be impressed by you and your message
 - You can't do a big enough miracle to bring faith when the word of God is not bringing faith
 - Don't try to "fix" a problem you don't have the power to solve
 - When someone lives in disobedience to the word of God, it's rarely because they lack the understanding or capacity to obey
 - Most of the time that person simply doesn't want to obey
 - It's purely a matter of will
 - So don't be tempted to change the message or retreat from the proclamation of the truth, just to get around a stubborn heart
 - When you stop serving the truth, you start serving yourself
- Remember last week I explained that the word stubborn in Hebrew literally means "hard face"
 - Now we see in v.8 the Lord making a play on those words when he tells Ezekiel he will make his face and forehead as hard as Israel's
 - They are stubborn and set in their ways against God's word
 - And so God will strengthen Ezekiel's resolve to be just as persistent in delivering the truth to them
 - The more they resist the Lord, the more His prophet will persevere in speaking the truth
 - But the point of Ezekiel's persistence won't be to win Israel over
 - The reason for hardening Ezekiel's resolve is to equip him to go the distance with this adversary
 - Do you remember in the case of Pharaoh how the Lord hardened his heart during the plagues?

- After six plagues, the Pharaoh was willing to give in, but the Lord hardened his heart to make sure the battle lasted ten rounds
- Because the Lord had a plan to bring ten plagues even before the fight started
- The same is true here in a way
 - The Lord has a message He wants Ezekiel to deliver to Israel
 - That message needs to be delivered because it speaks to people and events in the distant future
 - God can't afford to have his prophet give up early just because the audience of his day didn't like it
 - So in v.9 the Lord says Ezekiel's going to be as hardheaded as emery, which could be translated diamond
 - God made Ezekiel hardheaded
 - Just to be clear, hardheadedness isn't normally a gift from the Lord, so you can't use this as your excuse with your spouse
 - In short, God tells Ezekiel to ignore Israel's response, just keep on talking to them
 - The Lord sums up the prophet's commission in vs.10-11
 - He says take everything I tell you to heart, which means believe it yourself
 - And listen closely, which means to obey it all personally
 - Then go to the people of Israel and tell them these things whether they listen or not
 - Dismiss none of it, change none of it, hold back none of it
 - Simply add, "Thus says the Lord"
- So as Ezekiel does these things, what will be achieved in Israel?
 - First, they will know that a prophet has been among them
 - Which is to say, they will know that the Lord spoke to them so they will be without defense for their sin
 - And the world will understand that what came against them was according to the word of the Lord as a result of their sin
 - We're learning about a unique man who received a remarkable mission at a critical time in the history of God's people
 - So you may assume you have little in common with him
 - But don't be sure
 - Every believer shares in this mission to some degree
 - You too are living in a unique and critical time in the history of God's people, and you too share in a remarkable mission
 - Like Ezekiel, you too have the indwelling of the Spirit of God
 - And you have been entrusted with the word of God

- In fact, you have the whole counsel of God's word, even more than he had
- But we also face the same challenges he faced
 - We must take it to heart and listen closely
 - We too have an audience that, in many cases, won't listen
 - And we too may experience the pain of thorns and scorpions when the world responds to God's truth
- Therefore, we need to think like Ezekiel
 - Don't fear the world's response...our family's response, our friends' response
 - Don't even be surprised when they don't listen
 - Just say "Thus says the word of the Lord"
 - And be persistent, so that they know the Lord has spoken to them
 - And leave the results to God

- Last week in Ezekiel I taught on our mission to speak the truth of God's word in love
 - We're studying Ezekiel's commissioning in Chapters 1-3
 - In the second half of Chapter 2 and the first half of Chapter 3, the Lord commanded Ezekiel to go and speak to the rebellious people of Israel in exile in Babylon
 - The Lord told Ezekiel to be obedient to this calling regardless of whether Israel listened to him or not
 - He warned Ezekiel that Israel would respond harshly to his prophecies
 - Nevertheless, Ezekiel was to speak boldly, without holding back the truth
 - And he was to keep himself above reproach, obeying all the Lord told him
 - In these things, Ezekiel becomes an example for all God's people
 - Though we aren't prophets, we still have a call to reach a lost and dying world with the truth
 - And though we haven't received a vision of God on His throne, we have received something even more precious
 - We have the full counsel of the Word of God and we have the Spirit of God living in us
 - So by way of Ezekiel's example, we too are called to speak the truth in love even though we know the world won't approve
- Now we're ready to conclude this section of Ezekiel, considering the personal cost of speaking the truth for God
 - As we begin let's remember Jesus' words about the personal cost of following Him

Luke 14:27 "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

Luke 14:28 "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?

Luke 14:29 "Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him,

Luke 14:30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

- Following Jesus as His disciple brings a personal cost
 - We must pick up our own cross, as Jesus said, which means to be prepared to sacrifice everything, even our own lives, in service to Him
 - And to illustrate what He means, Jesus asks who would undertake the effort and cost to build a tower before determining if he had enough funds to complete the project?
 - Would you begin to build a pool in your backyard without asking for an estimate first?

- How foolish would that be? You could end up with a pit in the ground and no pool when you ran out of money
- So why would you embark on following Jesus without at least considering what it will cost to do so?
 - If we're not willing to look foolish in front of our neighbors when we construct a pool...
 - Then why risk humiliation before the Living God when we agree to serve Him?
 - We must appreciate the costs so that we will be prepared to accept them
- That's the challenge facing Ezekiel this morning
 - He's received a call from God, one that will bring significant costs
 - So let's see how Ezekiel responds to this burden

Ezek. 3:12 Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard a great rumbling sound behind me, "Blessed be the glory of the Lord in His place."

Ezek. 3:13 And I heard the sound of the wings of the living beings touching one another and the sound of the wheels beside them, even a great rumbling sound.

Ezek. 3:14 So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away; and I went embittered in the rage of my spirit, and the hand of the Lord was strong on me.

Ezek. 3:15 Then I came to the exiles who lived beside the river Chebar at Tel-abib, and I sat there seven days where they were living, causing consternation among them.

- Ezekiel says that as the Lord stopped speaking to Him, he was lifted up by the Spirit
 - He's taken away from the throne of God and transported back to the exiles in Babylon
 - He's transported by the Spirit
 - And he hears the cherubim making great noise as they move behind him
 - It appears Ezekiel can no longer see these creatures, but merely hears them moving behind him
 - Amidst the great sounds of rumbling, Ezekiel hears a voice declare "Blessed be the glory of the Lord in His place"
 - The mention of God's glory reminds us that these sounds and visions are manifestations of the Shechinah glory of God
 - The word Shechinah means dwelling, and refers to the presence of God dwelling among men
 - The Shechinah glory makes frequent appearances in the Old Testament, most commonly in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle
 - This is Ezekiel's first exposure to the Shechinah glory of God, which is ironic because

he was training to be a priest

- A priest would have been among a privileged few in Israel to regularly come near the glory of God in the Holy Place
 - In exile, Ezekiel will never serve as a priest in the tabernacle
 - Yet now he receives an even greater appreciation of God's glory while in Babylon
 - Remember, you may have your eye on a certain ministry or mission, but God may redirect you
 - Redirection in ministry isn't a sign of failure or reason to pout...it means God has something better waiting for you
- Then in v.14, we have Ezekiel's first reaction to everything he's heard and seen
 - It says he was embittered in the rage of his spirit
 - As a result of his remarkable encounter with God, Ezekiel is wrestling with two conflicting emotions inside himself
 - He has bitterness and he has a rage in his Spirit
 - In Hebrew, the word rage could be translated literally as heat
 - You could say he felt heat in his spirit
 - And who could blame him...he's had an audience with the Living God
 - He's seen the glory of God and the awesome majesty of His cherubim and of the throne
 - Have you ever had the opportunity to meet a childhood hero or favorite musician or celebrity?
 - When people finally meet someone they idolize, they usually walk away from that encounter feeling flushed, exhilarated, jubilant
 - In part, I think that's what Ezekiel must have been feeling
 - Only we need to magnify the effect by about a million fold
 - Ezekiel's spirit is not having come so close to the glory of God
 - Yet on the other hand, he's also embittered
 - He's probably feeling bitterness because he knows how little regard his countrymen have for the glory of God
 - He's just experienced the sweetness of the word of the Lord and the awesomeness of His majesty
 - And now back among his people in Tel Aviv, Ezekiel sees on full display the depravity and idolatry and indifference of Israel for this great God Who has made them His people
 - Therefore, he knows the terrible things that must come against them for their sin
 - And he grows bitter

- It reminds us that prophecy is a double-edged sword
 - On the one hand it's sweet to know God's purposes in advance
 - That's why the scroll was sweet in Ezekiel's mouth
 - John has a similar experience later in Revelation 10

Rev. 10:9 So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, "Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey."

Rev. 10:10 I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.

- Like Ezekiel, John found the word of prophecy sweet in his mouth
 - But when the content of God's word hit home, it left him bitter
 - It's not God's word that causes us to feel bitter; God's word is always sweet as we said
 - But we become bitter as we understand that the word of God brings wrath against sinful hearts, in the day of judgment
- So it's Israel's hard heart that leaves the prophet feeling bitter
 - In an instant, Ezekiel realizes that the hearts of his Israel are too hard to be turned even by the severe warnings of God
 - And so the outcome will be a disaster, which is a bitter thought indeed
- So you may identify with Ezekiel in his bitterness and rage in his spirit
 - Having come to know the grace of God in Jesus Christ, you want everyone to understand and appreciate what you understand about God
 - You'll feel excitement to share the Lord and His word
 - You burn with desire in your spirit for everyone to give Christ the glory He deserves
 - We feel like one of those disciples on the road to Emmaus after encountering Jesus

Luke 24:31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.

Luke 24:32 They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"

Luke 24:33 And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them,

Luke 24:34 saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon."

- That's the right response to a revelation of the holy God
- That's the "heat" Ezekiel felt in his spirit
- But at the same time we may also feel a growing bitterness
 - The closer you get to the glory of God, the more intolerant and even bitter you will become toward sin and those who approve it
 - The better we know God, the more we respond to sin as He does
 - After you experience the awesome majesty of God, you'll recoil at the vanity of human beings
 - If you understand the righteous judgment of God, then you'll shudder contemplating the destiny of the unrepentant sinner
 - Once you know the wisdom of God in His word, you'll lose patience for the foolishness of human wisdom
 - Once you have the perfection and holiness of God living in you, you begin to hate sin – especially your own
 - Even more, we can feel sadness when we see how the world just doesn't get it
 - We see unbelievers who sin with impunity, without regard for their eternal future
 - Yet we know judgment is only a heartbeat away
 - And our hearts hurt to see our fellow believers wasting their time on earth caught up in sinful or selfish pursuits
 - We want them to live out their faith so they may receive a full reward
 - When we see these things, we may feel angry, bitter and even vengeful
 - That's the bitterness Ezekiel feels
 - He knows his people are turning their backs on the glory of the Lord
 - And he knows what's coming for them
 - We could label this bitter feeling as righteous anger, but if it's going to remain righteous, we have to put it to work in the right way
 - We can't let our resentment over another's sin lead us to judge them harshly or to refrain from serving them with the truth
 - Have you ever felt that instinct...to refrain from sharing the Gospel because you don't feel someone deserves to be saved?
 - You're so bitter against them that you secretly look forward to them receiving God's wrath, so you withhold the good news
 - As if we have control over their salvation in any case...we don't...read Jonah again
- Now I doubt most of us would admit to thinking this way about someone else, but I suspect we all know the feeling
 - Obviously, it's an unloving, sinful response and it's exactly the opposite of what Jesus did

- He experienced the ugliness of humanity in a way none of us will ever know, thankfully
 - The world spit in the face of God Himself...it's hard to do worse than that
- And yet He showed no bitterness toward that sin
 - Rather He said, "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do"
 - We need to adopt that same thought...forgive them Father because they don't know what they're doing
- Moreover, that was you and I before the Gospel came into our hearts
 - Or at least that's who we would have become apart from the grace of God
 - So how can we look down our noses at someone else who is dead in their sins and needs to know the love of God?
 - That's why we've been given the indwelling of His Spirit...so that we can know God and offer that to others
- That's the challenge Ezekiel faces at this point...to share the glory of God that touched him with an undeserving people who will likely reject it
 - So let's see how he gets started with that mission
 - In v.15 it says Ezekiel came back to sit among the exiles in Tel Aviv
 - And he sits there for a week "causing consternation among them"
 - The Septuagint translates this verse this way:

Ezek. 3:15 Then I passed through the air and came into the captivity, and went round them that dwelt by the river of Chobar who were there; and I sat there seven days, conversant in the midst of them.

- The Septuagint (LXX) translation says Ezekiel was conversing as he sat among the people and the NASB says he was causing consternation
 - I suspect he was explaining what he saw and heard during his encounter with the Lord
 - So he's trying to communicate to these people, but he's getting ahead of the Lord
 - Because at this point, Ezekiel has not been given a specific message to deliver to the people
 - God has not yet said "Thus saith the Lord" to Ezekiel
- So what is Ezekiel sharing? He can only be sharing his personal experience seeing the glory of God
 - And by what he shared, he confuses the people or at least he's freaking them out (as we would say today)
 - He's causing consternation and astonishment, because he's speaking about mysterious and frightening things

- Obviously, this isn't going to fix a rebellious heart
- So after seven days of this going on, the Lord is ready to begin giving Ezekiel a word for the people

Ezek. 3:16 At the end of seven days the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezek. 3:17 “Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me.

Ezek. 3:18 “When I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.

Ezek. 3:19 “Yet if you have warned the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself.

Ezek. 3:20 “Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand.

Ezek. 3:21 “However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself.”

- Now after the seven days Ezekiel receives his first word from the Lord
 - Notice this time there is no vision, no creatures darting about, doing wheelies and the like
 - It's just the word of the Lord
 - And though we don't know how this communication took place, Ezekiel is confident he heard from the Lord
 - First in v.17 the Lord tells Ezekiel he will serve as a watchman for Israel
 - A watchman was a guard who walked along the top of the walls of a city
 - He kept a lookout for threats headed toward the city
 - The job of a watchman was NOT to fight the threat
 - His job was to issue a warning to the people so they could respond properly in defense of the city
 - So Ezekiel's job is to warn the people of Israel so they may act accordingly
 - Ezekiel isn't supposed to act on his own or try to take matters into his own hands
 - He will simply relay the warnings God gives him
 - Now of course being a good watchman requires that we relay our information completely, accurately and in a timely fashion

- What would we think of a watchman who only gave us half the story...a partial warning?
- Or a watchman that slept on duty?
- We wouldn't think that watchman was doing his job at all
- Furthermore, it's in the watchman's own best interest to speak accurately, because if he fails to warn the people, he dies too
 - So a poor watchman puts his own life at risk as well as those of the city when he fails at his task
 - And so it would be for Ezekiel too, the Lord says
- In v.18 the Lord warns Ezekiel that whenever God issues a warning to the wicked, Ezekiel will be held responsible for what he does next
 - If he fails to deliver the message to the wicked as the Lord commands, then both the wicked and the watchman will die
 - Conversely, the Lord says in v.19 that if Ezekiel is obedient, he will be preserved regardless of what the wicked do with his warning
 - Here again, the point is that a watchman is only accountable for giving the warning, not whether his warning is heeded
 - And just to show that the Lord is evenhanded and is not a respecter of persons, He tells Ezekiel in vs.20-21 that this process will work the same way for the righteous who fall into sin
 - If a righteous man falls into sin, then God will warn that man to change his ways
 - If he heeds the warnings, he will live longer on earth
 - If he fails to heed the warning, he will be consigned to an early death
 - God will place a stumbling block before him to cause his death
 - But regardless of the man's response, if Ezekiel is obedient, he will not be caught up in the punishment
 - On the other hand, if Ezekiel fails to warn the righteous man, Ezekiel will die with him
- To be clear, in both cases the judgment God is talking about is an earthly judgment of a physical nature
 - The Lord isn't speaking about eternal judgment of the soul
 - A person's eternal judgment is determined by faith alone, not by their works whether good or bad
 - Notice that even though the Lord made a distinction between the wicked (unbelievers) and the righteous (believers) in His instructions...
 - Still both groups suffered the same fate if they failed to heed the warning: an early death
 - That tells us the Lord is talking about consequences for disobeying the Old Covenant, not eternal consequences for failing to believe

- Whether you were a believer or unbeliever in Israel, you were still bound to the terms of the Old Covenant
- So God's people must heed His warnings or else the Lord would end their lives prematurely as punishment
- What happened to them after they died depended on the heart of each person
 - The unbelieving (wicked) experience the second death
 - While believing (righteous) go into eternal life
 - But notice also in v.20 that in the case of the righteous, their righteous deeds will not be remembered either
 - So a believer who fell into sin and ignored God's warnings not only died sooner, but also risked losing eternal reward
- So now we understand the personal cost for Ezekiel serving the Living God as a watchman
 - He could not look away from the approaching danger or fail to speak it to Israel
 - Nor was Ezekiel supposed to worry about the outcome once he spoke the word
 - He must obey the Lord and leave the result to the Lord
 - Which means he had to conform his behavior and lifestyle to ensure obedience to this calling
 - Sitting among the exiles conversing about his visions wasn't a part of Ezekiel's job description
 - He had been talking too much and it wasn't helping the situation
 - Ezekiel was to speak only when the Lord commanded,
 - And he also was to remain silent when the Lord wasn't speaking through him
 - That may not seem like much of a cost for this man, but let the implications of this requirement sink in for a moment
 - Ezekiel is no longer free to interact with his countrymen in the way he preferred
 - He was constrained by God to a very specific and very restrictive lifestyle, one that made him a more effective prophet
 - But it also came at great personal cost
- We see the full extent of this burden in the last passage from this chapter

Ezek. 3:22 The hand of the Lord was on me there, and He said to me, "Get up, go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you."

Ezek. 3:23 So I got up and went out to the plain; and behold, the glory of the Lord was standing there, like the glory which I saw by the river Chebar, and I fell on my face.

Ezek. 3:24 The Spirit then entered me and made me stand on my feet, and He spoke with me and said to me, "Go, shut yourself up in your house."

Ezek. 3:25 “As for you, son of man, they will put ropes on you and bind you with them so that you cannot go out among them.

Ezek. 3:26 “Moreover, I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be mute and cannot be a man who rebukes them, for they are a rebellious house.

Ezek. 3:27 “But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you will say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house.

- These are the final instructions the Lord gives Ezekiel in preparation to receive his first prophecy which begins in Chapter 4
 - Ezekiel says the hand of the Lord was on him there by the river
 - Earlier in v.14 he also said that the hand of the Lord was strong on him
 - He is being comforted, strengthened, and prepared for his mission, because he will need the Lord’s strength
 - Next, he’s told to go away from the camp to receive the word of the Lord
 - Why does the Lord send Ezekiel away to receive the word?
 - After all, the Lord is already speaking to Ezekiel here now?
 - I think the answer relates to what’s happened already and to what will follow in this chapter
 - Earlier, Ezekiel sat for a week in Tel Aviv in conversation with the exiles
 - He probably told them bad things were coming, that the Lord was preparing judgment, and that they needed to repent
 - He shared his own thoughts, his own wisdom, not God’s wisdom
- So now that the Lord is ready for Ezekiel to begin speaking to the people, He doesn’t want His words to be confused as just more conversation
 - To correct this problem, the Lord does two things
 - First, he directs Ezekiel to get out of town for a while
 - He will receive his instructions from a nearby plain or uninhabited area
 - Then when Ezekiel returns to the people, they will see him as one coming with a message from God
 - Rather than merely someone spouting off his own opinions
 - The Lord commonly takes His prophets away before bringing them back with a word
 - Moses went to Midian and later he climbed Mt Sinai multiple times so that he could come to the people with a word from the Lord
 - The Lord sent Amos from the southern kingdom to the northern kingdom to bring the word of the Lord to a evil king
 - He drove John the Baptist into the wilderness and then brought him back to

- declare the time for the Messiah was at hand
 - The Lord led Saul into Arabia before bringing him back to the church as the apostle Paul
 - He even sent Jesus into Egypt as a child and later sent Him into the wilderness, so that He could return to begin His ministry
- So the Lord separates His prophets from among the people to mark the delivery of something new and special
 - The Lord sends Ezekiel to a plain
 - And there he encounters the Shechinah glory of God and hears a word from the Lord
 - Now his words and the word of the Lord can be distinguished
- Secondly, the Lord makes sure Ezekiel won't create this same confusion in the future
 - In v.24 the Lord tells Ezekiel to live under house arrest
 - He was to stay in his home and not spend time among the people
 - This probably accomplished two things
 - First, Ezekiel was no longer in a position to lead a normal life, to interact with the people of Israel and to speak of his own accord
 - From this point forward, the only time the people hear Ezekiel speak will be when the Lord speaks through him
 - Notice in v.27 the Lord says that only when the Lord speaks to Ezekiel may he then open his mouth and speak to the people
 - This will ensure that the people recognize that everything Ezekiel says from this point forward is from the Lord
 - They will soon come to understand that when Ezekiel speaks, they should listen
- But there is a second reason for this isolation
 - The Lord is protecting Ezekiel from the people and even from himself
 - The people of Israel were immersed in sinful practices of one kind or another
 - So that if Ezekiel lived among them in a normal fashion, it would be very difficult for him to fully separate himself from their practices
 - Associating too closely with them would likely compromise his walk and his witness
 - Remember the Lord told Ezekiel he must live according to the word he would share with Israel
 - Since Israel is so corrupt, there was no safe harbor from sin among them... except to remain in one's own house
 - In v.25 the Lord says that Israel will put ropes on him and bind him so that he cannot go out among them
 - There is no evidence in the record of Ezekiel that this event happens to Ezekiel literally

- So it's best understood as figurative speech
- The Lord is saying that the sins of the people have forced God to bind up Ezekiel in his home
- The evil of Israel has tied Ezekiel's hands, so to speak, leaving Ezekiel with no option except to isolate himself to prevent defilement
- So the Lord's instruction protects Ezekiel from the sin of the people
- Finally, this isolation will protect Ezekiel from himself
 - The Lord says in v.26 He is going to make Ezekiel mute should Ezekiel decide to speak on his own again
 - Ezekiel has already shown a propensity to talk without permission, so we can assume he will be tempted to speak again in the future
 - Then at the end of v.26 the Lord says he will not allow Ezekiel's tongue to rebuke a man, *because* they are rebellious
 - God knew that Israel was rebellious, so rebellious in fact that it was unreasonable to expect Ezekiel to remain silent on his own
 - Even the most heartless person would have wanted to warn Israel of the things God was prepared to bring upon them
 - So God said He places Ezekiel in his home and prevents him from speaking to ensure that Ezekiel's words are God's words only
- In the end, Ezekiel was called to be a watchman, a faithful deliverer of God's warnings to Israel
 - And he was to let the chips fall where they will
 - The Lord ends saying let him who hears, hear, and let him who refuses, refuse
 - The outcome is not our responsibility...we are merely the messenger
 - This was the personal cost Ezekiel paid to be a prophet of God...he had to isolate himself from God's people
 - What does serving God cost you? It will always cost something...
 - Less time for what we want, more time for what He wants
 - Let us make the sacrifices that demonstrate faith

Ezekiel 4

- We're now ready to move into the next major section of the book of Ezekiel
 - Let's revisit where we've been so far and where we're going
 - We just finished the first section of the book, Chapters 1-3
 - In those chapters, Ezekiel told us how he came to be a prophet
 - Ezekiel's job description was remarkably simple yet challenging
 - Ezekiel was to be a watchman for Israel
 - He was speak to the people as God directed, speaking only when God tells him to speak
 - He wasn't to be concerned with the peoples' response, one way or the other
 - God said some would listen, most would not, but regardless, Ezekiel was to speak faithfully
 - We also learned that Ezekiel's mission would exact a considerable toll on the prophet
 - He was called to forgo a normal life among the people so that he could serve God in a dramatic fashion
 - He would live sequestered in his own home
 - The Lord even made Ezekiel mute so he could speak only in circumstances when the Lord specifically directed
- That brings us to the first prophecy the Lord asks Ezekiel to deliver
 - In Chapters 4-24, the Lord warns Israel repeatedly of a coming destruction of their beloved city, Jerusalem
 - God's initial warning comes in Chapters 4-7
 - Today, we study the first chapter of that section; Chapter 4
 - But as you will soon see, this warning begins in a most curious manner
 - God doesn't ask Ezekiel to speak to Israel

- Which means Ezekiel remains completely silent during the first stage of this prophecy
- So if Ezekiel can't speak, how does he issue his first warning to Israel?
- I'm glad you asked...

[Ezek. 4:1](#) "Now you son of man, get yourself a brick, place it before you and inscribe a city on it, Jerusalem.

[Ezek. 4:2](#) "Then lay siege against it, build a siege wall, raise up a ramp, pitch camps and place battering rams against it all around.

[Ezek. 4:3](#) "Then get yourself an iron plate and set it up as an iron wall between you and the city, and set your face toward it so that it is under siege, and besiege it. This is a sign to the house of Israel.

[Ezek. 4:4](#) "As for you, lie down on your left side and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel on it; you shall bear their iniquity for the number of days that you lie on it.

[Ezek. 4:5](#) "For I have assigned you a number of days corresponding to the years of their iniquity, three hundred and ninety days; thus you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.

[Ezek. 4:6](#) "When you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah; I have assigned it to you for forty days, a day for each year.

[Ezek. 4:7](#) "Then you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem with your arm bared and prophesy against it.

[Ezek. 4:8](#) "Now behold, I will put ropes on you so that you cannot turn from one side to the other until you have completed the days of your siege.

- Intrigued? Confused? If so, that's not surprising, because we've dropped into a game of charades
 - Before the internet and video games, charades used to be a common party game
 - One person draws a slip of paper from a bowl with a word or phrase written on the paper
 - Then without speaking, the person acts out the meaning of the word while everyone else tries to guess the answer
 - This is essentially what God has asked Ezekiel to do in public before Israel

- Ezekiel is acting out a prophecy before Israel
- And this is no game, for the events he depicts are a very serious matter
- They foretell great destruction coming to Israel for their sin under the Old Covenant
- Now, to succeed at a game of charades, it helps to know a couple of things
 - First, you need to understand the symbols a person uses to communicate
 - In the game, you can hold up fingers to indicate how many words are in the phrase or how many syllables are in a word
 - You can also cup your hand to your ear to indicate you are miming a word that “sounds like” the actual answer
 - Secondly, you need to understand a little about culture and history
 - If someone is miming the phrase “A Hard Day’s Night,” you probably won’t guess the answer unless you have some understanding of 1960’s pop music
 - Or if someone is acting out the word “water” followed by the word “gate,” you probably won’t get it unless you know American presidential politics
 - So if we’re going to understand Ezekiel’s charade, we need to understand a few things about the symbols and Israel’s history
 - To help you follow all this, I’ve prepared a simple handout to accompany this lesson ([Click here](#))
 - You can mark a few points next to the pictures
- Let’s start with the first part of the charade that the Lord asks Ezekiel to perform
 - In v.1 the Lord asks Ezekiel to find a brick and inscribe Jerusalem on it
 - In Babylon, bricks were made of clay mud and straw to bind the clay together and varied in size, but they could be quite large
 - The Hebrew word for brick is also the word for tablet or pavement

- When used to inscribe things in the way the Lord commands here, the tablets were usually about 2 feet long by 1 foot wide
- This brick or tablet is inscribed with a depiction of the city of Jerusalem
 - Notice in v.1 the Lord commands Ezekiel to inscribe a city on it, not to inscribe the name of the city
 - Perhaps Ezekiel drew an outline of the city walls and pools and the temple compound
 - Whatever he did, it would have been immediately recognizable as a model of the city to any passing exile
- Then the Lord commands Ezekiel in v.2 to set up a small battle scene around the brick city
 - He is to erect an enemy's camp around the brick, build a little siege wall, a ramp, and battering rams
 - Ezekiel creates a miniature battlefield around the brick as if playing toy soldiers
- The first part of Ezekiel's charade is easy to understand
 - The brick and the accompanying siege-works represent the Babylonian siege of the city of Jerusalem
 - Remember at this time, Ezekiel and his brethren are sitting in captivity in Babylon
 - Judah has already been conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon
 - These exiles have already witnessed a siege much like the one Ezekiel is depicting
 - But history records that Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem a total of three times over 19 years
 - The first time in 605 BC, the city of Jerusalem was taken and many of the citizens taken prisoner including the prophet Daniel
 - The Babylonian king allowed some Jews to remain and installed a new king to lead them
 - That king pledged loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar, but soon he rebelled

- So the Babylonians returned and defeated the city a second time in 597 BC
- After the second attack, a new wave of prisoners were taken including Ezekiel
- Finally in 586 BC, after a second revolt by another Jewish king, the Babylonians returned a third time to put an end to Israel's defiance
 - This time they utterly destroyed the city and the temple and removed the rest of the people
 - It's this third siege that Ezekiel is depicting in his charade before the exiles
 - That third siege is still about seven years away, so Ezekiel is predicting the complete destruction of the city
- Keep in mind that at this early point in the captivity, the people of Israel still assumed they would be returning to their city sooner than later
 - As long as the city walls remained intact and the temple continued to operate, there was reason for such hope
 - But Ezekiel is telling God's people there was no reason for such hope
- In fact, much worse is yet to come
 - Not only will the city be destroyed, but still more calamity is planned after that
 - We see these details in the second sign God gives Ezekiel to act out
- In v.4 the Lord commands Ezekiel to lie on his side on the ground near the display he created
 - For 390 days, Ezekiel would take up a position laying on his left side, presumably with his face looking north
 - And then for another 40 days he would lay on his right side looking south
 - The greater time for the north reflects their greater degree of sin
 - As he lay he would face the brick city while holding an iron plate up between himself and the model he built

- He probably didn't lay on the ground 24/7 during those days
 - We know this because later we'll read how Ezekiel is required to make food for himself
 - So it's likely he lay in this position for a good part of each day
 - And he did so for the number of consecutive days God ordered
- The Lord says Ezekiel will be "bearing" the iniquity of the houses of Israel and Judah
 - To bear means to carry or be burdened with something
 - So Ezekiel represents the houses of Israel, each on the ground as if struck down, one facing north and one facing south
 - Each of them bearing the consequences of their sins under the Old Covenant
- Finally, that iron plate was held in such a way that it separated Ezekiel from the city
 - The plate was probably the type used to bake the meal offering for use in the temple
 - The symbol told the people they would be barred from the city of Jerusalem and from their temple
 - The iron plate emphasized the firmness of this judgment
 - Israel would not be able to penetrate the barrier God was erecting
 - Also notice that Ezekiel's arm was to be bare during this time
 - Traditionally, bearing a body part was a sign of hostility or anger
 - This further emphasized the Lord was acting in hostility against the people of Israel in these matters
 - Their fate wasn't accidental or a sign of God's inability to defend them
 - It was an outcome brought against them by a covenant-keeping God
 - So this second part of the charade explains the long-term consequences for Israel's sins under the Old Covenant

- Not only would Jerusalem be sieged and the temple destroyed
- But Israel will be barred from free access to the city for many years
- This judgment will last for a total of 430 years
- To understand this judgment properly, we must understand that access to the city and the temple lies at the center of all God's prophecies to Israel
 - God has promised His people a glorious future living in their land, centered on their holy city, with a temple filled by the glory of God
 - God fulfills that promise to Israel in the future Millennial kingdom, through the New Covenant
 - But in the meantime, the Lord granted Israel a foretaste of that blessing through the Old Covenant
 - So long as they keep the terms of the Old Covenant, the people could live in their land in peace with the Lord's glory dwelling among them in the temple
 - But when Israel rejected the Lord and His Law, they forfeited that earthly blessing
 - And now as a consequence, the Lord declares the people would lose access to their city and temple for 430 years
 - There were temporary periods during those 430 years when Israel re-entered the city and the temple operated (as in the times after Nehemiah)
 - But even then, the people were still restricted by the authority of Gentile rulers, whether Persian or Greek
 - Before long, they would find themselves pushed out of their land again, the temple defiled, and the sacrificial services halted
 - This situation would continue for 430 years, but at the end of that time, the judgment would come to an end
 - And as the Lord foretold, exactly 430 years after the fall of Jerusalem in 156 BC, the Maccabean kingdom re-established Jewish control of Jerusalem and the temple
 - In that year, a Jewish family called the Maccabees miraculously overthrew the remnants of the Greek

- The Maccabeans re-established free and independent Jewish control over the land and the city of Jerusalem and temple for about 100 years
- Jews still celebrate Hanukkah today in remembrance of that victory
- This outcome fits Ezekiel's charade perfectly
 - He depicted both Jewish kingdoms laying down, prevented from reconquering their city and temple, for 430 years
 - And at the end of that time, they would stand again, retaking the city for a time
- So parts 1 and 2 of Ezekiel's charade foretell of a city destroyed and a people scattered for 430 years
 - And there are still two more parts to this prophecy, also told in mime
 - The third part finishes this chapter

Ezek. 4:9 "But as for you, take wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt, put them in one vessel and make them into bread for yourself; you shall eat it according to the number of the days that you lie on your side, three hundred and ninety days.

Ezek. 4:10 "Your food which you eat shall be twenty shekels a day by weight; you shall eat it from time to time.

Ezek. 4:11 "The water you drink shall be the sixth part of a hin by measure; you shall drink it from time to time.

- Now the Lord gives Ezekiel instructions on how to eat and drink during the time he is performing his daily charade
 - First, he should take six grains together and mill them into a flour from which he will make his bread
 - This is an unusual mixture of grains
 - Today, there are companies selling bread in the supermarket based on this same mixture, calling it Ezekiel bread
 - They claim it's a supernatural combination of grains that God intended for the best nutrition
 - Ironically, the context of Ezekiel 4 makes clear God had a very different purpose, an opposite purpose in fact

- This strange mixture of grain doesn't represent health but rather it symbolizes Israel's poverty and desperation during the coming siege
 - Notice Ezekiel could only eat the equivalent of twenty shekels by weight per day
 - This is about 8-9 slices of bread each day...that's only about 720 calories per day
 - That's a starvation diet. Ezekiel would have lost a lot of weight during those 14 months
- Moreover, he could only drink a sixth of a hin of water, which was about a quart of water per day
 - In a hot, desert climate like Babylon, this was scarcely enough water to survive
 - Obviously, Ezekiel did survive, but it wasn't comfortable or easy
- And there's a second part to the third sign

[Ezek. 4:12](#) "You shall eat it as a barley cake, having baked it in their sight over human dung."

[Ezek. 4:13](#) Then the Lord said, "Thus will the sons of Israel eat their bread unclean among the nations where I will banish them."

[Ezek. 4:14](#) But I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I have never been defiled; for from my youth until now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has any unclean meat ever entered my mouth."

[Ezek. 4:15](#) Then He said to me, "See, I will give you cow's dung in place of human dung over which you will prepare your bread."

[Ezek. 4:16](#) Moreover, He said to me, "Son of man, behold, I am going to break the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and they will eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and drink water by measure and in horror,

[Ezek. 4:17](#) because bread and water will be scarce; and they will be appalled with one another and waste away in their iniquity.

- The bread Ezekiel makes must be baked a very specific way, an especially odd and offensive way
 - He must bake them like one bakes a barley cake, which means over an open fire

- He must bake them publicly, where he will be seen by Israel
- And the most important part...he must cook the cakes using human excrement as fuel for the fire
- Here again, this reflects the conditions that would exist inside the city of Jerusalem during the coming siege
 - People will have burned everything they can find in the city
 - Leaving them with no choice but to burn poop
- But at this point, Ezekiel's had about all he can take
 - He responds in v.14, "Ah, Lord God!"
 - Think about all Ezekiel has witnessed...the glory of God, the throne, cherubim
 - And think about how he has patiently received all of God's demanding instructions without even a word so far
 - But now he's at breaking point, and he tells the Lord he can't bear to do this
 - That tells us how desperate Ezekiel must feel at this point...he's reached such a breaking point that he's finally compelled to answer back to God
 - He says, Lord I've done all that the Law required my whole life to avoid defiling myself with my food
 - What Ezekiel is saying is he feels he will be defiled by this request
 - To be clear, there is no prohibition in the Law against using human feces as fuel for a fire
 - But that's not the point really
 - The point is Ezekiel's conscience is wounded by this request, so he asks the Lord for relief
 - The Lord could have overruled Ezekiel's objections, but He doesn't
 - He graciously substitutes cow dung instead, since it communicates the same message though perhaps a little less graphically
- The Lord explains the point to these things in vs.16-17

- He wants Ezekiel to illustrate the poverty Israel would experience during the coming siege of 586 BC
 - The people will experience a famine created by the siege
 - They will eat bread by weight and water by measure, meaning it will be closely rationed
 - They will become anxious over where to find food and horrified at the prospect of running out of water
 - In general, they will be appalled at what people are reduced to doing to survive in the city as a result of the Babylonian siege
- And true to God's word, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were reduced to inhuman measures to survive the 18-month siege
 - The Babylonians starved out the people leading to virtual cannibalism
 - Here's what Jeremiah, a contemporary of Ezekiel, foretold would happen in the city during the siege

[Jer. 19:4](#) "Because they have forsaken Me and have made this an alien place and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods, that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had ever known, and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent

[Jer. 19:5](#) and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind;

[Jer. 19:6](#) therefore, behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when this place will no longer be called Topheth or the valley of Ben-hinnom, but rather the valley of Slaughter.

[Jer. 19:7](#) "I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies and by the hand of those who seek their life; and I will give over their carcasses as food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.

[Jer. 19:8](#) "I will also make this city a desolation and an object of hissing; everyone who passes by it will be astonished and hiss because of all its disasters.

[Jer. 19:9](#) "I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh in the siege and in the distress with which their enemies and those who seek their life will distress them."

- So Ezekiel's strange diet and cooking practices were pictures of the desperation to come upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem
 - There is still one more part to this charade, which we'll see next week in Chapter 5
 - But already we're getting a much better appreciation for the cost of Ezekiel's service to the Lord
 - He will suffer physical discomfort, public humiliation, and deprivation in serving as a prophet
 - More than that, Ezekiel has been asked to give up normal life
 - Not just a part of his life or some piece of his life
 - He will literally cease living normally for a time
 - He will spend most of everyday for the next 14 months just laying around, getting up only when he needs to eat or drink
 - Some of you may be wondering if your teenager has been called to be a prophet of the Lord...likely not
 - Joking aside, Ezekiel's sacrifice was not easy and it likely included persecution and even self-doubt
 - Can you imagine waking up every day for 14 months with this assignment to complete?
 - Do you think you may have wavered in completing the task?
 - Ezekiel's faithfulness is reminiscent of Noah
 - Everything in his life stopped so that he could be 100% dedicated to serving God in a remarkable task
- Last week I told you that following the Lord as His disciple will bring a cost
 - We must be prepared to set aside things we prefer, should the Lord ask us to do so for His purposes and glory
 - If that challenge seemed daunting, then let this chapter be a source of some encouragement to you to take up that challenge
 - Jesus said His yoke is light and the burden is easy
 - This is true, because the Lord does all the heavy lifting

- For example, notice back in v.8 the Lord told Ezekiel He would help Ezekiel perform his tough assignment
 - Try laying down on one side for an extended period of time and you'll find it difficult and painful after a short while
 - Then try doing it for 430 days straight...it's torture
 - But while Ezekiel is on the ground in that awkward position, the Lord says He will hold Ezekiel there as if tied by rope
- So Ezekiel won't even have to do the hardest part of the work in serving God, because the Lord will make that burden easy for him
 - But Ezekiel still had to show up for work each morning, and there were still going to be difficult moments along the way
 - That's why you've heard me say often that serving Christ is less about ability, it's more about availability
 - Show up for work and watch how the Lord makes you equal to the work He assigns
- But if you're worried that the Lord will ask too much of you, take note also that the Lord recognizes we have personal limitations
 - When Ezekiel couldn't stomach the Lord's command to cook with feces, the Lord graciously gave him something he could accept
 - The Lord granted Ezekiel's request because Ezekiel spoke out of conviction, not complaint
- The Lord will certainly challenge us at times, moving us out of our comfort zone when it stands in the way of our spiritual development
 - But he won't give us more than we can handle
 - He may even grant you a request for something easier if you ask
 - Just don't expect the Lord to honor your request for relief if it comes from a selfishness or lazy desire
 - Serving the living God still requires a sacrifice
- Finally, let's consider the most obvious and perhaps most critical question raised by this strange chapter...why did God employ charades?

- Later in Chapter 5 Ezekiel finally gets permission to speak to Israel
 - And at that point he will explain these same things to them with words
 - Which begs the question, why did God bother with the drama in the meantime?
- Moreover, we know the word of God is the most powerful force in the universe
 - Scripture says that the world is literally held together by the power of God's word
 - And that when everything created has passed away, the word of God will still remain
 - The word of prophecy is so sure that if necessary, rocks would cry out to fulfill its demands
 - So we know that the word of God is entirely sufficient to reveal the glory of God and to bring about the will of God
- And for centuries the Lord did speak to Israel by His word
 - He explained patiently through the prophets that consequences would follow for Israel's failure to keep the Law of their covenant
 - For example, in Isaiah 13, the prophet told the people that Babylon would destroy them and they needed to repent to avoid it
 - But Israel ignored the warnings
 - And they profaned the name of the Lord in front of the nations
- So the time has come for the Lord to make an example of Israel
 - If Israel would not fulfill their purpose to be an example to the world through their obedience
 - Then the Lord would make them an example through disobedience
 - And He orders Ezekiel to engage in a long, tortuous display to get the nation's attention

- So that just as Ezekiel caught Israel's attention through his bizarre behavior
- So would Israel draw the world's attention by the terrible things they endured
- As God's people we need to understand that we too have been given a mission by Christ to witness to the world
 - Our message is first and foremost one of words, the word of God and the Gospel of Christ, specifically
 - But it's also a message formed in our actions because our actions often speak louder than our words
 - So as followers of Christ, we have to concern ourselves with how we live
 - If we live out our faith in the right way, we gain opportunity for people to hear the word we want to speak to them later
 - We have to set our hearts on obedience and faithfulness, rather than lip service and token efforts
 - Living for Christ now so we can receive a good report in the day to come will require sacrifice

- I mentioned last week that we've entered an extended section of the book running from Chapters 4-24
 - In that section, the Lord tells Ezekiel to issue warning after warning to Israel about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and Judah
 - Last week I explained how that judgment took place at the hands of the Babylonians
 - So already we have the big picture of the history of this event
 - But if you scan through the upcoming chapters, you'll notice the theme doesn't change much
 - The Lord continues to hammer away at what Israel has done to offend Him and He describes the severe consequences coming
 - At times He will use some very colorful and even vulgar terms to describe Israel's sin
 - But in general, the message remains on the same theme
 - So anyone who attempts to preach through this book on a weekly basis is faced with a challenge of keeping the message fresh each week
 - Ezekiel is one of the least often taught books of the Bible in the church, probably for this reason
 - Most pastors are reluctant to make their congregations listen to God pronouncing judgment against His people week after week
 - Fortunately for you, I'm not that sensitive
- Nevertheless, I recognize I need to consider ways to bring something new each week, and here's how I intend to do that
 - Each of the next 20 chapters reveals some aspect of the coming destruction of Jerusalem
 - Some chapters describe the sins of the people that brought God's wrath
 - Some chapters explain the coming judgments God will send against the people and the city
 - Other chapters reveal the departure of God's glory from the temple or the silencing of false prophets or the removal of idols
 - There are even chapters where the Lord promises to bring the nation a heart of faith and return them into the land
 - So we're going to focus on each chapter's distinct perspective
 - We'll read every word
 - But when a chapter repeats themes or concepts we've already studied, we'll spend our time on examining other aspects
 - For the next three chapters beginning with Chapter 5 today, we study the consequences of the destruction of Jerusalem
 - Each chapter gives us a different perspective

- Chapter 5 looks at the effect of God's judgment on the people
- Chapter 6 covers the effect of God's judgment upon the land
- And Chapter 7 covers the effect of God's judgment on Israel's prosperity
- These three perspectives parallel the promises God gave to Abraham
 - The Lord promised Abraham he would have a people, a land and the blessing of an inheritance in the land
 - These promises are unconditional, and God will remain faithful to Israel in all three areas
 - But as Paul says in Romans, not all Israel are those who are descended from Israel
 - So those within Israel who ultimately receive these promises are those who share in the faith of Abraham = the remnant
- So let's move on to Chapter 5 and the consequences of God's judgment against the people of the city, beginning with the final sign of Ezekiel's charade

Ezek. 5:1 "As for you, son of man, take a sharp sword; take and use it as a barber's razor on your head and beard. Then take scales for weighing and divide the hair.

Ezek. 5:2 "One third you shall burn in the fire at the center of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. Then you shall take one third and strike it with the sword all around the city, and one third you shall scatter to the wind; and I will unsheathe a sword behind them.

Ezek. 5:3 "Take also a few in number from them and bind them in the edges of your robes.

Ezek. 5:4 "Take again some of them and throw them into the fire and burn them in the fire; from it a fire will spread to all the house of Israel.

- Last week God asked Ezekiel to make a miniature model of the siege of Jerusalem and to lie on his side next to the model for 430 days
 - These actions were to be signs to Israel of what was coming against the city
 - The city would be sieged and taken
 - And the people would be barred from free access to their city and temple for 430 years
 - Now we come to the third part of the charade, where Ezekiel will dramatize the effects of that siege upon the people
 - Ezekiel is required to shave his head and beard completely
 - The Law of God prohibited a man from shaving his head and beard under certain circumstances
 - In particular, a priest could not serve before the Lord with the sacrifices if he had shaved his head

- So now the Lord orders Ezekiel to shave himself, which would have disqualified Ezekiel from serving in the temple
 - But there was no temple in Babylon and Ezekiel wasn't serving as a priest
 - So in this case the Lord's instructions resulted in Ezekiel's humiliation and shame before the people
 - And this is part of the charade
 - Ezekiel is playing the part of Israel again
- More specifically, Ezekiel's hair is playing the part of Israel
 - The Lord tells Ezekiel to divide his hair three ways by weighing it on a scale
 - To weigh on a scale is a picture of God's judgment, so the hair is experiencing a judgment of sorts
 - And the precision of the measurement emphasizes the discriminating nature of God's judgment
 - God is assigning outcomes to various groups in precise ways
 - Jerusalem's population will be divided into thirds, and each third will experience a different fate
 - One third will die in the siege on the city as represented by the hair burned in the fire of the city following the siege
 - Another third will die by the sword of the Babylonians as they flee the city
 - And the final third of Ezekiel's hair was to be scattered to the wind, symbolizing the scattering of Israel among the Gentile nations of the world
 - These refugees will be driven away from Israel and into the world at the point of a sword
 - From the perspective of the people suffering these judgments, everything will appear random and without meaning
 - They will see their city and lives destroyed
 - They will watch as their family and countrymen will die around them while others are left captive, away from Judah
 - But the Lord is telling them now what's going to happen so they will understand that it's not random
 - It's a plan of God executed as judgment against an unbelieving and ungodly people
- But this isn't to be the end of Israel
 - Notice in v.3 that the Lord commands Ezekiel to separate a few hairs out of the three groups and set them aside
 - These few will be bound in the edges or hem of Ezekiel's robe
 - The edge of a man's robe symbolized his character and authority
 - So by binding the hairs in his robe, Ezekiel is indicating that these few hairs share in Ezekiel's faithfulness

- Those hairs represent the remnant of Israel
 - The remnant is an important concept in Scripture
 - The Bible tells us that though Israel is very numerous, only a small group of Jews are truly believing in God
 - This small group is the true Israel
 - We might call this group those who are “saved” in Israel, but the Bible calls them the remnant

Is. 10:20 Now in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.

Is. 10:21 A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.

Is. 10:22 For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea, Only a remnant within them will return;...

- Similarly, we could consider those within the church as part of the larger Israel, but only those true believers as the “remnant”
- The Lord is telling the people that in the midst of this destruction He will preserve His remnant, those believers within Israel
 - But notice they are not spared from the judgment entirely
 - After all, Ezekiel is a part of that remnant, which is why the hairs were bound into his hem signifying they are like him
 - So they are righteous like Ezekiel, but yet they will go into exile like Ezekiel too
 - The Lord promises not to preserve them from the judgments
 - It was a promise to preserve them through the judgments
 - And at the end it is the remnant that returns to Jerusalem – as we find in Ezra and Nehemiah
 - Remember, these judgments are required by the Old Covenant
 - The Old Covenant binds the entire nation to a single fate
 - Within that are the remnant
 - But they are saved by their faith, so they can share in the future of Abraham

Rom. 4:13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

- So God promises Abraham and his descendant that they will have wonderful things, but it is their faith that makes that possible

- No matter what calamity befell Israel for their failure to keep the Old Covenant, nevertheless the remnant still had assurance of eternal life – and the promise of preservation
- But then notice in v.4 that Ezekiel is told to burn some of those remnant hairs in fire
 - When the Babylonians came to capture the city, some of the remnant were not interested in going into exile
 - They did not accept the word of the prophet Jeremiah when he told them that God appointed this scattering and they must go
 - Instead, these rebellious believers decided to escape to Egypt before the third attack on the city
 - They ask Jeremiah to confirm that they Lord will be with them when they go to Egypt

Jer. 42:1 Then all the commanders of the forces, Johanan the son of Kareah, Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people both small and great approached

Jer. 42:2 and said to Jeremiah the prophet, “Please let our petition come before you, and pray for us to the Lord your God, that is for all this remnant; because we are left but a few out of many, as your own eyes now see us,

Jer. 42:3 that the Lord your God may tell us the way in which we should walk and the thing that we should do.”

Jer. 42:4 Then Jeremiah the prophet said to them, “I have heard you. Behold, I am going to pray to the Lord your God in accordance with your words; and I will tell you the whole message which the Lord will answer you. I will not keep back a word from you.”

- So Jeremiah prays and then gives them the Lord’s answer

Jer. 42:11 ‘Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you are now fearing; do not be afraid of him,’ declares the Lord, ‘for I am with you to save you and deliver you from his hand.

Jer. 42:12 ‘I will also show you compassion, so that he will have compassion on you and restore you to your own soil.

Jer. 42:13 ‘But if you are going to say, “We will not stay in this land,” so as not to listen to the voice of the Lord your God,

Jer. 42:14 saying, “No, but we will go to the land of Egypt, where we will not see war or hear the sound of a trumpet or hunger for bread, and we will stay there”;

Jer. 42:15 then in that case listen to the word of the Lord, O remnant of Judah.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, “If you really set your mind to enter Egypt and go in to reside there,

Jer. 42:16 then the sword, which you are afraid of, will overtake you there in the

land of Egypt; and the famine, about which you are anxious, will follow closely after you there in Egypt, and you will die there.

Jer. 42:17 “So all the men who set their mind to go to Egypt to reside there will die by the sword, by famine and by pestilence; and they will have no survivors or refugees from the calamity that I am going to bring on them.””

- The men were so disturbed by what Jeremiah told them that they claimed he was lying and they decided to go to Egypt anyway
 - They were determined to disobey the Lord’s instructions
 - And to punish Jeremiah, they kidnapped the prophet and forced him to go to Egypt with them
 - Jeremiah eventually lived out his remaining years in Egypt
- Ezekiel tells us that the Lord will judge these rebellious believers for disobedience
 - That judgment fire is the same one that engulfs all the people of Israel
 - It didn’t matter if they hid in the city or in the hills or fled to Egypt, they would see judgment
 - You can run, but you can’t hide from the Lord
 - This reminds us that God’s remnant, believers, may face consequences for disobedience
 - We see two principles working together in this example
 - First, God’s people may experience bad things because God is working around us in things that are much bigger than us
 - But still the Lord hasn’t forgotten about His remnant, and He will preserve us through these trials
 - The good things He has for us in the course of a trial can only be received through the path He has assigned for us
 - Remember the Lord said through Jeremiah that if the remnant went into captivity obediently, the Lord would preserve them there and bring them back in due time
 - That leads to the second principle: believers must remain obedient to the Lord even when His commands don’t suit our preferences
- Now Ezekiel has finished the charade, so it’s finally time to speak to the people

Ezek. 5:5 “Thus says the Lord God, ‘This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her.

Ezek. 5:6 ‘But she has rebelled against My ordinances more wickedly than the nations and against My statutes more than the lands which surround her; for they have rejected My ordinances and have not walked in My statutes.’

Ezek. 5:7 “Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Because you have more turmoil than the nations which surround you and have not walked in My statutes, nor

observed My ordinances, nor observed the ordinances of the nations which surround you,’

Ezek. 5:8 therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I, even I, am against you, and I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations.

Ezek. 5:9 ‘And because of all your abominations, I will do among you what I have not done, and the like of which I will never do again.

Ezek. 5:10 ‘Therefore, fathers will eat their sons among you, and sons will eat their fathers; for I will execute judgments on you and scatter all your remnant to every wind.

Ezek. 5:11 ‘So as I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable idols and with all your abominations, therefore I will also withdraw, and My eye will have no pity and I will not spare.

Ezek. 5:12 ‘One third of you will die by plague or be consumed by famine among you, one third will fall by the sword around you, and one third I will scatter to every wind, and I will unsheathe a sword behind them.

Ezek. 5:13 ‘Thus My anger will be spent and I will satisfy My wrath on them, and I will be appeased; then they will know that I, the Lord, have spoken in My zeal when I have spent My wrath upon them.

Ezek. 5:14 ‘Moreover, I will make you a desolation and a reproach among the nations which surround you, in the sight of all who pass by.

Ezek. 5:15 ‘So it will be a reproach, a reviling, a warning and an object of horror to the nations who surround you when I execute judgments against you in anger, wrath and raging rebukes. I, the Lord, have spoken.

Ezek. 5:16 ‘When I send against them the deadly arrows of famine which were for the destruction of those whom I will send to destroy you, then I will also intensify the famine upon you and break the staff of bread.

Ezek. 5:17 ‘Moreover, I will send on you famine and wild beasts, and they will bereave you of children; plague and bloodshed also will pass through you, and I will bring the sword on you. I, the Lord, have spoken.’”

- Finally the Lord speaks to Israel through Ezekiel, and in the word Ezekiel shares, the Lord declares four points
 - First, He reminds Israel of the privilege God gave them
 - In v.5 He says they are set in the center of the nations of the earth
 - Remember, Israel was not a nation before God made it
 - He created a people out of one man and his barren wife
 - And then He grew that people to the point they could conquer the land and establish a nation in His name
 - They were assigned a place at the center of the earth, a place where east and west crossed, where all the nations of the world would take notice
 - That reflected the Lord’s desire for Israel to be a light among the nations

- Israel was supposed to witness to the Living God and His Law by keeping His statutes and ordinances before pagan nations
- And in return, the Lord would protect and bless Israel
- That leads us to the second point in v.6: Israel's unfaithfulness
 - Israel was unfaithful to the Old Covenant and not just a little unfaithful
 - Ironically, Israel adopted practices even more wicked than those practiced by the ignorant nations that surrounded her
 - In v.7 the Lord observes that though Israel had God's law, they were even more evil than the pagan nations that didn't know the law
 - Instead of being a source of light to the world, Israel became a black hole
- Which leads to the third point in v.8: God declares judgment against them
 - Because they were more wicked than the other nations, the Lord will bring them a calamity greater than He brought any other nation
 - He says in v.10 that the nation will see fathers consuming their children or sons consuming their elderly parents
 - As terrible as this sounds, it's an accurate description of what we know happened inside the city as I mentioned a week ago
- Lamentations describes the scene this way

Lam. 4:9 Better are those slain with the sword

**Than those slain with hunger;
For they pine away, being stricken
For lack of the fruits of the field.**

Lam. 4:10 The hands of compassionate women

**Boiled their own children;
They became food for them
Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.**

Lam. 4:11 The Lord has accomplished His wrath,

**He has poured out His fierce anger;
And He has kindled a fire in Zion
Which has consumed its foundations.**

- The Lord's fourth point is found in vs.12-17, the consequences
 - As we learned in the charade, the nation would be split into thirds
 - Some dying of famine, some of sword and the rest scattered
 - The Lord would have no pity on His people, because their sins were so great
 - The story of Judah's downfall would be one calamity after another
 - Notice in the concluding verses of the chapter the Lord speaks of wild beasts taking children, of more famine, more bloodshed

- The destruction of Jerusalem and her people would be the worst disaster any nation had ever seen or will ever see
- Moreover, the Lord says in v. 9 that He would never repeat this episode again
- Other disasters would come and will come for Israel
- But never again would Israel experience something like this
- Privilege, unfaithfulness, judgment and consequences
 - Israel was privileged by God but responded with unfaithfulness which led God to bring judgment with terrible consequences
 - Has God been fair to Israel through all this?
 - Well, let's consider this pattern again
 - God gave His people a privileged place to serve in the world, but He also gave them everything they needed to succeed
 - He blessed them with a land that was bountiful and beautiful
 - He sent them teachers and inspiring examples like Joshua, Samuel, and David
 - He gave them judges (and kings when they demanded one) to guide them in the right way
 - He even made provision in the Law for sacrifices to cover their sins and maintain the covenant blessings
 - So who do you blame?
 - And even when they demonstrated unfaithfulness, the Lord still gave them plenty of second chances
 - He gave them priests to intercede for them with sacrifices
 - He sent them prophets to correct them
 - He still gave them rain in the proper season and abundant crops
 - He even gave them victory over Israel's enemies even as they were adopting their pagan practices
 - So who do you blame?
 - Eventually, the Lord had to bring judgment, but only after showing long-suffering mercy by His patience
 - He waited patiently for centuries before acting against them
 - Entire generations of evil came and went without God acting
 - At times He acted to discipline them, but when the people cried out, He would hear them and restore them
 - This pattern happened time and time again
 - So who do you blame?
 - Finally, despite the severity of the consequences, the Lord continued to show mercy to His people even after the judgment

- He cared for their physical need in exile
- And while in exile He continued to speak to them by His prophet
- And after their exile, the Lord brought Israel back to her land
- So who is to blame?
- And before you judge, remember the Lord also preserved a remnant of faithful, believing Israel, even in the midst of their apostasy
 - We rest in the promise that despite our sin, we will be with Him
 - He has been gracious beyond measure
 - Both for Israel and for us
 - But disobedience has consequences
 - Thankfully we are saved from those consequences by our faith in Jesus Christ

- In Chapter 6 of Ezekiel we move forward in studying the consequences of God's judgment against Judah and Jerusalem
 - Last week in Chapter 5 the Lord explained the consequences that would come against the people in the city
 - We learned that two thirds would die but a third would be exiled
 - And from among these groups the Lord promised to preserve a remnant of believing Israel
 - That remnant would still experience the earthly judgments, since those judgments were required by the Old Covenant which bound all Israel
 - But they would be preserved through the judgments as a testimony to God's faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant
 - Today the Lord addresses the consequences to the land of Israel
 - Specifically, the Lord explains how He will bring judgment against the high places of idolatry in Israel

Ezek. 6:1 And the word of the Lord came to me saying,

Ezek. 6:2 “Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them

Ezek. 6:3 and say, ‘Mountains of Israel, listen to the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God to the mountains, the hills, the ravines and the valleys: “Behold, I Myself am going to bring a sword on you, and I will destroy your high places.

Ezek. 6:4 “So your altars will become desolate and your incense altars will be smashed; and I will make your slain fall in front of your idols.

Ezek. 6:5 “I will also lay the dead bodies of the sons of Israel in front of their idols; and I will scatter your bones around your altars.

Ezek. 6:6 “In all your dwellings, cities will become waste and the high places will be desolate, that your altars may become waste and desolate, your idols may be broken and brought to an end, your incense altars may be cut down, and your works may be blotted out.

Ezek. 6:7 “The slain will fall among you, and you will know that I am the Lord.

- Ezekiel's charades are done for now, so the Lord asks him to speak to the people plainly
 - Nevertheless, Ezekiel is still delivering the message with flair
 - Ezekiel is told to turn and face the direction of Israel
 - So that as he delivers his prophecy, he is speaking as if addressing the mountains themselves
 - But as we see, the Lord isn't angry at the land itself
 - He's promising to destroy the “high places”
 - A high place is any place of Canaanite idol worship and particularly of sacrifice

- When Israel entered the Promised Land under Joshua, the land was occupied
- But the occupants had been judged by God as worthy of destruction
- The Lord told Abraham centuries earlier that a day would come when his descendants would receive the Canaanite land
- This would happen when the Lord's patience over the Canaanites' sin reached its limit

Gen. 15:12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him.

Gen. 15:13 God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.

Gen. 15:14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.

Gen. 15:15 "As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age.

Gen. 15:16 "Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."

Gen. 15:18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:

Gen. 15:19 the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite

Gen. 15:20 and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim

Gen. 15:21 and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite."

- The Lord promised that Abraham's fourth generation of descendants would occupy the land of Canaan
 - But before they could take possession of that land, they must displace and destroy the Canaanite inhabitants
 - These peoples were idolators who committed great sin for many centuries
 - But when their iniquity was complete, as the Lord said to Abraham, they would come to an end
- But in the years that followed, the people of Israel failed to heed the Lord's command to defeat the Canaanites and possess the land
 - As a result, the nation found itself living side by side with the idolatry and evil of the Canaanite people
 - Over time, the people adopted the Canaanite idols
 - And they substituted idol worship for worship of the true God of Israel

- Evil kings of Israel and Judah set up high places across the land to encourage the people to worship false gods
- In that way, Judah incorporated idol worship into the very landscape of Israel
 - On hills and mountains, on cliffs and ravines, by rivers and valleys, altars devoted to false gods dotted the landscape of Israel
 - The very first of these high places was set up by the tribe of Dan during the time of Judges
- In the beginning, these high places were not centers of idol worship but rather Yahweh worship
 - The tribe of Dan had migrated far north away from their assigned territory and into new lands
 - Since the people were now living so far from the tabernacle, they didn't want to make the long trip back to worship at Shiloh
 - So they set up a graven image of God and declared they would worship in Dan instead
- Then over the centuries, the idea caught on
 - Jews who preferred not to make the long journey back to the tabernacle as required in the Law set up their own high places
 - Soon these high places dotted the land
 - Jews were practicing various forms of false worship at altars on every hill, mountain, ravine, etc.
- And then other worship practices began to change as well
 - These worshippers were not believing Jews – they were not the remnant – so their evil hearts continued to lead them astray
 - Having already set aside the Law concerning where to worship, it was a small step to then change how they worshipped
 - In time they adopted the pagan gods of the Canaanite people living around them
 - Altars were now dedicated to Baal, Molech and other pagan idols
 - Jews agreed to be “priests” to these false idols
 - In addition to altars, whole temples were erected to these false gods
 - Then prostitution was practiced in these temples as part of the “worship”
 - Sacrifices graduated from merely animals to infants
 - Within a few generations, the nation's religious practices were indistinguishable from the surrounding pagan people
 - Reading through Judges, 1&2 Samuel and 1&2 Kings, you can see idolatry in Israel progressing over about 500 years
 - Under Solomon's rule, these high places gained legitimacy
 - Later, evil kings in the northern and southern kingdom embraced false worship

- At times a good leader might rise up to to put a stop to these practices
- But even then, the high places often remained
- In time, the reforms would be forgotten and the people would return to their evil practices
- It's hard to believe how pervasive idolatry became in Israel, especially when we remember how the nation came into their land in the first place
 - God revealed Himself to the nation in miraculous ways
 - He performed miracle after miracle leading them out of Egypt and into the promised land
 - He did further miracles under Joshua and the Judges
 - He gave them the Law and the feasts to remember these things
 - He gave the nation great blessing in David's day
 - And under Solomon, He made Israel the most powerful nation on earth
 - So how did they stray so far away from the Lord?
 - Remember how it started
 - First, they moved away from the Lord
 - They left His presence and left His word
 - Then they began to listen to the world's counsel and to their own selfish, evil heart
 - The rest followed naturally
 - That pattern has never been any different
 - If you feel far from God, it's not God Who moved away; you did
 - Like the tribe of Daniel, you've moved away from God, from spending time with God's people and in God's word
 - And you've gone so far that now you tell yourself you have reasons why you need to do things your own way
 - Before long, church is for other people, the Bible holds no attraction and your life resembles the world
- Idolatry is a seductive thing...it draws us in quietly so that we rarely see it coming
 - Remember, high places in Israel began as alternative places to worship Yahweh
 - The Jews who built these places still wanted to worship the God of Israel
 - But they wanted to worship on their own terms
 - But that one little compromise was the wedge the enemy needed to pry their hearts away
 - Before long, they were worshipping pagan idols
 - Each step they took away from the word of God made the next one easier to take
 - That's exactly how it works for us too

- Rarely will a Christian move from a faithful walk with Jesus one day, to complete rebellion and apostasy the next
- Instead, we make one small compromise today and another tomorrow
- If left unchecked, we soon end up in a bad place wondering how we got there
 - As things bottom out, we ask ourselves when was the last time I went to church?
 - When was the last time I prayed or opened my Bible?
 - Why am I spending so much time in the company of ungodly people?
 - How did I fill my days with so many worldly pursuits?
 - How did my life get so messed up?
 - Where are you Lord?
- You may never have thought of these things as idolatry, but it is
 - You don't have to bow your knee to a wooden statue to be guilty of idolatry
 - You only have to set up high places in your life, things that substitute for obedience and devotion to the Lord
 - We establish our own ways to finding satisfaction, protection, provision rather than relying on the Lord and His word
 - The Hebrew word for idol is literally translated “dung god” and that's what we're talking about
 - We tell ourselves that the waste products of our consumption are our gods, our high places
 - The things we consume by whatever lustful appetite we indulge, become our masters, our dung gods
 - Do you have a high place? Well, ask yourself where do you turn when you feel vulnerable, when you feel empty, when you feel hurt?
 - If that place isn't your prayer closet or the word of God...
 - Or if can't be found within the fellowship of God's people...then you've discovered your high place
 - That place needs to be taken down because it stands between you and your walk with Christ
- Israel didn't want to remove their high places because they had hard, unbelieving hearts
 - High places were the consistent feature of the land which stood to condemn the people
 - So now the Lord declares He will remove them personally by bringing a sword against them
 - Specifically, He will use the Babylonian army to accomplish this task
 - As that army moved through the land, they came upon Jews worshipping at high places
 - As they engaged these groups in battle, the Lord gave His people over to the

Babylonians

- The Babylonians were enraged against the people of Israel
- This would be the third time they had to march into the land to subdue the people
- They're so angry this time that they are determined to crush any and all opposition
- As they advanced the army tore down every altar it found and killed those worshippers gathered there
 - The dead were left unburied
 - Eventually, their bones lay scattered around the altars where they once worshipped
- This outcome was be a bitter irony
 - Israel worshiped these idols expecting to receive favor
 - They expected their idols to grant them fertility, abundant crops and protection from their enemies
 - Instead, both shared the same fate
 - Israel's idols were crushed and the people died
 - These so-called gods couldn't save themselves much less protect Israel
- Historically, this was a turning point for Israel
 - In the past when a good king put an end to idol worship and took down the high places, the reforms never lasted
 - Another generation later and the people had rebuilt the high places
 - But after the Babylonian conquest of Judah, Israel never again returned to these things
 - Wherever they've existed, whether in the land of Israel or outside the land, the Jews remained true to the Law of Moses
 - Never again were high places established in Israel
 - Never again did the nation embrace idolatry
 - Even today religious Jews are generally faithful to the Law and reject idolatry
 - This is remarkable departure from Israel's past
 - Why hasn't the nation fallen back into idolatry as it did so many times before?
 - Why did things change?
 - The Lord gives us the answer in the rest of the chapter

Ezek. 6:8 “However, I will leave a remnant, for you will have those who escaped the sword among the nations when you are scattered among the countries.

Ezek. 6:9 “Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations to

which they will be carried captive, how I have been hurt by their adulterous hearts which turned away from Me, and by their eyes which played the harlot after their idols; and they will loathe themselves in their own sight for the evils which they have committed, for all their abominations.

Ezek. 6:10 “Then they will know that I am the Lord; I have not said in vain that I would inflict this disaster on them.”

Ezek. 6:11 “Thus says the Lord God, ‘Clap your hand, stamp your foot and say, “Alas, because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, which will fall by sword, famine and plague!

Ezek. 6:12 “He who is far off will die by the plague, and he who is near will fall by the sword, and he who remains and is besieged will die by the famine. Thus will I spend My wrath on them.

Ezek. 6:13 “Then you will know that I am the Lord, when their slain are among their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the tops of the mountains, under every green tree and under every leafy oak — the places where they offered soothing aroma to all their idols.

Ezek. 6:14 “So throughout all their habitations I will stretch out My hand against them and make the land more desolate and waste than the wilderness toward Diblah; thus they will know that I am the Lord.””

- In v.8 the Lord mentions His remnant again, which brings us back to last week’s lesson
 - Last week we learned that the Lord intended to preserve a third of the people of the city
 - He preserved them by scattering them into the nations of the world
 - Among that group will be the remnant, a believing group of faithful Israel who were caught up in the judgments
 - Now we begin to understand how the Lord brings good things out of this tragedy
 - The Lord says in v.9 that those who survived and were scattered would testify to this experience
 - The remnant of believing Jews would understand that their ancestors had grieved the Lord’s heart by their idolatry
 - They will recognize that these terrible things were justified and they had no one to blame but themselves
 - They will come to loathe their sins and abominations and to repent from them
 - Because of this powerful experience, the remnant of Israel would “remember” the Lord among the nations
 - “To remember the Lord” means the Jewish people would remain faithful to the Lord wherever they lived
 - They would keep the Law, celebrate the feasts and observe a weekly Sabbath while residing in the Gentile nations

- Notice in v.10 the Lord adds that these disasters wouldn't come upon Israel "in vain"
 - He means that these terrible events will accomplish a lasting good for the sake of God's people
 - First, they will recognize they brought these things upon themselves, as the Lord says in v.11
 - More importantly, it will lead the people to recognize they have but one true God
 - Notice the phrase "then they will know I am the Lord"
 - It appears three times in this passage, in v.10, v.13 and in v.14
 - In fact, that phrase appears 65 times in this book, because that was the problem
 - This nation had walked away from God and forgotten Him
 - They needed to KNOW the Lord was the only God
 - And through these one-of-a-kind judgments, the Lord left an indelible impression on His people
 - So they would come to know He was the Lord
 - The Lord says it will take Israel dying on every high place to accomplish this transformation
 - On every mountain and hill, and under every tree where Israel placed an altar, bodies would lie as testimony to the Lord's wrath
 - By the magnitude of the disaster, future generations would be saved from wandering into the same mistake
- Boy, what a hard way to learn a lesson, isn't it?
 - We're starting to understand why God's judgment was so harsh
 - They sinned against their God in the worst ways possible and did it repeatedly
 - Until the Lord has no choice but to act in this way to correct the problem
 - He was acting to preserve His people from annihilation
 - It's fair to say that had God not taken such drastic action, then instead of a third of Israel remaining, there would have been none
 - There still would have been people living in the land, but they would have ceased to be Israel
 - By sacrificing two thirds, the Lord was able to bring one third through a trial that resulted in a lasting faithfulness
 - That is a very hard way to learn to be faithful to God
 - Now we live under the grace of the New Covenant
 - So we may be tempted to think that the Lord could never respond in this way to us
 - But be careful
 - The word of God tells us that since we have been given an even greater covenant, we

have an even greater obligation to live obediently

Heb. 10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;

Heb. 10:24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,

Heb. 10:25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Heb. 10:26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

Heb. 10:27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.

Heb. 10:28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Heb. 10:29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Heb. 10:30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people."

- The writer reminds his Christian audience we must hold fast our confession without wavering
 - But if we should waver – that is if we waver in our pursuit of Christ just as the Israelites wavered in following the Lord God
 - Then we can expect the Lord to respond
 - The writer asks if failing to keep the Old Covenant resulted in a penalty of death, then consider what follows for the apostate New Covenant believer?
 - He doesn't answer his question because he wants us to think about it
 - If those who violated a lessor covenant received such a severe penalty, then we shouldn't be playing around here
 - We are in a blood covenant with the Creator God, and that relationship brings unfathomable blessings
 - But it also brings an obligation to live in the light of what we've received
 - So how do we meet that obligation?
 - The writer says it starts by doing the very things Israel neglected
 - Stay close to the Lord and to His people
 - Serve Him in good deeds and love
 - Don't be drawn away to high places of one kind or another

In a small town, a street preacher named Nate Evans walked every day, preaching to the few people who drove past. “Repent, the End of the World is Near!” he proclaimed.

One day, as he was walking near the edge of town, he came upon a big lever sticking out of the side of the road. It had a sign next to it that read, “Pull this lever to end the world.”

Nate thought this was the perfect location for his message of coming destruction. So Nate set up a pulpit next to the lever, and he began to preach with great conviction on the coming destruction. Soon many drivers were parked along the roadside listening intently.

All was going well, until the road became congested with cars, and just then an 18-wheeler came barreling down the highway so fast that he couldn’t stop in time. To avoid running into the road full of parked cars, the truck driver swerved onto the shoulder, but now he’s headed straight for Nate and that lever. In a split second, the truck driver had to make a choice: run over Nate, or run over the lever.

As the driver later explained to the Highway Patrol officer, he had no choice. Pointing to Nate’s dead body, the driver said, “Better Nate than lever.”

- There have always been doomsayers predicting the end of the world, but so far the only end that’s come is their own
 - It’s easy to make predictions, but it’s a lot harder to bring them to pass
 - Unless a herald’s proclamation is based on the authority of God’s word, he is destined to humiliation
 - The Lord has revealed how the world will end, and He’s revealed the times and circumstances we should watch for
 - But we also know the Church won’t be here to experience the terrible things God has planned
 - So we aren’t concerned by what we read in scripture knowing we aren’t appointed to God’s wrath
 - Even more, we can completely ignore the doomsayers and their false predictions, as Jesus instructed
 - The people of Israel had a similar confidence
 - They knew from the word of God they were God’s chosen people
 - They knew they had been promised a glorious future in a kingdom to come
 - But when it came to hearing the word of God, Israel had a selective attention

- They heard the promises of blessings, but conveniently they overlooked the warnings God issued against them
- As the Lord sent prophet after prophet to tell the people that their sin would bring serious consequences, the people rejected God's word
- In the end, they usually killed the prophet to silence him
- This history explains why we have Chapter 7 in the book of Ezekiel
 - The Lord is still explaining to the people of Israel that judgment is nigh
 - He's used pantomime
 - He's used graphic images
 - And He's speaking through Ezekiel's words
 - But the Lord knows the people aren't listening yet
 - So today, He tells Ezekiel to speak against the nation once more
 - He's already spoken against the people and against the land
 - Now the Lord finishes by speaking against the nation's prosperity and safety in their land
 - His point is clear...just because you're God's covenant people doesn't mean you're safe from God's vengeance
 - On the contrary, it was *because* Israel was in covenant with the Lord that there would be an accounting for their sin
 - And so the Lord speaks once more through Ezekiel in late summer of 592 BC

Ezek. 7:1 Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me saying,

Ezek. 7:2 “And you, son of man, thus says the Lord God to the land of Israel, ‘An end! The end is coming on the four corners of the land.

Ezek. 7:3 ‘Now the end is upon you, and I will send My anger against you; I will judge you according to your ways and bring all your abominations upon you.

Ezek. 7:4 ‘For My eye will have no pity on you, nor will I spare you, but I will bring your ways upon you, and your abominations will be among you; then you will know that I am the Lord!’

Ezek. 7:5 “Thus says the Lord God, ‘A disaster, unique disaster, behold it is coming!

Ezek. 7:6 ‘An end is coming; the end has come! It has awakened against you; behold, it has come!

Ezek. 7:7 ‘Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land. The time has come, the day is near — tumult rather than joyful shouting on the mountains.

Ezek. 7:8 ‘Now I will shortly pour out My wrath on you and spend My anger against you; judge you according to your ways and bring on you all your abominations.

Ezek. 7:9 ‘My eye will show no pity nor will I spare. I will repay you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst; then you will know that

I, the Lord, do the smiting.

- I want you to imagine Ezekiel standing on a street corner in Tel Aviv in Babylon yelling, “An end! The end is coming on the four corners of the land!”
 - That’s what the Lord has told him to do, and I’m sure it had a predictable effect on the people
 - A few listened perhaps
 - But more likely most people looked at Ezekiel as a crazy old man
 - Remember, this prophecy is coming on the heels of 14 months of Ezekiel lying on the ground
 - He’s spent 430 days staring at a brick while holding an iron baking sheet
 - Anyone could have been excused for thinking Ezekiel’s missing a few crayons in the box
 - But now he’s moved from a curiosity to a threat
 - He’s telling the people of Israel that the Lord is about to bring a measure of destruction upon the people never before seen
 - Curiously, he’s speaking to exiles, who have already experienced that judgment
 - They have already seen their city attacked and now they’re sitting in captivity
 - If you and I were present at this moment, we might tell Ezekiel that his message was a little late
- But that’s not how Israel thought
 - Though many Jews were living in captivity, they knew their city still stood
 - The walls were mostly intact and still defended
 - The temple still stood and the priests were still making daily sacrifices
 - Fields were planted, feasts were celebrated, life went on
 - So from the exiles’ point of view, their situation was only temporary
 - We could compare their experience to that of a hostage like the Americans held in Tehran during the Iranian hostage crises of the late 70s
 - Though they were in dire circumstances, they never feared for their country’s destruction
 - And they hoped that one day they would be released and come home
 - That’s how it felt to be an exile in Babylon
 - They had hope that they would go home one day
 - As long as Jerusalem continued, they believed the Lord would protect them
 - And if not them personally, certainly their sons and daughters would go back
- They never considered the possibility that their city and temple could be utterly destroyed and the people exiled for centuries

- This confidence wasn't based in their own strength
 - It was based in their expectation that the God of Israel would protect His people forever, regardless of the threat
 - And the history of Israel seemed to support that conclusion
- Multiple times over the centuries, the nation had been confronted by superior forces only to emerge victorious by God's hand
 - On one occasion, the city was preserved from an overwhelming Assyrian force when the Angel of the Lord single-handedly killed 185,000 men overnight
 - When you have that kind of supernatural protection, you assume that you're invincible
- But Israel wasn't invincible, because the same Lord who vanquished 185,000 Assyrians was now preparing to turn His wrath against His own people
 - Despite His mercy and faithfulness to them, Israel had sinned against Him time and time again
 - So now the time had come to bring about the consequences the Lord promised would come
 - Beginning with making sure His people understand their fate was a result of His wrath
- A couple of phrases stand out in the passage
 - First, the Lord repeats five times that an end is coming
 - Despite their unjustified confidence, their days of comfort and protection were coming to an end
 - In fact, they've already ended, He says, as evidenced by their presence in exile
 - Secondly, the Lord twice emphasizes that these judgments will bring Israel to know that He is the Lord
 - That's the central problem that the Lord is working to fix
 - This episode isn't merely retribution, though it will accomplish that purpose as well
 - The coming destruction of Jerusalem will bring Israel back to an understanding of the true God
 - We learned last week that the Lord's hard treatment of His people is the result of centuries of Israel engaging in the worst abominations possible
 - They have been given plenty of chances
 - And God was long-suffering
 - But sooner or later God must act in keeping with His word, and so now that time has come

Ezek. 7:10 'Behold, the day! Behold, it is coming! Your doom has gone forth; the rod has budded, arrogance has blossomed.'

Ezek. 7:11 'Violence has grown into a rod of wickedness. None of them shall remain, none of their people, none of their wealth, nor anything eminent among them.

Ezek. 7:12 'The time has come, the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice nor the seller mourn; for wrath is against all their multitude.

Ezek. 7:13 'Indeed, the seller will not regain what he sold as long as they both live; for the vision regarding all their multitude will not be averted, nor will any of them maintain his life by his iniquity.

- The die is cast for Israel...doom is coming and it can't be stopped
 - The Lord explains the reason for this calamity using a metaphor
 - Imagine a weed growing up out of the ground
 - If left to grow long enough, it eventually becomes strong and blossoms
 - That's what's happened to Israel
 - Like a weed left to grow, their violent and rebellious hearts grew into a rod of wickedness
 - Eventually it budded into arrogance, an unjustified confidence
 - God granted the nation centuries to repent, but that mercy just emboldened them to sin all the more
 - They misinterpreted the Lord's patience as approval
 - And it gave more opportunity for their hearts to harden
 - The Lord gave Israel time to climb out of the hole they had dug for themselves
 - Instead, they used the time to keep on digging and told themselves the Lord appreciated the dirt
- Now the good news is the Lord is merciful and patient with His children

Psa. 145:8 **The Lord is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.**

- The Lord is literally the perfect parent
 - If you've ever witnessed a parent responding too quickly or too angrily to a child's error (or if you've ever been that parent), then you can appreciate the importance of being slow to anger
 - Having a friend or parent or spouse who is slow to show anger when we make mistakes is a blessing
 - But having a God who is slow to anger in the face of our sin is priceless
- But in both cases, we can misuse the mercy we receive
 - We allow our parents' or spouse's restraint to become license for further offense

- Or we tell ourselves that the Lord's slow response to our sin means He's not concerned in our behavior, so we continue
- Our false sense of security becomes license to continue our sinful ways, and so we squander the Lord's patience
- As you've heard me say many times, believers in Jesus Christ are saved from the penalty of sin in eternity
 - Our faith in Christ has cleared our debts before God
 - We are credited with Christ's righteousness, so our heavenly standing is literally perfect
 - And we can never lose, nor sin our way out of, God's forgiveness
 - That's the promise of the New Covenant
- Meanwhile, we are called to live for the goal of pleasing the Lord, seeking to keep His commandments the best we can
 - We cooperate with the Spirit to put away sin and conform our lives to the word of God
 - Nevertheless, along the way of life, we will all make mistakes
 - But the Lord, being loving and merciful toward His children, will give us time to repent and the opportunity to come back into obedience
 - He's our perfect Father above, but don't mistake His patience for disinterest or approval
- If we go on sinning willfully, eventually He may act to correct us, as He is doing here with Israel
 - The severity of His response in this case was a direct result of the severity of Israel's sin and the length of time He gave them
 - Which suggests a simple principle
 - The longer the Lord gives us to repent and return, the more severe the consequence will be if we don't return
 - Though our salvation and eternal glory is never at risk, we ought not test the Lord to see what He's prepared to do when we spurn His patience
- After all we've read about Israel's judgment, we still find a few new things in this passage
 - In vs.12-13 the Lord says He will take from Israel all their wealth
 - He says neither the buyer nor seller will be able to rejoice
 - He's referring to unique circumstances of commerce in the days between the second and third battles of Jerusalem
 - After Nebuchadnezzar's first two assaults on the city, land owners in Judah began to worry about their future prospects
 - They couldn't be sure they would be around to enjoy the land
 - So they began to sell their land hoping to obtain something they could take with them or perhaps hide until the Babylonians were gone

- With everyone looking to sell, the value of property began to drop
- So that even the seller who found a buyer would mourn the prospect of giving up valuable land at fire-sale prices
- Naturally those willing to buy the land despite the uncertain future, were rejoicing at the good fortune
 - They obtained land for a fraction of its value
 - They hoped they would avoid exile and could use the cheap land to make a tidy profit
- But both seller and buyer were working on an assumption that despite the troubles, Israel would continue on
 - A buyer only rejoices if he assumes he will be able to use the land he purchased
 - And a seller only mourns if he assumes someone else will be profiting on his misfortune
- But neither assumption was true
 - The Law of Israel stipulated that land could only be sold for 49 years, at which point it returns to the original owner
 - But the Lord says in v.13 that the seller will not regain the property for as long as both he and the buyer live
 - The Lord is saying that the entire nation would remain outside their land for generations
- Which means the Lord will strip the people of their source of power and strength
 - Remember, I said the Lord is systematically tearing down the nation's three sources of blessing as given in the Abrahamic Covenant
 - The Lord is judging Israel's people, their land (high places), and their prosperity or strength as the chief nation
 - Remember, these promises are reserved for those who share in Abraham's faith, and ultimately they are fulfilled in the kingdom
 - In the meantime, the nation could experience a foretaste of these things so long as they obeyed the Old Covenant
 - Since they disobeyed that covenant, the Lord is removing these blessings from earthly Israel, including taking their strength

Ezek. 7:14 'They have blown the trumpet and made everything ready, but no one is going to the battle, for My wrath is against all their multitude.

Ezek. 7:15 'The sword is outside and the plague and the famine are within. He who is in the field will die by the sword; famine and the plague will also consume those in the city.

Ezek. 7:16 'Even when their survivors escape, they will be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, each over his own iniquity.

Ezek. 7:17 'All hands will hang limp and all knees will become like water.

Ezek. 7:18 ‘They will gird themselves with sackcloth and shuddering will overwhelm them; and shame will be on all faces and baldness on all their heads.

Ezek. 7:19 ‘They will fling their silver into the streets and their gold will become an abhorrent thing; their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord. They cannot satisfy their appetite nor can they fill their stomachs, for their iniquity has become an occasion of stumbling.

Ezek. 7:20 ‘They transformed the beauty of His ornaments into pride, and they made the images of their abominations and their detestable things with it; therefore I will make it an abhorrent thing to them.

Ezek. 7:21 ‘I will give it into the hands of the foreigners as plunder and to the wicked of the earth as spoil, and they will profane it.

Ezek. 7:22 ‘I will also turn My face from them, and they will profane My secret place; then robbers will enter and profane it.

Ezek. 7:23 ‘Make the chain, for the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence.

Ezek. 7:24 ‘Therefore, I will bring the worst of the nations, and they will possess their houses. I will also make the pride of the strong ones cease, and their holy places will be profaned.

Ezek. 7:25 ‘When anguish comes, they will seek peace, but there will be none.

Ezek. 7:26 ‘Disaster will come upon disaster and rumor will be added to rumor; then they will seek a vision from a prophet, but the law will be lost from the priest and counsel from the elders.

Ezek. 7:27 ‘The king will mourn, the prince will be clothed with horror, and the hands of the people of the land will tremble. According to their conduct I will deal with them, and by their judgments I will judge them. And they will know that I am the Lord.’”

- We’ll summarize this section in 4 points
 - First, the Lord takes their strength to fight and defeat their enemies
 - In vs.14-15 He says the nation will meet Babylon for battle
 - But in the end, no one will go into battle
 - Historically, this is exactly what happened
 - As the Babylonians approached Jerusalem, they killed every Jew who came against the army so that there was no army outside the walls
 - And within the city, the population withered away from famine
 - By the time the Babylonians entered the city, Israel had no strength left to fight
 - The Lord says this will happen because God will bring it to pass
 - Secondly, the survivors will lack the strength of protection and comfort
 - They will be left like doves, exposed and defenseless and mourning

- The experience will leave them limp
- They will dress in rough sackcloth to indicate mourning
- And they will proceed into the nations bearing shame for having been so utterly defeated and humbled
- Thirdly, the strength of their wealth will fail them
 - Ezekiel says in v.19 that the people will throw their gold and silver treasures on the ground
 - Gold and silver can't buy freedom from an army intent on conquest
 - And they can't buy food when there is no food to purchase
 - Moreover, the Lord says in v.20 that these precious objects were made from materials stolen from the temple
 - So the people of Israel stole the objects from the temple and used the materials to make idols and other objects for themselves
 - These objects were detestable to the Lord
 - So now He will act to make their contraband abhorrent to them
 - What they once treasured will become plunder for their enemies
 - In v.22 the Lord says He will allow robbers to plunder the temple
 - After all, the Lord's own people had already profaned the place, so it was a small matter to allow Gentiles to do the same
- Fourthly and finally, the Lord will withdraw from Israel the strength of His counsel and protection
 - In the end, this was the only true source of strength in Israel
 - As the Lord Himself declared in the Law:

Deut. 7:6 “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Deut. 7:7 “The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, **Deut. 7:8** but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

- Israel was nothing apart from the Lord's choice to make them strong for His name's sake
- But now the Lord is bringing that to an end for a time
- He says in v.23 “make the chain”, referring to the way the people were led into captivity
 - The Babylonians chained prisoners together, often using rings through the nose or elsewhere

- They would be subjected to humiliation at the hands of Gentiles
- And not just any Gentile nation, but the “worst” of the nations, Babylon, would occupy the land and the houses of Israel
- Through all this God would bring an end to Israel’s pride and arrogance
 - Where before the Lord was long-suffering, waiting for the people of God to repent and cry out, and willing to show mercy...
 - The time has passed for mercy
 - In v.25 the Lord says when they cry out in anguish for peace, there will be none
 - Disaster will follow disaster
- Perhaps worst of all, the people will suddenly want to hear from God
 - In v.26 He says they will seek for a vision from a prophet or a word from the Lord, but there will be none
 - The Law will be lost from the priest and from the counsel of the elders
 - The people will have silence from the Lord
 - And even what He had revealed earlier will be taken from them
 - They will lose the strength of knowing His counsel leaving them truly alone and without hope
 - Kings will mourn
 - The people will tremble
 - And all they receive will be according to what they themselves have done, the Lord says in v.27
 - So that after it comes upon them, they will know Who they offended
- I think these four steps are a general pattern for the Lord’s discipline of His people
 - When we live in open rebellion to Him and His word, He waits patiently for our repentance
 - But when the time comes for Him to act, He moves in stages
 - First, He removes our protection from attack
 - Attacks come to test our heart and to awaken us to the error of our choices
 - If that doesn’t work, He removes our comfort, those things we rely upon to compensate for the unfulfilling emptiness of our sin
 - He’ll take our peace
 - He’ll take our security and reputation
 - He’ll take our possessions
 - He’ll take away our pride
 - He will strip away those things that stand between us and obedience
 - And if that doesn’t work, He will move to our physical strength

- He'll bring us ailments, weaknesses
- He calls into question the permanence of this body hoping we'll give consideration to the eternal
- Nothing leads a person to thinking about God and the eternal more than coming face-to-face with the frailties of our own body
- Finally, if all else fails, the Lord will cut us off from the counsel of His people and His word
 - We find ourselves wandering in the desert spiritually
 - We will be left to the world's counsel absent the support of the church
 - Paul invokes this penalty in at least one occasion for the sinner in Corinth who was engaged in particularly offense sin
- While I don't believe this is a firm rule, I do see the pattern in scripture
 - For example, as the Lord chose to test Job, He followed this same pattern
 - First God permitted the spiritual attack from Satan
 - Secondly, He permitted the removal of Job's possessions
 - Thirdly, He permitted Job to experience physical weaknesses
 - Finally, the Lord removed His counsel for a time, causing Job to turn to three clueless friends for counsel
 - God brought these things to Job because he was obedient, but He may do similar things to those children who are disobedient
 - Like we said there's a hard way to learn, and an easy way
 - The easy way is to take full advantage of the Lord's mercy and long-suffering patience by repenting before these things come to pass
 - Or even after they have started, bring them to an end by seeking forgiveness
 - Don't force the Lord's hand

- Today we start a new division of the book of Ezekiel
 - The storyline is changing in dramatic ways
 - Previously, we studied how Ezekiel was commissioned and called as a prophet in the midst of Judah's exile
 - And how the Lord asked Ezekiel to communicate difficult news through pantomime and with strong words
 - This morning we begin a four-chapter section that explains why and how the glory of God departs from Israel's temple
 - Chapters 8-9 give the reasons why God's glory must depart
 - And Chapters 10-11 explain His departure in several stages
 - It's a fascinating account for several reasons, but especially because it illustrates the Lord's patience with His children
 - And it foreshadows the Lord's ultimate plan to redeem Israel
 - That's a fact we need to keep in the back of our minds as we move through the early chapters of this book
 - The bad news comes up front in Ezekiel's book, but the back end of this book is all good news
 - The Lord sends His people away for a time so that He may bring them to glory in the end
- So let's get started in Chapter 8, which begins with God's explanation to Ezekiel for why His glory must depart the temple in Jerusalem

Ezek. 8:1 It came about in the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month, as I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord God fell on me there.

Ezek. 8:2 Then I looked, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of a man; from His loins and downward there was the appearance of fire, and from His loins and upward the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of glowing metal.

Ezek. 8:3 He stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was located.

Ezek. 8:4 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain.

Ezek. 8:5 Then He said to me, "Son of man, raise your eyes now toward the north." So I raised my eyes toward the north, and behold, to the north of the altar gate was this idol of jealousy at the entrance.

Ezek. 8:6 And He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the

great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, so that I would be far from My sanctuary? But yet you will see still greater abominations.”

- For a second time, Ezekiel receives an audience with the glory of God
 - The prophet dates the event precisely, which helps us understand the setting much better
 - He says this happened in the sixth year on the fifth day of the sixth month
 - Remember, these dates are all in relation to the original date given at the start of the book
 - Chapter 1 is dated to the fifth month of the fifth year of exile
 - That means these events are happening with ten days remaining in Ezekiel's fourteen-month duty of laying on his side
 - So he's still on his side next to the model of Jerusalem's siege
 - But he's not alone
 - The elders of Judah have assembled around him
 - These elders are the ruling men of the tribe of Judah, a government in exile
 - So it would seem that Ezekiel's antics worked as intended
 - He got Israel's attention for the message
 - Though the elders probably haven't been persuaded concerning their sinful ways, at least they're listening
 - That's all the Lord expected for now...but as we'll soon see, He has more to say about these elders
- In that moment, Ezekiel experiences the hand of the Lord “falling” on him again
 - Ezekiel has another personal moment with the glory of God, something we can't possibly appreciate beyond what little Ezekiel provides
 - He sees a “likeness” of man
 - By likeness, Ezekiel means it wasn't literally a man though the character shared similarities
 - The “man” had fire for a lower body and bright glowing metal for his upper half
 - What Ezekiel saw was a representation of God, something the Bible calls the Shechinah glory of God
 - As we discussed in Chapter 1, the Shechinah glory of God is *not* God but rather a physical manifestation of the invisible God
 - You might compare it to a flag fluttering in the wind
 - We can't see the wind...it's invisible
 - But we can see the movement of the flag which tells us that wind is present in that moment

- Likewise, this manifestation isn't God but it tells us that God is present in this place
- Jewish rabbinical teaching has always struggled with any suggestion that God can manifest Himself in human form
 - In fact, one rabbi famously taught that Jews were not allowed to reflect on Ezekiel 8:2 because it suggested something offensive
 - Naturally, then, the Pharisees were especially offended when Jesus equated Himself with God
 - But the rabbis failed to appreciate that these OT manifestations were not God Himself and therefore they did not diminish God
 - God merely manifested himself as a cloud and a burning bush and lightening and as a dove to communicate His presence, not His form
 - And if God can manifest Himself using these lesser members of Creation, then certainly He can take the form of Man; His greatest creation?
- So having appeared to Ezekiel, the Lord now directs Ezekiel's attention back to Jerusalem to witness events taking place at the temple
 - In v.3 the Lord catches hold of Ezekiel by a lock of hair on his head
 - Then the Spirit lifted him up between earth and heaven, which means in the air between the ground and the stars
 - But this was not a literal lifting, because Ezekiel says he was brought to Jerusalem in visions of God
 - We might say the Lord took hold of Ezekiel's attention
 - This moment is a perfect example of the ministry of the Holy Spirit
 - The Holy Spirit plays a specific role in the Godhead
 - He works in the hearts and minds of mankind to direct our attention to the things of God
 - Spiritually speaking, the Spirit literally takes hold of us
 - First, He calls us into a relationship with Jesus, gifting us to serve our Lord and sealing us for our day of redemption
 - Next, He brings us the revelation of God from the word of God
 - Things we could never see or know unless and until the Lord revealed them to us
 - Finally, He encourages and empowers our hearts into obedience to things we learn
 - He convicts us of our sin and strengthens us for our walk with Christ
 - Previously, we saw the Spirit come upon Ezekiel calling him into service and equipping him for his mission as a prophet
 - Now, Ezekiel is experiencing the Spirit in His role as revealer and teacher
 - The Spirit is revealing things to Ezekiel that he couldn't have known otherwise

- The Spirit takes Ezekiel to the north gate of the inner court of the temple in Jerusalem
 - Solomon's temple was a large ornate building on top of Mt Moriah in Jerusalem
 - The building itself was a tall rectangular structure with a single entrance facing East
 - Around that building was a fence creating an inner courtyard
 - That courtyard had gates at various points around, including a gate on the north side
 - About 60 years before Israel's captivity, an evil king named Manasseh set up a pagan idol at the entrance of this northern gate

2Kings 21:1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Hephzibah.

2Kings 21:2 He did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord dispossessed before the sons of Israel.

2Kings 21:7 Then he set the carved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which the Lord said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever.

- Notice that as the Lord shows Ezekiel this idol, He refers to it as the idol of jealousy
- He means this idol has provoked the Lord to jealousy for Israel's worship
- Jealousy seems like an odd word when applied to God, because we commonly use the word jealousy to describe a sinful human response
 - Therefore it seems out of place to describe God as jealous, yet we remember the Lord Himself said He was a jealous God

Ex. 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

Ex. 20:4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

Ex. 20:5 "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Ex. 20:6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

- Jealousy can be a sinful response or it can be a righteous response
 - Coveting for something we are not entitled to have is sinful jealousy
 - Desiring for something we have every right to possess is a righteous jealousy

- So when a man covets another man's wife, his jealousy is sinful
- But when that woman's husband reacts to the other man's advances in jealousy, that's righteous jealousy
- The Lord is jealous for His people, and He has every reason to expect us to give Him our affections, our worship and praise, and our faithfulness
 - He has given us everything
 - He loved us before we knew Him
 - He pledged Himself to us in the blood of His Son and gave us the downpayment of His Spirit
 - He has lifted us up with Christ in the heavenly place, assuring us a part in Christ's inheritance
 - He has done all of this to praise of His glory
 - So yes, He has every reason to ask for our devotion and faithfulness in return
 - In a day to come, when we are glorified in the Lord's presence, it will never dawn on us to give our attention to anyone or anything else
 - We will be captivated by His glory, His love, His wisdom and His power,
 - We will worship Him exclusively in joy
 - The Bible even describes you and me, as we're engaged in that worship

Rev. 4:8 And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come."

Rev. 4:9 And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever,

Rev. 4:10 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

Rev. 4:11 "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

- That scene describes a future event, a time when you and I will be present in the throne room of God
 - And as you hear, we will be engaged in full-throated worship of the Lord
 - No distractions, no hesitation, no worries over who is watching
 - And no temptation to worship anyone or anything else
 - But for now, we will struggle in our dedication to the Lord from time to time
- When we do stray, it's usually because we've put something between us and the Lord

- Some person or desire or pursuit becomes a greater attraction to our heart than knowing and serving and pleasing the Lord
- In Manasseh's day, worshippers seeking the true God had to first pass by that false god standing at the northern gate
- That idol was their distraction, a diversion that became a stumbling block
- Therefore, it offended the living God who says He will not share His glory with anyone
 - Notice Ezekiel says specifically in v.4 that the glory of God was in this place
 - He's referring to the Shechinah glory of God occupying the temple in the Holy of Holies
 - This is one of the greatest honors Israel has ever known: the glory of God dwelling among the people of Israel
 - The glory of God first occupied the tabernacle of Israel while Israel was in the desert with Moses
 - In fact the word Shechinah in Hebrew is similar to the phrase "I will dwell"
 - The Shechinah glory of God is His presence dwelling among men, and Israel was honored and blessed by that presence
 - Later when Solomon built the tabernacle, the glory of God moved from the tabernacle to the Holy of Holies in the temple

1Kings 8:10 It happened that when the priests came from the holy place, the cloud filled the house of the Lord,

1Kings 8:11 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.

1Kings 8:12 Then Solomon said,

"The Lord has said that He would dwell in the thick cloud.

1Kings 8:13 **"I have surely built You a lofty house,
A place for Your dwelling forever."**

- Solomon's prayer was for the glory of the Lord to forever occupy the magnificent temple he built, but that was not to be
- At this point in history, the glory of the Lord has remained in the Holy of Holies since the days of Solomon, about 340 years
- Even more remarkable, the Lord remained in His sanctuary despite one abomination after another
 - I believe the Lord points out His presence in the temple to Ezekiel to make the point that the Lord is indeed long-suffering with His people
 - The Lord is long-suffering with us too
 - And we should take great comfort in knowing that; He doesn't give up on us or walk away from us
 - But don't take His presence in your life for granted

- God wasn't giving up on Israel either
- But He is prepared to withdraw His presence for a time
- We'll talk more about that consequence when we get to Chapters 10-11
- For now, the Lord wants Ezekiel to see the full extent of Israel's abominations so that when He acts, there can be no doubt that His judgment was justified
 - The Lord shows Ezekiel five examples of the sin Israel committed in His presence in the temple
 - Beginning with this idol standing by the north gate
 - The north gate was the gate through which animal sacrifices entered into the court of the temple
 - As a result, the idol has defiled the temple court and the sacrifices that entered into it
 - Certainly, Ezekiel would have known of this idol standing in the temple and I'm sure he disapproved of it
 - But now he's learning how much the Lord despised it too
 - The Lord says that this idol is forcing the Lord to be far from His sanctuary
 - The Lord's glory cannot be united with idolatry, as Paul says

2Cor. 6:16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,

"I will dwell in them and walk among them;

And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

2Cor. 6:17 "Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord.

"And do not touch what is unclean;

And I will welcome you.

- God says this idol was reason enough for God's glory to depart the temple
 - But the abominations continued...

Ezek. 8:7 Then He brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall.

Ezek. 8:8 He said to me, "Son of man, now dig through the wall." So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance.

Ezek. 8:9 And He said to me, "Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here."

Ezek. 8:10 So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around.

Ezek. 8:11 Standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them, each man with his censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising.

Ezek. 8:12 Then He said to me, “Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, ‘The Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the land.’”

Ezek. 8:13 And He said to me, “Yet you will see still greater abominations which they are committing.”

- Ezekiel is led through a hole in the wall into a room in the temple compound
 - It appears as if this entrance was secret and known to only a few
 - But God reveals this entrance to Ezekiel
 - And inside Ezekiel witnesses a crowd worshipping every creeping and detestable thing carved on walls
 - Not just any pagan gods, but gods in the form of creatures declared unclean in the Law
 - These were likely Egyptian gods, since Egypt uniquely patterned their gods after such creatures
 - And even worse, the worshippers were led by Israel’s seventy elders
 - The ruling class of the nation leading a secret society of evil operating in a dark room in the temple compound
 - They thought their secret satanic cult was secret
 - They told themselves the Lord didn’t know either
 - They declared the Lord had forsaken the land
 - But as I’ve said, when you feel God isn’t around, it isn’t because God moved away...it’s because you did!
- This second abomination is greater than the first because it involved worship of Egyptian gods by Israel’s leaders
 - Remember the Lord formed this nation in the beginning by a great exodus out of Egypt defeating those gods through great plagues
 - And now the leadership have returned full circle to worshipping those same idols while doing it inside the Lord’s house
- But there is more...

Ezek. 8:14 Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the Lord’s house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.

Ezek. 8:15 He said to me, “Do you see this, son of man? Yet you will see still greater

abominations than these.”

- Now the Lord brings Ezekiel one step deeper into the temple, going past the north gate and into the inner court
 - At this entrance, women were seated weeping over Tammuz
 - Tammuz is an ancient pagan god
 - He goes by various names among different ancient cultures
 - Tammuz is also known as Adonis among the Greeks
 - Worship of Tammuz was essentially worship of nature, something we might call New Age today
 - He was the god of spring vegetation, so he was known as the dying and rising god
 - For just as spring vegetation dies in the fall and rises again in the spring
 - This abomination is worse than the previous idolatry because worship of Tammuz involved use of prostitutes in the temple
 - The women were weeping as part of their act as prostitutes
 - They wept as a display to invite a man to take them
 - So clearly, this perversion is worse than idolatry by itself
- But a worse abomination follows...

Ezek. 8:16 Then He brought me into the inner court of the Lord’s house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun.

- Now the Lord has taken Ezekiel to the doorway of the temple building beyond the altar
 - In this area of the temple, only the priests of Israel were permitted to stand, so these men must be priests
 - And these priest of the God of Israel are standing with the backs to the temple and facing east as the sun rises
 - And they are worshipping the sun as it rises
 - Moreover, at any given time there were exactly 24 priests serving in the temple
 - So because Ezekiel sees 25 priests, this means that the high priest of Israel has also joined in this sun worship
 - The door of the temple always faced east, so entry into the temple required moving from east to west
 - You may remember that in scripture the direction east stands for sin while the

direction west stands for holiness

- Therefore, facing east means turning toward sin and away from God
- And they worshipped the sun, which was specifically prohibited in the law
- Now we see a further progression of sin, from the common people to the leaders to those who serve in the temple including the priests and high priest
 - Any one of these sins was reason enough for the glory of God to leave the temple, but He waited patiently for Israel to repent
 - But now the time has come for the Lord's glory to depart from the temple
 - As the Lord announces to Ezekiel

Ezek. 8:17 He said to me, “Do you see this, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose.

Ezek. 8:18 “Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them.”

- The Lord asks rhetorically are these offenses too light to deserve the Lord's response?
 - Obviously they are not too light
 - In fact, they are well deserving of a response
 - But when you think about it, what response do they deserve?
 - Don't they deserve complete destruction? Don't they warrant the Lord completely turning His back on Israel forever?
- The Lord even says they are putting the twig to their nose, which is a colloquialism of that day
 - It was an obscene gesture in that day and it represented mocking someone
 - Israel is mocking God, daring God to respond
 - Bringing such sin right to the doorstep of the temple and daring God to do something about it
- In light of that arrogance, God would have every right to wipe them out
 - But He doesn't do that, despite what replacement theology may try to say
 - Yes the Lord acts in wrath and judgment, especially against this generation, as He says in v.18
 - But He doesn't wipe out Israel
- In future chapters we will see the Lord promising not to bring Israel to its end
 - In Jeremiah, who wrote about the same period of history, the Lord says:

Jer. 29:11 ‘For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.

- What kind of God is so loving and patient and merciful that He could speak to Israel in that way even in the midst of her sin?
- He’s the same God we serve, the same God ready to forgive us and grant us another chance to please Him
- He is the same God Who is faithful to us...even when we are faithless

- You'll remember that last week we began a new section in Ezekiel
 - We're studying how the Shechinah glory of God left the temple
 - The glory of the Lord set up residence within Solomon's temple over 300 years earlier
 - But now the time has come for Him to depart on account of Israel's repeated offenses against Him
 - Last week in Chapter 8 we learned the actions that have offended the Lord and caused Him to depart
 - In a vision, the Lord showed Ezekiel five abominations Israel committed in the house of the Lord
 - All five involved the worst kind of adultery and ungodliness
 - Any one of those offenses were reason enough by itself for the Lord to depart, since His glory will not reside alongside idols
 - So we can certainly understand why, collectively, these five offenses prompted the Lord to act
 - Now this week we move to part two of the four part story
 - In Chapter 9 the Lord's glory begins its movement out of the temple
 - But His glory departs in stages, taking measured steps along the way
 - The first stage of that departure is described in Chapter 9 while the second through third stages are described in Chapters 10-11
- But today's chapter also features a strong, and even disturbing battle scene
 - The battle scene is the major feature of this chapter but it's not an actual battle
 - It's a picture of what the Lord will do and why
 - Let's begin with the first couple of verses

Ezek. 9:1 Then He cried out in my hearing with a loud voice saying, "Draw near, O executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand."

Ezek. 9:2 Behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each with his shattering weapon in his hand; and among them was a certain man clothed in linen with a writing case at his loins. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar.

- The chapter begins with the word "then" indicating that this is the next thing Ezekiel sees following the events of the prior chapter
 - So this scene is a continuation of the one we studied in Chapter 8
 - In that chapter we learned that Ezekiel was transported to Jerusalem in a vision of God
 - He didn't actually go anywhere

- He's experiencing these things as a vision, like a supernatural movie
- So the events in this chapter are not happening in real-time
 - For example, the abominations described in Chapter 8 were probably events from the past
 - Likewise, the scene depicted in this chapter is revealing things to come in future years
 - But even then, the events of Chapter 9 never happen in exactly the way they are portrayed here
 - So this is a vision that foretells future events but uses symbolic actors to represent real things
- The scene begins with a loud voice crying for executioners to draw near to the city and temple
 - In response to the call, six men enter the temple through the upper gate that faces north
 - The north wall of the temple court had two northern entrances
 - We studied one of those entrances last week, where the idol was erected by the evil king Manasseh
 - The second was the upper gate in the northeast corner of the temple compound at the highest point of the temple mount
 - Today, that would be the area of the Damascus gate
 - Each of these men held a weapon in his hand
 - In v.1 the weapon is called a destroying weapon, or in Hebrew, a *machete*
 - But in v.2 it's called a shattering weapon, or in Hebrew, a *mappatz* or hammer
 - It seems Ezekiel isn't exactly sure how to describe what he sees
 - That's our first clue that these aren't mere men, but are angels
 - There's something supernatural about them
 - Their appearance is like men, but they carry strange weapons
 - And they hear and obey the call of the Lord to do His work in the city
 - We'll see even greater evidence of their angelic powers later
- Among them was another man, a seventh, wearing white linen and carrying a writing case strapped to his side
 - This man carries no weapon and is dressed in a peculiar way
 - First, he carries a writing case (sometimes called an inkhorn)
 - The small box had holes for holding reed pens, with an ink-holder at one end of the case
 - These were usually made of bone, hardwood or silver, and richly ornamented
 - Inkhorns were carried in the waistband of a tunic by high officials or scribes

- Secondly, this man is dressed in white linen
 - Linen was the required clothing of the priests of Israel, suggesting this man serves a priestly function
 - His dress is similar to another enigmatic character mentioned elsewhere in the Bible
 - In Daniel 10 & 12 a man appears dressed in linen floating above a river
 - In studying those chapters of Daniel, we come to learn the man in linen is a pre-incarnate Jesus Christ
- And so it would be reasonable and appropriate to make the same conclusion here
 - Especially since we know Jesus is our High Priest, our intercessor and mediator before God
 - But what of the writing box...well, we need to read a little further to put it all together

Ezek. 9:3 Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case.

Ezek. 9:4 The Lord said to him, “Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst.”

Ezek. 9:5 But to the others He said in my hearing, “Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare.

Ezek. 9:6 “Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary.” So they started with the elders who were before the temple.

Ezek. 9:7 And He said to them, “Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!” Thus they went out and struck down the people in the city.

- Here we have the first movement of the glory of God
 - In the Holy of Holies of the temple stood the ark of the covenant
 - On the top of this golden chest were carved statues of two cherubim in gold
 - These two angels spread their golden wings over the center of the chest forming a space underneath
 - In that space the glory of God would appear
 - The glory of God filled the holy of Holies with light
 - In fact, it was the only light in the Holy of Holies
 - The plans for the tabernacle never provided for a lamp or light of any kind in the Holy of Holies
 - Because the Lord knew His light would be there

- Except now in v.3 the Lord's glory departs the Holy of Holies
 - It goes up to rest for a time on the threshold of the temple
 - The threshold is the doorstep leading into the temple building, into the Holy Place
 - So the glory moved out of the Holy of Holies, past the veil, through the length of the Holy Place
 - Then it exited the door of the temple and stopped at the threshold
- This is the last time in the history of Israel thus far that the glory of God dwelled in the Holy of Holies of the temple
 - Never again did God's glory occupy this part of the Second Temple
 - Forever after when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, he entered a pitch black dark room
- As I mentioned the glory of God is departing the temple, but it does so in stages
 - We might ask why God moves in this manner, moving slowly, residing from place to place
 - Why doesn't His glory just leave in an instant?
 - The answer is this movement of the glory of God serves as a shadow of Christ
 - We'll take a closer look at that connection as we go along in these chapters
- As the glory rests on the threshold, the voice calls to the man in linen commanding Him to go throughout Jerusalem marking foreheads
 - Now we understand why he carries an inkhorn
 - He is to mark the men of the city who sigh and groan over the abominations committed in their midst
 - Obviously, sighing and groaning are disapproving responses to these things
 - So these are men (and women) who disapprove of Israel's idolatry
 - In other words, they are God-fearing and faithful to Yahweh, which means they are the remnant of Israel
 - And as the remnant, they are being protected by this marking against the coming judgment
 - The Lord is providing protection for His people even as He prepares to bring judgment to the ungodly of Israel
 - This passage is a good example of an important biblical principle at work
 - Whenever the Lord acts by His wrath against ungodliness, He will protect His children from His judgments
 - Peter puts it this way:

2Pet. 2:4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;

2Pet. 2:5 and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

2Pet. 2:6 and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter;

2Pet. 2:7 and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men

2Pet. 2:8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds),

2Pet. 2:9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,

- Peter uses two examples of God's judgment from the Old Testament to contrast how the Lord deals with the ungodly vs. the godly
 - To the ungodly angels who sinned in the days of Noah, He cast them into hell
 - To the ungodly men on the earth, he brought the flood
 - But He preserved the godly family of Noah
 - The Lord condemned the perverse and ungodly cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction as an example
 - But He rescued righteous Lot who lived among them
 - Therefore, Peter concludes the Lord knows ways to rescue the godly while holding the ungodly accountable
 - But notice also the differences between Noah and Lot
 - In Noah's case, the Lord provided a rescue for a godly man who clearly desired to escape the coming flood
 - But in Lot's case, the Lord provided a rescue for Lot even though Lot was tempted to remain in the city and wasn't heeding the call to leave
 - So Peter concludes that the Lord is so determined and powerful to protect His people from judgment that He even rescues us from temptation
 - Of course, Peter's not promising that God removes all our temptations
 - But he is teaching that when our temptations threaten to leave us vulnerable to God's judgments, He will intervene for His own name's sake
 - The Lord will never be seen to judge wrongly, as Abraham reminded him shortly before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

Gen. 18:25 "Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"

- Paul tells us in Romans 8 that we who are in Christ Jesus by faith have no condemnation
 - You and I have been likewise marked on our forehead, spiritually-speaking
 - Though we still have sin, we are not condemned for it because Christ has taken that condemnation for us
 - And though the Enemy may accuse us and others may condemn us...and we may even condemn ourselves at times
 - Nevertheless the Lord does not condemn us now, nor will He ever condemn us because of His Son's payment for us
 - So while you and I may not have visible marks on our bodies, the Lord knows who His sheep are and He will protect us from His wrath
 - Meanwhile, we live in the days of Ezekiel, times of great sin, and our world is growing more ungodly by the day, as Paul said it would
 - The ungodly world collectively thumbs its nose at God daring Him to do something about it
 - We who have God's law written on our hearts will sigh and groan over what we see around us
 - We should also be fearful for sooner or later the Lord must respond
 - And scripture says one day He will...
 - But before He brings judgment on the ungodly, the Bible teaches that the Lord will provide protection to the godly
 - In a moment commonly called the Rapture, the Lord will claim His people from the earth, removing us from harm's way
 - Then judgment comes like a thief in the night upon those who remain behind
 - We could call that day our great escape, and it reveals the lengths God is prepared to go to protect His people
 - Later during the Tribulation, the Lord provides yet another escape for the believing remnant of Israel enduring those days on earth
 - The Bible says the Lord will escort believing Israel into the wilderness to a place of protection called Petra
 - In this place, the remnant will be held in safety for 3.5 years until the end of the Tribulation judgments
 - Here again is another example of the power of God to protect His people
- So now, in Jerusalem God commands the "Man" in linen to inscribe the few believers in the city with a mark of protection
 - The fact that the man in linen is doing the marking is another confirmation that He is Christ
 - The Bible tells us that the Lord is the One Who marks us for eternal life and preserves us from condemnation
 - Speaking to the church in Revelation, Jesus says

Rev. 3:4 ‘But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

Rev. 3:5 ‘He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

- **Jesus is the Great Scribe Who writes our name in the book of life**

- Elsewhere in Revelation that same book is called the book of life of the Lamb
- It’s His book and He is its Scribe
- And those He records in His book of life can never be erased
- Having marked those who are God’s, the time has come to bring judgment upon the city, so in vs.5-6 the Lord commands the other six to show no pity
 - They are told to strike down every last person
 - There is no mercy shown no matter the gender or age
 - Old men, married women, young men, virgins, little children even
 - All who lack the mark are destroyed by this judgment
 - And it begins with the leaders in the sanctuary, moving outward from there
 - Historically, we know that the city of Jerusalem was not destroyed by six men, much less by six angels
 - It was destroyed by a Babylonian army of thousands
 - Therefore, these warrior angels are a representation of that coming judgment
 - Notice these angels come into the temple from the northeast entrance
 - Babylon is northeast of Jerusalem and their armies came from that direction as well
 - Furthermore, the Babylonian army accomplished a destruction that matches the orders given to the angels
 - When the Babylonians attacked the city following their long final siege, they showed no mercy
 - They killed indiscriminately, including the women and children
 - The only difference is that their killing didn’t happen with hammer-wielding angels
 - It happened with ordinary soldiers
 - So that’s how we should understand this vision given to Ezekiel
 - The Lord is explaining to the prophet that when this destruction comes upon the city, the Lord wasn’t unable to stop it or AWOL when it happened
 - Instead, He consecrated it

- This was His doing by means of the Babylonian army
- So how do we understand God's decision to take the lives of even the very young?
 - Naturally it concerns us to see women and children dying as a result of the Lord's order, doesn't it?
 - We assume the children are innocent by virtue of their age
 - And we assume that many of the women and even the men were not personally responsible for these abominations
 - So then we wonder why they are caught up in the destruction?
 - First, the entire city has been polluted by the sin of a few
 - And when a society embraces ungodliness, everyone in that society is at risk
 - Because God is not a respecter of persons and doesn't grade on the curve
 - Therefore, all of the city must suffer the penalty, as the Lord declared in His word

Ex. 20:4 “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

Ex. 20:5 “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Ex. 20:6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

- Furthermore, a person's age and status doesn't change the fundamental question of whether they are deserving of God's wrath or not
 - We may see young people of the city and those who played no part in the abominations as innocent in some sense
 - But the reality is, each person is still guilty of his or her own sin and ungodliness
- And so when God acts against unbelievers He is just, regardless of their age
 - It makes no difference whether a person is 1 or 5 or 50 or 100...if that person is not of faith, then they are not righteous
 - We know the Lord has already marked those in the city who were of faith, including some women and children
 - Therefore, those who are left are the unrighteous
- Notice the Lord says in v.5 that “the others” were to be destroyed, meaning those who were not His by faith
 - This is the way the Lord works routinely
 - Remember the Lord ordered Joshua to destroy whole cities of Canaanites, including women and children, when Israel took the land
 - And the tenth judgment against Egypt resulted in the first born of every Egyptian

dying, including many children

- And in Tribulation the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments will take the lives of uncountable numbers of all ages
- Ezekiel has a similar concern, as evidenced by his next statement

Ezek. 9:8 As they were striking the people and I alone was left, I fell on my face and cried out saying, “Alas, Lord God! Are You destroying the whole remnant of Israel by pouring out Your wrath on Jerusalem?”

Ezek. 9:9 Then He said to me, “The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is very, very great, and the land is filled with blood and the city is full of perversion; for they say, ‘The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see!’

Ezek. 9:10 “But as for Me, My eye will have no pity nor will I spare, but I will bring their conduct upon their heads.”

Ezek. 9:11 Then behold, the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case reported, saying, “I have done just as You have commanded me.”

- Ezekiel is distraught, and in effect he asks the Lord if He was intent on destroying all Israel
 - He says, are you destroying the remnant?
 - Remember, the remnant is the Bible’s word for the faithful believing people of Israel
 - The Bible says the Lord will always preserve a remnant within Israel
 - No matter how bad things get, there will always be believing Jews on earth somewhere
 - But because the Lord’s order to destroy the city is so comprehensive, Ezekiel wonders if anyone will be left when it’s over
 - The irony is Ezekiel is one of the remnant
 - Remember, the city has already seen two sieges before this moment
 - And in each conflict, the Babylonians moved some of the population into Babylon
 - This was the means the Lord used to preserve His remnant
 - He kept them safe in captivity in Babylon
 - These are the one’s represented by the men marked on their foreheads
 - That mark meant that in the battle they wouldn’t be killed by the Babylonians
 - But that doesn’t mean they wouldn’t be captured or enslaved
 - So the Lord does not answer Ezekiel’s question in this moment, because the answer is self-evident: no
 - No, the Lord is not destroying the remnant, or else Ezekiel himself wouldn’t be

standing

- He is destroying the city and its walls
 - He will destroy His sanctuary after His glory departs
 - He will destroy the ungodly in the city
 - And He will preserve a remnant in captivity for a time
- If you are still struggling with the notion that there are no exceptions to God's judgments against ungodliness, then ask yourself why you're not worried about God taking exception in His promises of mercy to you?
 - After all, if you expect God to play favorites or make exceptions for the ungodly, then why shouldn't you expect Him to make exceptions for those of faith?
 - If some ungodly can escape judgment merely on God's whim, then perhaps some godly may still receive condemnation despite their faith?
 - You see, it must work both ways
 - If God is not perfect in His justice, then He cannot be perfect in His mercy
 - But it's because God is perfect in all ways that we can rest in the assurance of scripture
 - Because scripture says that by our faith in Jesus Christ we are assured eternal life with Him
 - Though we are all sinners, our sins have been washed clean by the blood of Christ who took the penalty for us
 - The Father set loose warring angels against His Son instead of against you and me
 - So that every human being is included in the plan of judgment one way or another

- Let's return to Ezekiel's vision of the movement of God's glory out of His temple
 - Last week in Chapter 9 the Lord's glory moved out of the Holy of Holies to the threshold of the temple
 - At the same time, Ezekiel saw a vision of the coming judgment for the people in Jerusalem
 - That scene continues today into Chapter 10
 - And we're going to see something familiar in Ezekiel's vision today
 - Because the cherubim with their wheels return

Ezek. 10:1 Then I looked, and behold, in the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim something like a sapphire stone, in appearance resembling a throne, appeared above them.

Ezek. 10:2 And He spoke to the man clothed in linen and said, "Enter between the whirling wheels under the cherubim and fill your hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim and scatter them over the city." And he entered in my sight.

Ezek. 10:3 Now the cherubim were standing on the right side of the temple when the man entered, and the cloud filled the inner court.

Ezek. 10:4 Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub to the threshold of the temple, and the temple was filled with the cloud and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the Lord.

Ezek. 10:5 Moreover, the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when He speaks.

- Ezekiel has just witnessed the destroying angels striking down the people in the city
 - It was a traumatic moment for the prophet
 - It caused him to ask the Lord in horror if He was putting all the remnant of Israel to death
 - It's the low point so far in the visions Ezekiel has seen
 - But from that moment, the scene changes again and in a profound way
 - Ezekiel looks up from the temple and the city to see that same heavenly expanse he saw in Chapter 1
 - The expanse held the throne of God, just as it did in Chapter 1
 - And below the expanse, upholding the the glory of God, are the same cherubim we saw in Chapter 1
 - You'll remember these strange creatures
 - They have four wings and four faces on a neck that doesn't turn
 - Their feet are like that of an ox and they move like lightning on strange wheels
 - Ezekiel will describe them again in detail for us later in this chapter

- Their reappearance at this moment reminds us that their assignment is to guard the glory of God
 - So it only make sense that as God's glory prepares to depart, the cherubim have arrived as escorts
 - But they also participate in the judging of the city
 - Notice the One on this exalted throne calls down to the man clothed in linen and gives him instructions
 - He's told to enter underneath the wheels of the cherubim to fill his hands with burning coals
 - Earlier in Chapter 1 Ezekiel described these coals

Ezek. 1:13 In the midst of the living beings there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings. The fire was bright, and lightning was flashing from the fire.

- Ezekiel said these burning coals were in the midst of the living beings
- And now in Chapter 10 he clarifies that the coal fire was inside the space created by the four wheels under the living beings
- Into this space, the man in linen (who I suggested was pre-incarnate Christ) reached to fill his hands with burning coals
 - Then he's told to scatter these coals on to the city
 - Scattering burning coals is a picture of God's judgment
 - Remember, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with fire and brimstone
 - And remember Paul when he wrote these words

Rom. 12:19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

Rom. 12:20 "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

- So here we're seeing the destruction of the city foretold in this vision
 - In the previous chapter Ezekiel's vision foretold the death of the city's residents apart from the remnant
 - Here we see the destruction of the structures and walls of the city
- Then Ezekiel broadens our view of the scene by changing our vantage point within his vision
 - He tells us that the cherubim were standing on the right side of the temple itself
 - He means on the south side of the building, looking east

- The south end of the Temple was the side facing the old city of David
- So they are stationed between the city as it's being destroyed and the holy temple where the glory of God dwells
- Once again, they have assumed the position of guarding the glory of God
 - As they stand guard, the man in linen enters the court of the temple
 - And in v.3 Ezekiel says that as this happens, the court is filled with the cloud
- The glory of the Lord is commonly pictured as either fire or a cloud
 - The people of Israel followed both in their desert wandering
 - At night they followed a pillar of fire which gave light in the dark
 - And in the day they followed a pillar of cloud which obscured the sun to give them shade in the desert heat
- So as the man in linen enters the courtyard, the presence of the Lord fills that space in the form of a cloud
 - This cloud forms in preparation to receive the Shechinah glory as it leaves the temple
 - Remember we read last week how the glory of the Lord moved from the Holy of Holies to the threshold of the temple
 - The threshold was the doorway of the temple leading into the open court
 - But now Ezekiel explains that movement again in more detail
 - In v.4 the glory of the Lord goes up from its place under the cherub on the mercy seat of the ark
 - It moves through the length of the Holy Place in the temple, Ezekiel says, and as it does the temple was filled with the cloud
 - And the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the Lord
 - You're watching a handoff, of sorts, taking place
 - The cloud comes in to escort the glory out
 - This gives us a better appreciation of how special the appearance of God's glory is
 - God's glory is so holy, so exalted, that it cannot be viewed in its fullness
 - It must be obscured by cloud from the eyes of sinful mankind
 - You may remember that Moses' face used to shine after an encounter with the glory of God in the tent of meeting
 - Moses' face was reflecting the glory of God, but even that reflection was too intense for sinful Israel to behold
 - So Moses took to wearing a veil when he stood before Israel to obscure the reflected glory of God
 - Even Moses himself couldn't behold the full glory of God on the mountain but had to be shielded from God's glory

- Finally, Ezekiel says the cherubim stand by beating their wings as if they are preparing to take off at any second
 - They make a sound like the Almighty God speaking
 - So imagine the brightest light you've ever seen emerging from the temple
 - Met by the loudest sound you've ever heard as these fearsome cherubim beat their wings atop their gigantic whirling wheels
- This whole scene reminds me of a military hostage rescue operation
 - It's as if the glory of the Lord has been held hostage in the temple by the ungodly and wicked of Israel
 - The glory of God remained captive there for a while but the time has come for the glory of God to be rescued
 - So in come the Apache cherubim whirling their wheels like the rotors of a helicopter
 - They land just outside the temple, rotors turning, holding off the enemy to the south
 - Meanwhile, the special forces soldiers (dressed in camouflaged linen) enter the courtyard under cover of smoke
 - They escort the glory of God out of the building and to the safety of the cherubim
 - Before they leave, they need a diversion, so they lay down some suppression fire

Ezek. 10:6 It came about when He commanded the man clothed in linen, saying, "Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim," he entered and stood beside a wheel.

Ezek. 10:7 Then the cherub stretched out his hand from between the cherubim to the fire which was between the cherubim, took some and put it into the hands of the one clothed in linen, who took it and went out.

Ezek. 10:8 The cherubim appeared to have the form of a man's hand under their wings.

- As the man in linen was ordered, he approached the wheels of the cherubim
 - The cherub reached out to pick up some of the fiery coals burning in the midst of the four cherubim
 - Later in v.8 Ezekiel explains that this was possible because underneath each cherub's wing was the hand of a man
 - Then the cherub deposited these coals into the hands of the man in linen who went out
 - He went out to use these coals in the destruction of the city
 - Remember, last week we said that the death of the people in the city didn't happen

in the way depicted by the vision

- Angels didn't kill the people
- Babylonian soldiers did the dirty work
- But the purpose of the vision was to explain that the Lord had decreed the deaths of the ungodly
- Similarly, here we see a fantastic vision of the Lord using supernatural fire from cherubim to destroy the city itself
 - But we know that the city was razed by an army bent on making an example of rebellious Israel
 - But once again, we're learning that the end of the city, wall and temple was an act of God
- But we also learn that this destruction happens only after the Lord has moved His glory out of the way first
 - So far, the glory has moved to the threshold of the temple
 - But of course, that is only the first movement of God's glory
 - It has several stages of movement remaining
- The next stage of the movement is described in the next passage of this chapter
 - But the passage is rather long and most of it consists of a lengthy description of the cherubim
 - This description is very similar to the one we received in Chapter 1
 - So we won't spend much time revisiting the details here
 - Instead, we can look at the bigger picture of what's going on here
 - But first let's read the account

Ezek. 10:9 Then I looked, and behold, four wheels beside the cherubim, one wheel beside each cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like the gleam of a Tarshish stone.

Ezek. 10:10 As for their appearance, all four of them had the same likeness, as if one wheel were within another wheel.

Ezek. 10:11 When they moved, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went; but they followed in the direction which they faced, without turning as they went.

Ezek. 10:12 Their whole body, their backs, their hands, their wings and the wheels were full of eyes all around, the wheels belonging to all four of them.

Ezek. 10:13 The wheels were called in my hearing, the whirling wheels.

Ezek. 10:14 And each one had four faces. The first face was the face of a cherub, the second face was the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.

Ezek. 10:15 Then the cherubim rose up. They are the living beings that I saw by the

river Chebar.

Ezek. 10:16 Now when the cherubim moved, the wheels would go beside them; also when the cherubim lifted up their wings to rise from the ground, the wheels would not turn from beside them.

Ezek. 10:17 When the cherubim stood still, the wheels would stand still; and when they rose up, the wheels would rise with them, for the spirit of the living beings was in them.

Ezek. 10:18 Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim.

Ezek. 10:19 When the cherubim departed, they lifted their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight with the wheels beside them; and they stood still at the entrance of the east gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them.

Ezek. 10:20 These are the living beings that I saw beneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar; so I knew that they were cherubim.

Ezek. 10:21 Each one had four faces and each one four wings, and beneath their wings was the form of human hands.

Ezek. 10:22 As for the likeness of their faces, they were the same faces whose appearance I had seen by the river Chebar. Each one went straight ahead.

- From vs.9-17 we find a second description of the cherubim that largely matches the one we received in Chapter 1
 - There are a couple of differences though, and so I'll spend a moment on those parts
 - First, in v.12 Ezekiel tells us that these living beings had eyes over their whole body
 - In Chapter 1, we heard that the wheels were covered in eyes
 - But now we learn that there were eyes literally everywhere on the cherubim
 - The presence of so many eyes reinforces the conclusion we made in Chapter 1
 - These creatures are present with God at all times, seeing all that He sees
 - Nothing escapes their attention
 - Secondly, the faces of these creatures are described a little differently
 - In v.14 Ezekiel says they had faces of a cherub, man, lion and eagle
 - In Chapter 1, it was ox, man, lion and eagle
 - Apparently the cherubim mostly resemble oxen, so Ezekiel called the ox face the face of the cherub
 - That makes sense when we remember that these creatures had feet like a calf
 - So we should imagine a living creature with a body torso that largely resembles an ox
 - And therefore the ox face is the cherub's natural primary face, so to speak

- Then in v.18, we find the second movement of the glory of God
 - It departs from the threshold of the temple to ride above the cherubim
 - At that point, the Apache cherubim lifted off and carried the glory of God to the top of the east gate in the court wall
 - Here the glory of God hovered above the east gate of the temple
 - This gate is commonly called the Beautiful Gate
 - And here the glory of God remained for a time during these visions
 - There is still one more stop for the glory of God, which we will study next week
 - But before we get there, I want to direct your attention to a picture that the Lord is forming in this account
- First, let's remember that Christ is the ultimate manifestation of the invisible God, as Paul says:

Col. 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Col. 1:16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him.

- When you think of the glory of an invisible God, you must imagine something physical, for how else could you witness it?
 - And the physical manifestation of the Glory of God is found in Jesus Christ
 - Any time the Father manifests Himself into His Creation, He does so through His Son
 - As Hebrews says:

Heb. 1:3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.

- Like rays of light that emanate from the sun, Jesus is the radiance of the Father that reaches our eyes
- He is an exact representation of who the Father is
- So we can accurately describe the glory of God as Jesus Christ
 - Here in the times of Ezekiel that glory is in a pre-incarnate form, which we call the Shechinah glory
 - But in a later day, the glory of God would reach its fullness in Christ Himself
- Moreover, the glory of God is called the Shechinah glory because it is the dwelling of God among men
 - Remember, the word Shechinah incorporates a root meaning of “to dwell”
 - So God's Shechinah glory is that part of Himself that dwells among men

- The glory we see departing here is a lesser form of glory, for one day a greater glory would dwell among men
- As Haggai the prophet explains:

Hag. 2:6 “For thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land.

Hag. 2:7 ‘I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord of hosts.

Hag. 2:8 ‘The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,’ declares the Lord of hosts.

Hag. 2:9 ‘The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘and in this place I will give peace,’ declares the Lord of hosts.”

- Haggai was called to chastise Israel for not being willing to make the necessary sacrifices to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem
 - The remnant had returned from exile in Babylon, the same exile that Ezekiel is now experiencing
 - But after they returned, they became distracted in their own pursuits
 - And they neglected the temple construction
 - As the prophet speaks to them, he tells them that a day is coming when the Lord will not need to beg His people to build His temple
 - He will shake the nations of the world and all the wealth of the nations will come to the temple
 - More importantly, the glory of God will fill this house with glory, the Lord says
 - These details point to the temple that will exist in the Millennial Kingdom
 - But when the Lord refers to “this” house, he’s referring to the second temple
 - After Babylon destroyed the first temple, the returning exiles rebuilt the temple
 - That second temple, some call Zerubbabel’s Temple, eventually became Herod’s temple
 - So the Lord promises that the latter glory of this second temple will be greater than the glory of the former temple
 - And this principle will continue into the Kingdom, as the glory of the Kingdom temple will be greater than Herod’s temple
 - Christ is the fulfillment of these promises
- So with that background, we can begin to understand how the departure of God’s glory out of the first temple connects to Christ
 - As the glory of God leaves the temple at this time, the glory of God will never again inhabit the temple in the same way
 - It never enters the first temple again since this temple is soon to be destroyed
 - And even after the second temple is completed, the Shechinah glory of God

does not enter it as it once did before

- Nevertheless, the glory of God did occupy the second temple and He did so in a more glorious way than the former

John 1:9 There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

John 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

John 1:11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

John 1:13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- The glory of God did, in fact, occupy the second temple
- But it didn't occupy it in the same way as before, but as Haggai said it would
- God's glory came in a much greater way, in the form of Jesus Christ
- Ironically, that form appeared less glorious to the religious leaders of Israel who opposed Him
 - But in reality, He was the fullness of God's glory

Col. 1:19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,

- The glory of God entered that temple on multiple occasions
- And once Christ departed the earth, His glory continues to dwell in His temple, and again in a new and better way
- Today the glory of God dwells in the temple of the Body of Christ, the Church
 - Today, you are the temple of God because the Spirit of God has set up residence inside every believer
 - And this is still greater glory
 - Because collectively, the Church is an even greater display of God's glory in Christ than was Christ Himself in His body
 - As Jesus said to the disciples:

John 14:12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.

- Later, we know in the temple of the Kingdom, Christ will return to occupy His temple in His full glory
 - This will be the greatest display of God's glory in His temple
 - So that as the prophet said, the latter glory will exceed the former
- But sometimes we don't fulfill the mission we've been given to shine the glory of God among the nations
 - Sometimes, we let sin rein in our mortal bodies
 - We grieve the Spirit of God
 - We compromise our witness
 - We pollute the temple of God
 - On a personal level, we can run the risk of repeating the abominations that Ezekiel witnessed in the temple in Jerusalem
 - As Paul warned

1Cor. 6:18 Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.

1Cor. 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

1Cor. 6:20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

- We should consider our every action and thought from the perspective of how it reflects glory on the Lord
- We should ask ourselves whether we are creating a suitable dwelling place for the Spirit of God by our choices
- And as we experience conviction in that regard, look to the Spirit to guide you and empower you into making better choices
 - He will do it
 - And you can follow Him
 - If you make the glory of God your priority
- Remember the contrast of Chapter 9 and Chapter 10
 - Are you living like those in Jerusalem who perverted the temple for selfish reasons?
 - Or are you like those cherubim, who dedicated themselves to protecting and honoring the glory of God
 - Rescue Him from the abuse of sin in your temple

- One of the first things anyone learns about God is His omnipresence
 - We're taught from an early age that God is Spirit and He is everywhere at all times
 - And so when we hear that the glory of God dwelled among men in the tabernacle or temple, it sounds a bit confusing
 - Isn't He already there?
 - And if so, what exactly is different about the glory of God dwelling with men?
 - Well, we've been exploring these questions over the past several weeks as we learn how the glory of the Lord departs His temple in Ezekiel's day
 - The visions Ezekiel has received in Chapters 8-11 explain coming events in Jerusalem from a spiritual perspective
 - In Chapter 8 we saw Ezekiel predicting the end of the city through a 14-month long street performance
 - In Chapter 9 we learned that the Lord decreed the death of all ungodly in the city, and the glory of God begins to leave the temple
 - In Chapter 10 the city itself is destroyed by God's judgment and the glory of God moves from the doorway to the temple, to the east gate of the temple
 - Along this path, we're asking the question what all this means?
 - Why does God's glory move in this way?
 - Why is the Lord explaining His glory's departure in such detail and why does it move so slowly?
 - Perhaps we should ask why does God's glory dwell among men at all?
- Today in Chapter 11 we see the final installment in this particular prophecy given to Ezekiel
 - Today the glory of God makes one final stop on its way out and Ezekiel learns the Lord's plan to return in a future day

Ezek. 11:1 Moreover, the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the Lord's house which faced eastward. And behold, there were twenty-five men at the entrance of the gate, and among them I saw Jaazaniah son of Azzur and Pelatiah son of Benaiah, leaders of the people.

Ezek. 11:2 He said to me, "Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and give evil advice in this city,

Ezek. 11:3 who say, 'The time is not near to build houses. This city is the pot and we are the flesh.'

Ezek. 11:4 "Therefore, prophesy against them, son of man, prophesy!"

Ezek. 11:5 Then the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and He said to me, "Say, 'Thus says the Lord, "So you think, house of Israel, for I know your thoughts.

Ezek. 11:6 "You have multiplied your slain in this city, filling its streets with them."

Ezek. 11:7 'Therefore, thus says the Lord God, "Your slain whom you have laid in the midst of the city are the flesh and this city is the pot; but I will bring you out

of it.

Ezek. 11:8 “You have feared a sword; so I will bring a sword upon you,” the Lord God declares.

Ezek. 11:9 “And I will bring you out of the midst of the city and deliver you into the hands of strangers and execute judgments against you.

Ezek. 11:10 “You will fall by the sword. I will judge you to the border of Israel; so you shall know that I am the Lord.

Ezek. 11:11 “This city will not be a pot for you, nor will you be flesh in the midst of it, but I will judge you to the border of Israel.

Ezek. 11:12 “Thus you will know that I am the Lord; for you have not walked in My statutes nor have you executed My ordinances, but have acted according to the ordinances of the nations around you.””

- Once again, this chapter is a continuation of our scene – as the word “moreover” indicates
 - So we’re moving away from the moment that the cherubim land by the temple to escort the glory of God out of the building
 - The glory of God found no sanctuary in the Holy of Holies, since the priests that serve Him were worshipping the sun instead
 - And the glory found no sanctuary in the court because the leaders were worshipping Egyptian gods in its walls
 - And therefore the glory of God now hovers above the east gate leading out of the court of the temple to the city
 - The Spirit now transports Ezekiel in his vision to that gate to see yet another scene
 - Outside the gate stood another group of 25 men
 - This group is different than those we saw earlier in Chapter 8
 - That earlier group were priests serving in the temple, but these men are described as leaders of the people
 - It would be natural to see civic leaders gathered in a city gate, since this is where administrative business was conducted
 - Among these men are two who Ezekiel recognizes and names
 - Nothing is known about them except their names
 - The name Jaazaniah means God Hears
 - And the name Pelatiah means God Delivers
 - These names prove ironically prophetic in light of the circumstances
- The Lord says these men are supposed to dispense godly advice to the residents of the city, but instead they devise sin and give evil advice
 - The Lord gives Ezekiel two examples of their evil
 - First, they advise the people not to build houses saying the city is the pot and

we are the flesh

- To understand this statement, we have to know something that the people had been told by one of Ezekiel's contemporaries; Jeremiah
- Remember, Ezekiel is prophesying in Babylon to the exiles taken during the earlier campaigns
- But Jeremiah is in the city speaking to the remaining residents
- By this point, Jeremiah and the rest of the city had witnessed many of their brothers and sisters hauled off by the Babylonians into captivity
 - Twice before the city had been attacked and twice before the Babylonians had succeeded in defeating the city
 - So the Lord spoke through Jeremiah to the people remaining in the city that they were to be next
- Jeremiah told the people that they should submit to the Babylonians and not fight back because they were God's instrument of judgment

Jer. 21:8 "You shall also say to this people, 'Thus says the Lord, "Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death.

Jer. 21:9 "He who dwells in this city will die by the sword and by famine and by pestilence; but he who goes out and falls away to the Chaldeans who are besieging you will live, and he will have his own life as booty.

Jer. 21:10 "For I have set My face against this city for harm and not for good," declares the Lord. "It will be given into the hand of the king of Babylon and he will burn it with fire."

- The people were to allow the Babylonians to take them
- And if they submitted to this outcome, they would have their own life as their reward for obeying the Lord
- Furthermore, Jeremiah told the people that they were to make a life in Babylon because they were going to be there a while

Jer. 29:4 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon,

Jer. 29:5 'Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce.

Jer. 29:6 'Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease.

Jer. 29:7 'Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.'

- Notice in Jer. 29:5 the prophet said specifically to Jerusalem to set their minds on

building houses in Babylon and living in them

- This would not be a short term exile; they're going to be there for a while, so make the best of it
- And to reassure them, the Lord said He would provide for their welfare while they were there
- Now look back at Ezekiel 11:3
 - In v.3 the elders tell the people that the time is NOT near to build houses
 - They are mocking Jeremiah's prophecy
 - They are saying the prophet was wrong, a third exile is not coming and they need not be concerned about building homes in Babylon
 - Instead, they lie to the people a second time saying they are like flesh in a pot
 - The word pot means a cauldron or basin that you use to cook food over a fire
 - So the leaders are saying to the residents, live inside the protection of the city of Jerusalem so they need not fear the Babylonian army
 - In the same way that meat in a pot isn't touched by the fire outside the pot, so the people in the city won't be harmed either
 - More than likely, these men were basing their confidence in the fact that the glory of God was dwelling in the temple
 - They mistakenly believed that the glory of God would dwell in its place forever
 - And that as long as it did, no army could take the city
 - Such were the lies these men told themselves and the people
- So far, we've seen a corrupt high priest, corrupted priesthood, corrupt elders and now corrupt civic leaders
 - So it's no wonder that the city is accepting and even celebrating such abominations
 - It would be easy for us to scoff at this generation of Israel asking how they could have been so foolish
 - But when everyone who leads you has moved in the same evil direction, it's almost impossible for the people not to follow
 - This is why God is strict about the type of men and women He calls as leaders over His people
 - Israel was poorly served by their leaders, including the kings who were mostly often evil themselves
 - And when the head of the snake is diseased, then the whole will be as well
 - We cannot tolerate sinful, ungodly leaders over us, because if you show me your leaders, I will show you your future
 - Israel's leaders have produced a very bleak future for the people
- The Lord goes on to correct the lies of these leaders in vs.4-12
 - The Lord begins saying I know your thoughts

- He means He knows the intentions of their hearts
 - God's power to know our hearts is symbolized in the cherubim having eyes all around
 - He knows these men weren't seeking to advise the people in truth and godliness
 - Instead, they were seeking to manipulate the situation to maintain their position of power
- But because they contradict the word of the Lord and promote evil in the people, many more will die, the Lord says
 - He says these men multiply the dead in the city
 - They didn't literally kill the people, but their advice will lead to more loss of life as the people fight against the Babylonians
 - If the people had heeded Jeremiah's word, they could have saved their lives
- In v.11 the Lord mocks them by using their own statement about pot and flesh
 - He says the flesh in that pot will be the slain in the city
 - Rather than being preserved, they will perish
 - And moreover, you're not going to stay in the pot (the city)
- Instead, they will find themselves crossing the border of Israel as they are taken into Babylon
 - So not only is the city not a sanctuary for them, but neither will the land of Israel be their home
 - As the people crossed Israel's border at Riblah, Nebuchadnezzar met the exiles and executed Israel's civic leaders by the sword
- Two of those men executed were Jaazaniah and Pelatiah
 - Remember their names? God Hears and God Delivers
 - Even as these men claimed God didn't hear, God did in fact hear them
 - And therefore, He delivered a just response to their sin
- The message was clear...if Jerusalem could not be a sanctuary for the Lord, then He would not allow it to be a sanctuary for His people
 - If they will not live by His precepts, then they will not live at all
 - And they will not live in the light of His presence
 - Israel learned this lesson in a visceral way, watching their city destroyed and the families dragged into a foreign land
 - But the principle is no less true for us even if we never see such disasters personally
 - We have opportunity to live in peace and in the light of the presence of the Lord so long as we give attention to His precepts
 - Or we can heed evil counsel or follow the lusts of our heart and experience the

darkness that follows

- Nothing escapes the notice of the Lord and He always has the perfect response to expose our heart's intent and correct our ways
- Next, the Lord gives Ezekiel a vision confirming the outcome for these two men

Ezek. 11:13 Now it came about as I prophesied, that Pelatiah son of Benaiah died. Then I fell on my face and cried out with a loud voice and said, “Alas, Lord God! Will You bring the remnant of Israel to a complete end?”

Ezek. 11:14 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezek. 11:15 “Son of man, your brothers, your relatives, your fellow exiles and the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, ‘Go far from the Lord; this land has been given us as a possession.’”

- Ezekiel sees one of these two men, Pelatiah, drop dead at the city gate
 - Remember, we’ve said that these visions aren’t depicting the literal manner by which these events will take place
 - Instead, they explain the purpose behind these outcomes
 - In real life, Pelatiah doesn’t drop dead at the gate; he dies at Riblah
 - But this vision explains why his death is necessary
 - Seeing the man die causes Ezekiel to ask the Lord the same question he asked in the prior chapter: are you putting an end to all Israel?
 - He asks is the Lord putting the remnant of Israel to a complete end?
 - The word “remnant” causes some confusion here because normally that word refers to the believing element within the nation
 - But clearly Pelatiah is not a believing Jew, since he is principally responsible for the evil among the people
 - By the context of the passage, we must interpret the word remnant here to mean the remaining population of Israel living within the city
 - So Ezekiel is distraught at the prospect of seeing all remaining Jews in the land extinguished
 - Like any Jew, Ezekiel would have been aghast at the idea that there could be an Israel and Jerusalem with no Jews
 - And yet that is exactly what the Lord plans, at least for a time
- Notice the Lord’s response to the prophet in vs.15-16
 - He tells Ezekiel that those who remain in the city are those who have been saying that exiles deserved to be taken
 - They told their brothers and sisters like Ezekiel to “go far from the Lord” because we have been given the land as a possession

- They feel as though these exiles deserved to be taken away from the presence of the Lord
 - While they assume they remain behind because the Lord has awarded the city to them instead
- Once again, the presence of the Lord in the city seems to be the thing these people are hanging their hat on for security
 - And for that reason the glory of God will leave the city and so will they
 - Their offenses could only be rectified by taking such drastic action
- But then comes a glimmer of hope, the first reason for hope we've yet seen in the book of Ezekiel
 - This next passage introduces one of the most important themes of the book, a theme that will be developed in much greater detail in coming chapters
 - For now, let's consider what the Lord says in connection to His glory and its departure

Ezek. 11:16 “Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Though I had removed them far away among the nations and though I had scattered them among the countries, yet I was a sanctuary for them a little while in the countries where they had gone.””

Ezek. 11:17 “Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.””

Ezek. 11:18 “When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it.

Ezek. 11:19 “And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,
Ezek. 11:20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.

Ezek. 11:21 “But as for those whose hearts go after their detestable things and abominations, I will bring their conduct down on their heads,” declares the Lord God.

- The Lord begins to speak from a future point of view, looking back on the events in this vision
 - He says in v.16 though I removed My people from the city and scattered them far away among the nations of the world, nevertheless He would remain a sanctuary for them
 - He's describing the way the Lord intends to protect His people while they are in exile
 - Ezekiel has been concerned that the Lord's harsh actions would lead to the disappearance of the Jewish people

- And certainly, without the Lord's grace they most certainly would have disappeared
- Anthropologically speaking, it would have been impossible for such a small people group to maintain a distinct identity over the many centuries they spent outside their lands
- Yet they have done exactly that, survived intact
- The Lord says He will be their sanctuary during these times of exile
 - They will turn to him in their afflictions and He will hear them
 - They will seek to keep the covenant in ways their evil ancestors wouldn't, and by doing so their identity will be preserved among the nation
- Ironically, the people didn't find their sanctuary in the Lord when He dwelled among them in their city in peace
 - Yet now while in exile and under persecution, His people will seek Him earnestly
 - And this exile will be for a "little" while the Lord says in v.16
- We know that the people were in exile in Babylon for 70 years, and certainly that is only a little while in terms of history
 - But when we look at what the Lord promises to do for Israel at the end of this time, we find He's talking about a different time altogether
 - Notice in v.17 the end of this "little while" will result in Israel returning to her land and to possessing it again
 - Not just part of the land, but the Lord says they will possess "THE land of Israel"
 - The Lord means the entire land He promised to Israel, to Jacob
 - The exiles that returned from Babylon never realized this promise
 - Furthermore, the Lord says the Israel that returns to the land will once and forever put away their idols
 - As we mentioned in a previous week, the nation of Israel never returns to systematic idolatry after the Babylonian exile
 - But this promise goes far beyond mere external religious practices
 - Notice in vs.19-20 the Lord says all Israel will receive a "new heart" at this time
 - They will lose the hard heart of stone that didn't know Him and didn't obey His word
 - And in its place, the Lord will give them a heart of flesh, meaning a soft heart capable to hearing His voice and responding in obedience
 - As a result, the entire nation of Israel will walk in keeping with the Law of God and they shall all be God's people
 - These are dramatic promises and they can only be understood in the context of Israel receiving the Kingdom
 - Under no under circumstances will we find Israel possessing all her land in peace

- Under no other circumstances do we find the people of Israel united by the same heart of faith
 - Under no other circumstances could we find even one person – much less *all* the people – keeping the commandments of God
- So the Lord is telling Ezekiel worry not, the people of Israel are in good hands; the Lord's hands
 - On the other hand, the hands of Israel's leaders are not good
 - Far from it...they are the ones leading the people astray
 - So the Lord says in v.21 that these will perish, because He will bring the consequences of their conduct back upon them
- This is the full, 360° view of God's relationship with His people
 - They are bound to Him by covenant, so He will not walk away from them
 - But neither can He overlook their sins against Him
 - Especially when the covenant itself warns the people of the consequences
 - But He also promised their father Abraham that He would bring blessing to his descendants
 - And the Lord is faithful to that promise
 - The Kingdom will arrive one day and on that day Israel will receive what they have been promised
 - But as the Lord reveals here, they will need to be regathered and they will need to receive a faithful heart first
 - So I ask which is the more remarkable thing that God does?
 - That He would bring punishment against a people that worshiped idols and committed the worst perversions
 - Or that He would bring glory and honor and blessing to that very same people?
 - It seems to be that God was only doing what should be done when He brought judgment
 - But we should be amazed at His grace when He promises to bring redemption as well
- Which brings us back to the story of the departure of the Lord's glory

Ezek. 11:22 Then the cherubim lifted up their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them.

Ezek. 11:23 The glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city.

Ezek. 11:24 And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God to the exiles in Chaldea. So the vision that I had seen left me.

Ezek. 11:25 Then I told the exiles all the things that the Lord had shown me.

- Once again the movement of the Lord's glory is initiated by the supernatural escort of cherubim upholding the glory of God
 - It moves from the east gate in the midst of the city to a point overlooking the city from a high point to the east of Jerusalem
 - Just as the Lord told Ezekiel, the leaders wouldn't be safe in the city depending on the glory of the Lord to protect them
 - The Lord's glory won't inhabit the temple or its court nor even the city itself
 - The Shechinah glory was leaving the city for a very long time
 - Its next destination is a mountain to the east of the city
 - That particular pinnacle was one of several hills that surrounded Mt Moriah, the hill on which the temple is built
 - It had no particular name in Ezekiel's day
 - But later it will be called the Mt of Olives
 - This is the final stopping point for the Shechinah glory before it departed Israel altogether
 - Scripture never tells us how long the Lord's glory remained here before departing earth altogether
 - Clearly it departed at some point, since we don't see it now
 - Perhaps it remained long enough to witness the destruction of the city as a testimony against the people
- The rabbis who reflect on this passage teach that the glory remained on the Mt of Olives for 3.5 years
 - This detail brings us back to our discussion of the picture of Christ, revealed in these movements of the glory of God
 - As we read last week from John 1, the coming of the Messiah meant the arrival of the light of God's Shechinah glory in greater form
 - Paul told us in Colossians 1 that Jesus is the visible manifestation of the invisible God
 - That glory came to Israel for 3.5 years before it departed the earth for a time
 - And when Jesus left the earth, He too ascended from the Mt of Olives
 - And that detail draws a clear connection between the movements of the glory here and the glory of Jesus Christ
 - When Jesus ascended, the disciples who witnessed His departure were told this

Acts 1:9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Acts 1:10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.

Acts 1:11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky?"

This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

- The angels declared that the glory of God would return from Heaven in the same way as He departed
- Well, we know how Jesus departed and we also know how the glory of God departed in an earlier time
- So how should we expect the Lord to return in His glory in the Kingdom to come?
 - First, we know He will arrive in Jerusalem on the Mt of Olives; the place of His departure
 - Zechariah describes the Lord’s return this way

Zech. 14:3 Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle.

Zech. 14:4 In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.

- Near the very end of the seven-year Tribulation on earth, the Lord returns to the city and place where He departed
- The glory of God will once more return to the city to dwell among men
- And following His arrival, the glory of the Lord in the Person of Christ will retrace His steps with which he departed the city in Ezekiel’s day
 - Later in this book when Ezekiel is shown a vision of the new temple of the Kingdom, he witnesses the Lord’s return to His temple

Ezek. 43:1 Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east;

Ezek. 43:2 and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east. And His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory.

Ezek. 43:3 And it was like the appearance of the vision which I saw, like the vision which I saw when He came to destroy the city. And the visions were like the vision which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face.

Ezek. 43:4 And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east.

- Just as the glory left through the east gate so will it one day return through the east gate
- This east gate is very different to the one of the past or even the one present in the wall today

- So as the glory left through the east gate so it will return in Christ
- Finally, the Lord will retrace His steps in the court and into the temple itself

Ezek. 43:5 And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house.

Ezek. 43:6 Then I heard one speaking to me from the house, while a man was standing beside me.

Ezek. 43:7 He said to me, “Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever. And the house of Israel will not again defile My holy name, neither they nor their kings, by their harlotry and by the corpses of their kings when they die,

Ezek. 43:8 by setting their threshold by My threshold and their door post beside My door post, with only the wall between Me and them. And they have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed. So I have consumed them in My anger.

Ezek. 43:9 “Now let them put away their harlotry and the corpses of their kings far from Me; and I will dwell among them forever.

- We’ll revisit these passages in a day to come, so for now it’s enough to understand the picture here
- The manner of the Lord’s departure from the temple pictures the manner of the Lord’s Second coming
- And why is this picture important?
- It’s the silver lining in the otherwise dark cloud hanging over Israel
- That even in the midst of these dark times for Israel – times of judgment, death and exile – there is reason for hope
 - The Lord has not forsaken His people
 - This pictures confirms that even as Israel must experience God’s wrath of God, they will also know His mercy and redemption one day
 - One day the Lord will regather them from exile
 - One day He will dwell among them again
 - One day He will give all Israel a heart to know and follow Him
 - One day the Lord in His kindness and mercy will restore Israel to glory
 - In that day, the Lord blesses His people beyond all measure and certainly beyond what they deserve
 - And we, like them, will be blessed to be included in that day
 - By the Lord’s gracious choice, He has placed His glory in us promising us the same future
 - A day when we will have soft hearts that know and obey Him

- A day when we too will dwell with God in glory by our faith in Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Savior of all men



Ezekiel - Lesson 12A

Chapter 12:1-16

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- It's time to start the third division of prophecy in the book of Ezekiel
 - This third section runs from Chapter 12-19
 - This section is really quite interesting because it's the first time we hear from the exiles themselves
 - They've been watching and listening to Ezekiel's prophecies for the past year or so, but they haven't believed him
 - So in these eight chapters they offer eight excuses for why Ezekiel's prophecies will not come to pass
 - And the Lord speaks through Ezekiel to refute all eight excuses in their hearing
 - In Chapter 12, we find the first of their excuses, but it doesn't show up right away
 - In fact, we don't get to that excuse until next week
 - Because before we get to the excuse, the Lord has Ezekiel prepare another street performance to send a message

Ezek. 12:1 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezek. 12:2 “Son of man, you live in the midst of the rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear; for they are a rebellious house.

Ezek. 12:3 “Therefore, son of man, prepare for yourself baggage for exile and go into exile by day in their sight; even go into exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand though they are a rebellious house.

Ezek. 12:4 “Bring your baggage out by day in their sight, as baggage for exile. Then you will go out at evening in their sight, as those going into exile.

Ezek. 12:5 “Dig a hole through the wall in their sight and go out through it.

Ezek. 12:6 “Load the baggage on your shoulder in their sight and carry it out in the dark. You shall cover your face so that you cannot see the land, for I have set you as a sign to the house of Israel.”

Ezek. 12:7 I did so, as I had been commanded. By day I brought out my baggage like the baggage of an exile. Then in the evening I dug through the wall with my hands; I went out in the dark and carried the baggage on my shoulder in their sight.

- The Lord gives Ezekiel another message to act out before His people in exile
 - Notice this message is not dated as were the past two prophecies
 - That tells us that this is a continuation of the moment from the earlier vision that started in Chapter 8
 - Nevertheless, we count this as a separate section because the material differs dramatically from the previous section
 - So we must assume that Ezekiel has related what he saw in those visions
 - And the people have had a chance to respond
 - And from what we learn in this chapter, they haven't responded well

- In fact, they are denying Ezekiel's word
 - Their rebellion against the word of the Lord began while in Jerusalem
 - And it continues even now while they are in exile
- In v.2 the Lord tells Ezekiel that these people are a rebellious house
 - He says they have eyes to see and ears to hear but don't see or hear
 - The Lord is speaking in spiritual terms
 - Through their prophet, the people have been given "sight" of spiritual truth
 - And as Ezekiel has spoken spiritual truth to them, they have been given "ears" to hear the Lord
 - The Lord has shown Ezekiel what will happen to Israel so that the people might repent and respond in the right way
 - But instead they deny Ezekiel's prophecies, which means they aren't seeing and hearing as they should
 - I like this description of how men and women respond to the word of God
 - All believers have the been given spiritual truth in the word of God
 - And we all have the Spirit of God to teach us all things
 - And sometimes we use these things to see and hear truth and respond to it
 - And then there are other times we close our eyes and ears because we're rebellious
 - Ignoring the word of God is like closing our eyes and ears to God
 - And grieving the Spirit is like ignoring the Lord
 - It never ceases to amaze me how many Christians treat study of God's word as an optional pursuit
 - And how many more will knowingly adopt views of life and ministry that are directly contradicted by scripture
 - These are moments of rebellion
 - We all have these moments to deal with in our lives
 - It's never a good thing, but the real problem begins when we make this pattern our lifestyle
 - We determine to keep our eyes shut and ears closed because we prefer our rebellion
 - When we do this, we'll feel the Spirit's conviction as He works to bring us back to the Lord in obedience
 - Sometimes we respond to that conviction in the right way – returning to the word, listening to the Spirit
 - But sometimes we make excuses for our rebellion and intentional blindness
 - And I bet many of those excuses for why we can't (or won't) do what the Lord wants, sound like the excuses Israel offered Ezekiel
- The Lord knows the excuses are coming, so he gives Ezekiel a message to send to the people, and once again He asks Ezekiel to act out the message

- This skit will reinforce the truth that they've already heard from Ezekiel
 - That the city of Jerusalem will be sacked, destroyed and the people sent into exile
 - The Jewish people will be removed from the land entirely
 - They will be scattered and the temple destroyed
 - And they will not return for a long time
- That's the key issue that the exiles failed to grasp
 - While they understood that Judah was under judgment (because their own exile made that truth self-evident)
 - They didn't grasp the magnitude of that judgment
 - They assumed they were going to be held outside the land of Israel for a short time and soon they would return
 - And they assumed their brethren would remain in the city maintaining a Jewish presence in the land
 - And they assumed the glory of the Lord would remain living alongside the people as it had for the previous 340 years
- These wrong assumptions had given them false hope, and that false hope gave opportunity for their pride to stir up rebellion in their hearts
 - Misplaced confidence gave birth to hard hearts
 - And yet the Lord is still working to soften them
 - Notice in v.3 the Lord tells Ezekiel to perform these acts in the hope that perhaps Israel will get the message
- Ezekiel is told to pack baggage for exile and leave his home
 - The baggage for an exile would be very little of course
 - Someone going into exile is in a rush and under threat, so they gather only a few essentials
 - Therefore, Ezekiel would have taken only the bare necessities from his home
 - The Lord tells him to take it out by daylight
 - This probably means Ezekiel brought out his belongings into the court that typically surrounded homes in that day
 - This would have turned to a spectacle, with clothes, some food or other items thrown out the door
 - His neighbors would be asking what Ezekiel was doing or where he was planning to go?
 - Then later in the day, as evening approached, Ezekiel was to move out of his home
 - But he isn't to leave through the door or gate
 - He must dig a hole in the wall, probably a hole in his courtyard wall
 - And then he will crawl through the hole with his baggage at nightfall
 - Leaving at nightfall pictures the calamity that will fall upon the people as they

walk in darkness

- And crawling through a wall reminds the people of the circumstances in which the exiles leave
 - They aren't leaving through the gate as in times of peace
 - They will be taken out of a city that has fallen to a siege campaign and has seen its walls breached
- Finally, as he crawls through the hole, Ezekiel is told to cover his face so he can't see the land
 - The general point is that the exiles won't see their land after they leave it behind
 - This isn't a temporary affliction nor will Israel escape their enemies or find refuge elsewhere in Israel
 - But this detail has an even darker meaning that the Lord will reveal shortly
- In v.7 Ezekiel reports that he did exactly as the Lord intended
 - And of course, his antics would have been the talk of the town
 - He's already gained a reputation as a man who sees visions and does crazy things
 - So as soon as he starts throwing clothes outside his house, he probably attracted a crowd
 - And then when he began digging in his courtyard wall, you know the people started laughing and mocking him
 - And that's the reason the Lord gave Ezekiel this task
 - The people have been given this same prophecy before, and yet they continue to ignore it
 - So the Lord is amplifying the message through this spectacle
 - The people certainly can't ignore what they see Ezekiel doing
 - The question is will they come to understand that Ezekiel is communicating the words of God?
 - It's natural to feel some pity for Ezekiel at this point
 - He's being asked to sacrifice his pride and honor to reach a people who have repeatedly rejected the word of the Lord
 - It's tempting to think they had their chance...they made their bed, let them lie in it
 - Why should a man of obedience and upright character like Ezekiel sacrifice his dignity to serve a people who couldn't care less about pleasing God?
- Because it's called ministry for a reason...it's what the Lord asks from all of us, though in different ways
 - The word "minister" means to serve – and service isn't easy and it won't be possible without a personal cost
 - We're all called to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the lost
 - And our personal sacrifice is a primary means for us to glorify the Lord

- Serving God isn't all doom and gloom, of course
 - Sometimes, the Lord allows us to stand in the spotlight, to receive the thanks and accolades of those we serve
 - To experience triumphs and to see miraculous fruit
 - Moments like Peter experienced at Pentecost or Paul and Barnabas experienced in Antioch
 - These are the moments we all yearn for, and the Lord will grant them from time to time to encourage us and to glorify Himself
- But other times – perhaps most of the time – serving the Lord demands great personal sacrifice
 - There are no spotlights, no cheering crowds, no fame or fortune
 - The Lord assigns us a task that *requires* we set aside personal interests like wealth, comfort, safety, popularity, & dignity
 - At the very least, you sacrifice your time when you serve the Lord
 - Even worse, we may lose our career, friends, family, or freedom
 - He calls us to take up a cross of shame for the Lord, just as our Lord did for us
- No one is exempt from this pattern, for even the apostles knew this call, as Paul reminds us

1Cor. 4:9 For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

- Paul says the Lord exhibited the apostles as a spectacle, meaning He put them on public display just as He did Ezekiel
- What spectacle did God call Paul to perform? I'll let Paul tell you in his own words

2Cor. 6:1 And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain —

2Cor. 6:2 for He says,

**“At the acceptable time I listened to you,
And on the day of salvation I helped you.”**

Behold, now is “The acceptable time,” behold, now is “The day of salvation”

—

2Cor. 6:3 giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited,

2Cor. 6:4 but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,

2Cor. 6:5 in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger,

2Cor. 6:6 in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love,

2Cor. 6:7 in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left,

2Cor. 6:8 by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true;

2Cor. 6:9 as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death,

2Cor. 6:10 as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.

- Paul's suffering for the gospel matters little to him, because he knew he had everything he needed waiting for him in the eternal realm
 - And he had more of it because of his willingness to serve God in sacrificial ways
 - Simply put, Paul lived with eyes for eternity
- Likewise, Ezekiel was called to be a servant to the people of Israel: a disobedient, stiff-necked people
 - Serving God under those circumstances required great personal sacrifice
 - But his obedience in this difficult assignment and his service to a disobedient, unappreciative audience made for an even more powerful testimony
 - And we presume an even more glorious reward
- After Ezekiel completed his task, the Lord gives Ezekiel a full interpretation of his skit

Ezek. 12:8 In the morning the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezek. 12:9 "Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?'

Ezek. 12:10 "Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, "This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem as well as all the house of Israel who are in it.'"

Ezek. 12:11 "Say, 'I am a sign to you. As I have done, so it will be done to them; they will go into exile, into captivity.'

Ezek. 12:12 "The prince who is among them will load his baggage on his shoulder in the dark and go out. They will dig a hole through the wall to bring it out. He will cover his face so that he can not see the land with his eyes.

Ezek. 12:13 "I will also spread My net over him, and he will be caught in My snare. And I will bring him to Babylon in the land of the Chaldeans; yet he will not see it, though he will die there.

Ezek. 12:14 "I will scatter to every wind all who are around him, his helpers and all his troops; and I will draw out a sword after them.

Ezek. 12:15 "So they will know that I am the Lord when I scatter them among the nations and spread them among the countries.

Ezek. 12:16 "But I will spare a few of them from the sword, the famine and the pestilence that they may tell all their abominations among the nations where they go, and may know that I am the Lord."

- The Lord explains the meaning of all the symbols in his drama, presumably so the

prophet could communicate it to the people in case they missed the point

- Notice the Lord says in v.9 that the people have been asking Ezekiel “what are you doing?”
 - Obviously, the skit got their attention as was attended
 - They have watched it intently and now they want to know what it all means
 - So the Lord explains to Ezekiel what it all means
- First, in v.10 the Lord says this burden that Ezekiel bore concerned the prince in Jerusalem
 - The term prince here refers to the ruling king of Judah, King Zedekiah
 - Zedekiah was appointed king by Nebuchadnezzar following the second siege of the city
 - The previous king, Jehoiachin, had rebelled against Babylonian rule, and was taken into exile with the second wave of refugees
 - Ezekiel and the rest of the exiles still saw Jehoiachin as the legitimate king, so the prophet calls Zedekiah merely the “prince”
- But Zedekiah was ruling over those left behind in Jerusalem, and this prophecy describes what was coming for him and the rest of the people
 - Just as was done to the earlier exiles so it will be for those still in the city
 - Even King Zedekiah will find himself trying to escape the city under cover of darkness with a few possessions on his back
 - He will dig a hole through the rubble of the wall and he will cover his face to conceal his identity
- Then, the Lord says in v.13 that He would set a net and snare for this king
 - The Lord promises Zedekiah would be captured by the Babylonians and brought back to Babylon as an exile
 - Eventually, the king would die as an exile in the land of Babylon, never having returned to Israel
 - Nevertheless, the Lord says, the king would never see the land he will occupy
 - According to Josephus, the king received word of this prophecy somehow, perhaps by a Jewish slave traveling with a Babylonian official
 - But unsurprisingly, Josephus says the king didn’t believe it
 - Ironically, Josephus says Zedekiah rejected the prophecy because he thought it disagreed with the words of the Jerusalem prophet, Jeremiah
 - Here’s what Josephus wrote

Ezekiel also foretold in Babylon what calamities were coming upon the people, which when he heard, he sent accounts of them unto Jerusalem; but Zedekiah did not believe their prophecies, for the reason following:—It happened that the two prophets agreed with one another in what they said as in all other things, that the city should be taken, and Zedekiah himself should be taken captive; but Ezekiel disagreed with Jeremiah, and said, that

Zedekiah should not see Babylon; while Jeremiah said to him, that the king of Babylon should carry him away to there in bonds; and because they did not both say the same thing as to this circumstance, Zedekiah disbelieved what they both appeared to agree in, and condemned them as not speaking truth to him, although all the things foretold him did come to pass according to their prophecies...

- The king thought the two prophets were in disagreement, but in fact they were in perfect agreement
- Both said the king would end up in Babylon, and so he did
- But Ezekiel adds that Zedekiah wouldn't see the land, and that turned out to be true also
- When Nebuchadnezzar met the exiles in Riblah, he had all the leaders of the city killed
 - He also killed Zedekiah's sons in front of the king, so that he was forced to witness the death of his children
 - And then Nebuchadnezzar had both of Zedekiah's eyes gouged out so that he was made blind
 - And thus the king never saw the land of Babylon
- Finally, the prophecy explains in v.15 that the people of the city would be scattered among the other nations and spread into other countries
 - Many would die in the siege and others would die in captivity by disease and famine
 - But to fulfill the Lord's purposes, He says He will spare a few of Israel so they may be His witnesses
 - They will testify to these events so they may become cause for future generations of Israel to remain true to the covenant
 - So that is the full meaning of the prophecy Ezekiel acted out
- It's interesting that as the people were asking Ezekiel what his strange routine meant, he didn't have answers for them
 - We can safely assume Ezekiel understood the broad storyline about the coming exile
 - After all, the Lord has already told that story a couple of times already
 - And so most people probably gathered this was another message of judgment
 - But the exact meaning of each little detail wasn't available to Ezekiel or to the people until after he had completed the task
 - Only then the Lord revealed the full meaning to them
 - And as you can see, these details could never have been understood until the Lord put the pieces together
 - Can you identify with Ezekiel's situation? I know I can
 - God asks you to serve Him in some way, but His call doesn't make sense to you
 - It lacks details, it doesn't answer your questions or doubts

- And others may even ask you why you are doing what you're doing, but all you can say is the Lord told you to do it
- They wonder if you've got a screw loose and you're beginning to question yourself too
- It's a test of faith
- Years ago my wife and I were attending a church where we were active in teaching the Bible and we liked the pastor and had good friends
 - After attending there several years, there came a point when we felt the Lord was calling us to leave the church
 - He didn't give us a specific reason though we searched to explain it to ourselves
 - We didn't have a new church waiting for us and even if we found one, we knew we wouldn't be able to teach or serve right away
 - All we knew was it was time to leave
 - Leaving a church is tough enough even when you have good reasons
 - Leaving a church means leaving friends, leaving service opportunities, kids leaving their friends too
 - You don't want to hurt feelings and you don't look forward to the grueling process of finding the next church home
 - But when you don't have a specific reason for why you're leaving, everything gets even harder
 - When the pastor or our friends asked us why we're leaving, we didn't have an acceptable answer
 - I remember telling him I felt the Lord was telling us to be "available"
 - That answer confused them, and I assume he thought we weren't telling him the whole story
 - And our kids were *not* happy
- The truth was even we didn't like that answer, and we weren't sure we were moving in the right direction, because we didn't know what the Lord was doing
 - And not knowing turned out to be an even bigger test of our faith than if the Lord had told us everything up front
 - That test of faith was whether we were willing to step out in obedience without having all the answers
 - And whether we were willing to wait on Him to direct us when we had no place to go
 - A couple of months went by...we had largely stopped attending church
 - And then a couple of families approached us asking us to start a church with them, and my career as a pastor was launched
 - And suddenly we had our answer for why we needed to leave, why we needed to be available
 - Ezekiel was probably used to getting strange assignments that came with more questions than answers

- But still, he had to step out even before he knew what the Lord was doing
- And He had to endure the questions from the crowd, from neighbors and perhaps even his friends
- And he didn't have answers other than "Thus saith the Lord"
- Each of these moments built up the prophet's faith, giving him greater reason to obey the next time God asked something difficult and didn't explain why
 - Later in this book, the Lord is going to ask even greater sacrifice of Ezekiel
 - These earlier moments teach Ezekiel to serve God even when he didn't understand
- Look for that same pattern in your walk with Christ
 - Expect Him to call you to small tasks first and greater tasks later
 - Watch Him call you without explanation and then provide the answer after you've obeyed
 - And when you've gained some practice in following, trusting that answers come in time, you'll find the burden growing lighter
 - You'll begin to understand Jesus' words "My yoke is easy and My burden is light"
- When you learn to follow the Lord sacrificially and without requiring all the answers first, He'll do great things through you

- We return to our study of the third division of Ezekiel's prophecies
 - As I mentioned last week, in this section we find the rebellious exiles giving excuses for why they should not listen to the prophet's counsel
 - Across eight chapters we will find eight excuses
 - And in response to each excuse, the Lord will give Ezekiel a word for the exiles
 - And I also mentioned that these eight excuses may sound familiar to us
 - There are times in a Christian's life when we may use similar excuses to defend our choice to disobey or ignore God
 - After all, it's human nature to make excuses, even if they aren't very good

Like the man who arrived late for work for the third time in a week. When he walked into his office he found his boss, Mr. Epstein, waiting for him.

The boss asked sarcastically, "What's your reason for being late this time? I hope you have a good excuse for a change."

The man sighed, "Everything went wrong this morning. My wife was supposed to drive me to the ferry this morning, but she didn't set the alarm and we overslept. She got ready in ten minutes and drove me straight to the harbor, but I still missed the ferry."

"So rather than let you down, I swam across the river, ran over the mountain, borrowed a bicycle and cycled the remaining 20 miles through a field to the office."

The boss listened to the man's story, and then without missing a beat, he responded. "Do you really expect me to believe that story? No woman can be ready in ten minutes."

- Our excuses rarely sound as good to others as they do to ourselves...and they *never* sound good to God
 - Last week we studied the first half of Chapter 12, where the Lord asked Ezekiel to prepare another charade for the people of Israel
 - Ezekiel was told to pack some belongings, dig a hole in his courtyard wall and pretend to go into exile
 - He was depicting what God said was to happen to the remaining Jews living in the city of Jerusalem
 - Ezekiel's message to the exiles wasn't news, of course
 - He has told them all this before

- But because they hadn't listened in the past, the Lord directed Ezekiel to tell them again in this more dramatic fashion
- But after the people saw Ezekiel's display and they heard his explanation concerning its meaning, they simply went on their way
 - They were neither impressed by, nor believed in, what the prophet foretold
 - But still, something must have stirred in their hearts because they felt the need to invent a reason to dismiss it
 - So they offered an excuse for why Ezekiel's words weren't worth considering
 - We don't see them sharing their excuse directly with Ezekiel
 - But the Lord has heard their mumblings, and He brings the excuse to the prophet
 - And then the Lord directs Ezekiel how to respond
- Let's look at the excuse first

Ezek. 12:21 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezek. 12:22 “Son of man, what is this proverb you people have concerning the land of Israel, saying, ‘The days are long and every vision fails’?”

- The Lord shares with Ezekiel what the Lord has heard the exiles saying about Ezekiel's prophecy
 - The Lord asks, “Son of man, what is this proverb your people have...”
 - The Lord is referring to a cynical saying that circulated within apostate Israel culture even when they were living in the land
 - And now the exiles were repeating it in defense of their unbelief
 - The proverb says “The days are long and every vision fails”
 - It means the things foretold by prophets always turn out to be false because life goes on unchanged
 - It's a similar sentiment to what Peter said will be repeated during the last days of our age:

2Pet. 3:3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts,

2Pet. 3:4 and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.”

- Peter says in the last days people will mock the promises of scripture which declare Jesus will return one day and judgment will follow
 - Peter says these mockers also claim that “the days are long”
 - Or as Peter puts it, everything continues just as it was from the beginning

- They say there will be no end of days, so we have nothing to fear
- That's the same sense we find in the exiles' proverb
 - They deny a dramatic judgment awaits them
 - And their confidence is based in the fact that no one can remember such a dramatic thing ever happening
- Their cynicism is especially foolish given their circumstances in Babylon
 - These people have already experienced a dramatic upheaval
 - It's not like they're still sitting in Jerusalem scoffing at a prophet declaring their city would one day fall to invaders
 - That's already happened!
 - Ezekiel is simply revealing that more of the same is going to happen
 - Yet the exiles comfort themselves with this proverb
- The second half of the proverb is even more absurd
 - They say "every vision fails" meaning the prophets always get it wrong
 - On the one hand, their skepticism is understandable
 - False prophets had been victimizing Israel for centuries
 - And the people had become accustomed to taking such predictions with a grain of salt
 - But here again, their present circumstances in Babylon should have caused them to recognize that not *all* prophets are wrong
 - Jeremiah, the prophet to Jerusalem, told the people their city would fall to Babylon well before it happened
 - Centuries before him, Isaiah foretold that Assyria would conquer the north and it happened
 - Isaiah also alluded to Babylon's capture of Jerusalem
 - So, of all people, the exiles in Babylon should have recognized that not all prophets are wrong
 - Only the false ones are wrong
 - Nevertheless, the people blindly assert that prophets can't be trusted
 - So with this proverb, they assure themselves they have nothing to worry about
- Have you ever used this excuse with God? Tell Him that the days are long and His word fails for you?
 - Maybe not in so many words, perhaps, but maybe you've thought something like this:
 - I know God's word says I shouldn't be doing such-and-such, and that sin has consequences...but so far, so good
 - I've avoided disaster to this point, things seem fine so far, I can control this, I can handle it

- So I can continue to ignore the word of God and it will all work out
- In essence, that kind of thinking is no different than the proverb spoken by the exiles
 - The commands we find in the word of God directing us into holiness and obedience seem more like suggestions
 - Even though God's instructions were intended for our good, to preserve us from the destructive consequences of sin, still we choose to ignore them
 - And even when we read warnings in scripture about willful disobedience, we tell ourselves it won't come to pass
 - Or we just don't want to think about it, burying our head in the sand
- Ironically, when the Lord is merciful to us by delaying those consequences, we treat his mercy as excuse to continue, like those in Babylon
 - We tell ourselves nothing has happened to us so far, so it will never happen
 - Even though we know others who have experienced consequences under similar circumstances
 - But we will be the exception
- We all use this excuse from time to time, but we're not fooling ourselves and we're certainly not fooling God
 - Our spirit knows better; that the word of God can be trusted
 - The Lord is faithful to His word, so as we play with sin, our spirit knows we're playing a game of roulette
 - Sooner or later, if we persist in disobedience, our number comes up
 - But the Bible also warns of hardening of our heart
 - You could define a hardened heart as reaching the point where you believe your own lies
 - I think that's how to understand the exiles in Babylon
 - They were a rebellious house because they had come to believe their own lies about God
 - And so they repeated the proverb among themselves even though they had plenty of proof the Lord was faithful
- So how does the Lord answer this excuse? Very simply...he renders it void

Ezek. 12:23 “Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “I will make this proverb cease so that they will no longer use it as a proverb in Israel.” But tell them, “The days draw near as well as the fulfillment of every vision.

Ezek. 12:24 “For there will no longer be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel.

Ezek. 12:25 “For I the Lord will speak, and whatever word I speak will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, for in your days, O rebellious house, I

will speak the word and perform it,” declares the Lord God.’”

- The Lord asks Ezekiel to respond to their excuse by saying, therefore tell them I will make this proverb cease
 - The Lord will bring their proverb to an end by proving it wrong
 - He says the days are drawing near when everything He has foretold through Ezekiel and Jeremiah will come to pass
 - Every vision will happen, and it will happen soon
 - The Lord is going to call Israel’s bluff
 - Moreover, the Lord says there no longer will be false visions or flattering divination given within the house of Israel
 - Not only will the Lord prove the accuracy of His words, but He will frustrate the words of the false prophets in Israel
 - Notice the false prophets were those who gave flattering prophecies to the people, prophecies that the people liked to hear
 - This is hardly surprising, since false teachers and prophets have always sought the approval of men rather than God
 - In the New Testament Paul calls such false teaching “tickling ears”
 - Tickling ears produces a counterfeit joy that isn’t rooted in anything real, so cannot last
 - These wolves in sheep’s clothing were sowing confusion among the people, encouraging skepticism of prophecy by their false words
 - Because of so many false prophets, the people of Israel assumed men like Isaiah and Jeremiah were just like the rest
 - They lumped the whole group together – both true prophets and false – and then they chose to ignore them all
 - But they neglected to notice that some guys, like Ezekiel and Jeremiah, got it right...every time
- So the Lord is going to get rid of the noise drowning out His voice among the people by thwarting the words of the false prophets
 - Obviously, the predictions of false prophets have no power to come true in any case
 - But sometimes they get lucky or sometimes the outcome isn’t clear one way or the other
 - But now God was preparing to actively oppose the predictions of false prophets
 - So when a false prophet flattered someone by promising God was going to bring a healing, God left their infirmity remain instead
 - When a false prophet promised a person riches, the Lord brought the person to ruin
 - Promises of safety would lead to disaster, promises of children would leave a

mother barren, and so on

- Soon the people would come to see the difference between the true prophets and the false prophets
- In fact I imagine it didn't take long before the last thing the people wanted was to be the subject of a false prophet's visions
- The Lord has more to say about false prophets in the next chapter
- Meanwhile, everything Ezekiel said would happen would take place just as the Lord promised
 - Notice He says "in your days, O rebellious house", these things will be carried out
 - The Lord is hastening these things in response to the people's stubborn doubts in His word
 - Those who had scoffed at Ezekiel were going to live to see how wrong they were
 - Once again this is how the Lord gains the attention of His people
- So Israel's first excuse survived in their culture because of two factors
 - The people of God had short memories of God's faithfulness and they gave their attention to false voices drowning out the truth
 - These same problems still exist among God's people today
 - So it makes sense we should still see this excuse in use today
 - And therefore the solution remains the same
 - We need to amplify the Lord's voice in our life, remembering His faithfulness, and we need to turn down the false voices everywhere
 - It's like two volume knobs on a radio
 - We need to turn up the truth and turn down the static
 - Because the more you remember the faithfulness of the Lord and the less you trust proven liars, the more reason you will have to act in obedience to the truth
 - As William Gurnall once said:

What more powerful consideration can be thought on to make us true to God, than the faithfulness and truth of God to us?

- As you pursue your study of God's word, allow time to reflect on the times God has been faithful to you
 - Those moments of grace when He steps in to alter the course of your life or provide or comfort you
 - The ways He brought encouragement or strengthened you to face a trial
 - How He took a small step of faith and magnified it in amazing ways
- Those memories of yesterday become a testimony that encourages us to anticipate His

faithfulness tomorrow

- And as Gurnall said, nothing will give us cause to be true to God more than to remember His faithfulness to us
- The exiles forgot God's faithfulness to His word and it encouraged them to scoff at the prophets
- And secondly, we need to grow in our discernment for where we go for counsel and who we give our attention
 - Our world is filled with false prophets, but most of them don't wear sackcloth or say "Yea, verily..."
 - Instead, they host daytime talk shows or write bestselling books
 - They might be that well-meaning but ungodly neighbor or relative always ready to hand out advice
- When you rely on those false voices and in the end they prove themselves worthless, you may start to think like these exiles
 - You may assume every voice is false, every teacher is wrong
 - Your cynicism grows, and eventually you turn away from God's people and from God's word too
 - That's the place of a hard heart
- Remember the case of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist?

Luke 1:13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

Luke 1:14 "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

Luke 1:15 "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

Luke 1:16 "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

Luke 1:17 "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Luke 1:18 Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years."

Luke 1:19 The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

Luke 1:20 "And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

- The priest was standing next to an angel in the Holy Place of the temple
 - He knows the messenger is someone special and he's afraid of what he sees
 - The angel responds with great news, that Zacharias will have a son
 - And that this son will be used mightily by the Lord
 - But how does the priest respond to this great revelation of God?
 - He asks for proof...he's making the same excuse in a way
 - He's saying my wife has been barren for our whole marriage, so the days are long and nothing changes
 - And perhaps others have prayed over them or prophesied they would have children, but those things didn't come to pass
 - So now he doubts everyone, even an angel in the temple of God
 - And we see what God did to discipline this man
- If we persist in listening to the wrong voices, the Lord may act against us too, out of love to demonstrate the folly of trusting in the world
 - If you place your trust in wealth or status instead of in the word of God, then maybe He'll shake your financial world
 - Prefer the opinions of your godless friends or the talking heads on TV rather than the voice of your pastor or elders?
 - Then maybe He'll frustrate your plans
 - Prefer the leading of your flesh over the leading of the Spirit? Maybe He'll bring your flesh to its end
 - All these things are possible, but the Lord doesn't want us to experience them
 - A God willing to place Himself on a Roman cross for the sake of sinful men and women is a God who has proven He has our best interests at heart
 - So when He directs us in His word, you can know He is telling the truth and it's for the best
 - He's not trying to steal away your fun or deny you what you need
 - He's telling you that He knows best what's good
 - And while His grace knows no limits, His patience does have a limit
 - Using the excuse of "so far, so good" is like daring God to speed up His plan and to expose our misplaced trust
 - Don't let yourself follow in the footsteps of these exiles, forgetting the faithfulness of God and dismissing His counsel
- We still have a few verses left in Chapter 12, and these verses give us time to examine the second excuse Israel offered, which was closely connected to the first

Ezek. 12:27 "Son of man, behold, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision that he sees is for many years from now, and he prophesies of times far off.'

Ezek. 12:28 “Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “None of My words will be delayed any longer. Whatever word I speak will be performed,”” declares the Lord God.

- Once again the Lord comes to Ezekiel telling him what the people are saying about His prophecies
 - Some are saying that Ezekiel’s visions are true, but they will not come true for many years from now
 - This is a variant on the earlier excuse
 - In the first case, the people were saying nothing ever changes and prophets are always proven false
 - This excuse says the prophets do speak truthfully
 - But they speak about things so far away, we need not concern ourselves with what they say
 - I think of this excuse when I hear scientists telling us that in a few billion years from now, our sun will exhaust all its fuel and go supernova
 - The sun will violently explode
 - And the explosion will grow to consume every planet in the solar system
 - All life on earth will be extinguished, and even the planet itself will cease to exist
 - Why doesn’t that prediction worry people? It’s because of that little detail at the beginning...”in a few billion years from now”
 - We hear that part of the prediction, and we say, “Oh that sounds terrible...what are we having for dinner?”
 - It’s not a concern because we’ll never live to see it and we have more pressing concerns
 - That same thinking is also reflected in that passage I quoted earlier from 2 Peter...it won’t happen to us
 - But the exiles weren’t listening to Ezekiel’s words very carefully, because he’s been predicting things that could be far away
 - For example, in his prophecy concerning the destruction of the city in Chapter 11, Ezekiel predicted the death of two current leaders in the city of Jerusalem
 - So obviously if his predictions are true, then they have to come to pass during their lifetimes
 - It’s more of the same bad logic we’ve discussed already
 - These people are willfully blind
- If you’ve never used the first excuse, perhaps you’ve used the second – because they are two sides of the same coin
 - God’s word is true...but just not yet
 - The Lord says He’s coming back for His church, but I’m guessing it’s not

happening today

- The Lord says that I should be serving Him and should be growing in my spiritual maturity...but that can wait for tomorrow
- If the first excuse could be labeled denial, then this one could be labeled delay
 - We don't deny the truth of the word; we just tell ourselves that it's too far away to matter
 - Like a supernova, God's word is interesting in theory, but it's not very practical
- I think this is one of the more common excuses you find in the church today for why people ignore, and flat out disobey, the word of God
 - It's why you see so many pastors pandering to congregations with sermons advertised to be "relevant" or "practical"
 - I think those are code words for "Bible-free" preaching
- Our church culture has been trained to acknowledge the Bible is true but to also assume it doesn't speak to our situation or needs
 - Part of the problem is there is a lot of bad Bible teaching going on
 - There are a lot of men in the pulpit who couldn't find their way out of a paper bag, much less divide rightly the word of God
 - And when our people sit under such nonsense week after week, it dulls their senses and distorts their view of what Bible teaching should be
- It's the same situation that caused the exiles to use the same excuse
 - They had false teachers everywhere, which cheapened their appreciation for God's word
 - In the end, many acknowledged the truth of God's word, but none of it seemed meaningful or relevant
 - So they said it concerns distant things, therefore we can ignore it
- When I began to teach Ezekiel to our congregation, I heard from several pastors who said they would never consider teaching this book to their congregations
 - They said they didn't think their people would listen to it...the content was too far removed from their experience
 - At first, I gave some thought to those words and began to worry this wasn't the right book for me to teach either
 - And then I realized this was the very excuse that God condemns in His word...*ironically in this very book*
 - God gave us this book for a reason, and if we think it's too remote, it's only because we've forgotten the power of God's word
 - Some of the events of this book are distant...and some are right around the corner
 - Some of the situations in this book are unique to ancient Israel...but many are as relevant to us as our own diary

- You only have to look deeper into what God is saying to find what He has for you
- The solution to ending this excuse among God's people is the same as the earlier excuse
 - In v.28 the Lord simply declares that none of His words will be delayed any longer
 - He will speak to near term events and He will bring them to pass
 - And then the people will not be able to claim that His word isn't relevant
 - I believe we're living in days when the Lord is preparing to remove this excuse from the church as well
 - Prophecies are being fulfilled
 - And much more is going to happen soon
 - Now is not the time to doubt the word of the Lord or to think it's not happening soon
 - It's all true, and it's all relevant

- The Lord said Israel was a rebellious house, making excuses for ignoring the word of the prophet
 - And we're in the midst of a study of these excuses
 - And we're watching how the Lord responds to each one
 - Refuting them by rendering them void
 - It reminds me of the wife who rendered her husband's excuse void

A husband came home from work and his wife walked up to him and slapped him across the face, "What was that for?" he cried.

His wife fumed, "I found a piece of paper in your pocket with the name Jenny on it."

The husband replied, "I bet on a race last week, and Jenny was the name of the horse!"

The wife looked embarrassed, "I'm so sorry!"

The next day his wife hit him again as soon as he walked through the door.

The husband shouted, "What now?"

The wife said, "Your horse is on the phone."

- The two excuses we studied last week were kissing cousins with one another
 - The first excuse denied that the prophets couldn't be trusted since their predictions never come to pass...yet we know this wasn't true
 - The second excuse acknowledged the prophets spoke truth, but the fulfillment of those prophecies was so far in the future there was no point in considering them
 - I called these two excuses denial and delay
- But as we also learned last week, false prophets operating among the people contributed greatly to their cynicism and doubt
 - These men spread false predictions that never came true
 - God never sanctioned them to speak nor gave them vision to know the future
 - They plied their corrupt trade for the praises of men rather than the approval of God
 - And in the end, they gave an already rebellious Israel the proof they needed to ignore the word of God
- Last week in Chapter 12, the Lord accused these men of flattering divination
 - They told people what they wanted to hear, collected their payment from grateful victims and then moved on
 - And because their prophecies inevitably proved false, they undermined the people's trust in God's word
 - So that soon, Israel couldn't (or wouldn't) distinguish between the true prophets and the false ones
- Because false prophets were eroding trust in the word of God, the Lord promised He

would act to remove this cancer from among His people

- And today in Chapter 13 we learn how the Lord deals with these men
 - In the course of our study, we also come upon the third excuse in this section
 - This excuse is a little buried in the events of the chapter, but we'll find it easily enough when we get to it
- But first, let's see how the Lord beings to deal with this cancer of false prophets

Ezek. 13:1 Then the word of the Lord came to me saying,

Ezek. 13:2 “Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy from their own inspiration, ‘Listen to the word of the Lord!

Ezek. 13:3 ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing.

Ezek. 13:4 “O Israel, your prophets have been like foxes among ruins.

Ezek. 13:5 “You have not gone up into the breaches, nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the day of the Lord.

Ezek. 13:6 “They see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, ‘The Lord declares,’ when the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope for the fulfillment of their word.

Ezek. 13:7 “Did you not see a false vision and speak a lying divination when you said, ‘The Lord declares,’ but it is not I who have spoken?””

- The Lord confronts these posers by calling them out publicly
 - In v.2 the Lord describes them as those who prophesy from their own inspiration
 - That's a way of saying they don't speak with the inspiration of God
 - A true prophet is a man (or woman) speaking under the inspiration of the Lord
 - They communicate things that could not be known by mere men apart from a revelation of the omniscient God
 - In that way, a prophet's own words validated the authority of their office
 - If a prophet was false and his prophecies were not inspired, his con would become evident soon enough
 - Eventually, he would be shown to be a liar when his prophecy failed to come to pass
 - On the other hand, when man spoke under the inspiration of God, and his predictions did come to pass, he would be validated before the people by the accuracy of his prophecy
 - In fact, the Lord often gave His prophets near-term visions to relate to the people to legitimize his office
 - False prophets were *not* inspired by God in this way, so they had only their own

inspiration to guide their prophecies

- Which was worthless, of course
- Everything they predicted was completely made up in their own heads
- Or to borrow from Nehemiah's retort to the men who lied about his motives in rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem:

Neh. 6:8 Then I sent a message to him saying, "Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind."

- Notice in v.2 that the Lord's first command to such men was to listen to the word of Lord (which is the solution to every problem, really)
 - If these men truly had a heart to serve the Lord, they would have focused on learning *from* God rather than pretending to speak *for* Him
 - If they had devoted themselves to a study of God's word, they could have at least spoken from an informed point of view
 - They could have benefited from the inspiration God has already revealed in scripture
 - So even though they weren't gifted by God to receive special revelation, at least they could have shared godly insight with Israel
 - But they did not care for the truth of God's word, so they gave no attention to it
 - They preferred the attention of the people and the power they derived from claiming to be one who spoke for God
- False prophets and false preachers only thrive among people who place too much emphasis on receiving special revelation from God, and too little emphasis on understanding the already revealed word of God
 - Though they have the full counsel of God's word and though the Bible itself tells us that should be our focus, still some feel it's not enough
 - So they seek for a sign or wonder or a supposed prophet, because they want to be the exception to the rule
 - So naturally come false prophets to tell us what we want to hear – that the Lord has a specific word for us!
 - The more God's people seek for such, the more false prophets are ready and willing to serve it up
 - But we already have so much revelation from God, to say nothing of His ordinary revelation in the world around us
 - If we would only take advantage of what He's provided, we could never exhaust its wisdom or power
 - We wouldn't think to demand something special and unique, because we would be too busy marveling at what has been provided
 - And God says that if the false prophets had done that themselves, then at least

they might have had something of value to offer the people

- But perhaps the Lord is admonishing the false prophets to read the word of God in the hope they would discover the penalty God assigns in His law for those who give false prophecies

Deut. 18:20 ‘But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’

Deut. 18:21 “You may say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’

Deut. 18:22 “When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

- If a man speak presumptuously as if from the Lord when he wasn’t commanded to speak by God, then the Law said he shall die
 - But how would Israel know that a man was speaking falsely?
 - So the Lord gave Israel a test that every prophet must pass
 - The test was that if any prophecy a man spoke failed to come true – even just once – then that man is deemed a false prophet and he should die
 - The people should not be afraid of him, because he is nothing
- God’s standard for determining a true prophet tells us something about the way true prophets operate under divine inspiration
 - When God chooses a person to speak His word and gifts that person with supernatural insight, the Lord also promises He will maintain perfect control over that person’s tongue
 - So that whenever the person claims to be speaking for God, he will be under God’s direction and therefore will never prophesy in error
- So the expression of the prophetic gift would never be a hit-or-miss affair
 - God would never allow someone He called as a prophet to make a mistake, because that would undermine the people’s trust in God’s word
 - So if the prophecy of a person claiming to be a prophet fails to come true, Israel should know this man was not a prophet
 - He was *never* called by God
 - So that even if some of his past predictions seemed to come to pass (whether by luck or otherwise), it didn’t matter anymore
 - Because if the man was wrong even one time, he proves he is a fraud, always was a fraud and always will be a fraud
 - His record of prophecy must be rejected entirely and he must be silenced
- So the Lord made it easy for Israel to distinguish between true and false prophets

- If only Israel had paid attention to the word of God, they never would have been taken in by these charlatans
 - So as I said, it all comes back to that, doesn't it?
 - Do we turn to the word of God for our guidance and authority?
 - And do we apply what it says?
 - Or do we ignore it, get taken in by crafty lies, and make the same mistakes over and over again
- So now the time has come for the Lord to judge these men for their lies, as He promised Ezekiel and the exiles He would
 - In v. 3 the Lord pronounces woe against these men
 - The word woe in the Bible is an expression of divine judgment
 - It's sometimes translated "alas"
 - It's like the expression a courtroom of observers might make after hearing a judge hand down a verdict of guilty
 - So the Lord is condemning them for their crimes
- The Lord describes these men's crimes in vs.4-7
 - He describes them like foxes or jackals scampering among ruins
 - Foxes make homes in rubble by finding crevices to hide in
 - It's a description of how these men were taking advantage of Israel's situation in exile
 - They were preying on the people's fears and worries and desperation to hear a good word from God
 - These scoundrels made a home for themselves in the rubble of Israel's ruin
- In v.5 the Lord indicts them for not standing in the breaches of those metaphoric walls, preventing them from falling rather than taking advantage of their fall
 - The Lord is asking where were these men, who claim to be building up the house of Israel in exile, when Israel needed spiritual guidance before they came under judgment
 - The city of Jerusalem fell under God's judgment because of Israel's idolatry and abominations, as we learned in earlier chapters
 - Had these men been true ministers of God, they would have worked to end the idolatry and to remove the abominations
- Instead the false prophets were taking advantage of the exiles telling them sweet sounding stories that weren't true
 - In v.6 the Lord says the people were hoping for the fulfillment of their false predictions
 - The people placed their hope in those lies but their hopes were going to be dashed in the end
 - In that way, these men were making a bad situation even worse

- Then in v.7 the Lord brings His judgment against these men, saying did you not lie when you said the Lord spoke to you when I didn't speak to you?
 - Therefore, the Lord says, I am set against you
 - The Lord will be their enemy
 - And when the Lord is your enemy, there is no one who can save you
 - The Lord pronounces His sentence against these men in vs.8-9, and it's very harsh

Ezek. 13:8 Therefore, thus says the Lord God, "Because you have spoken falsehood and seen a lie, therefore behold, I am against you," declares the Lord God.

Ezek. 13:9 "So My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will have no place in the council of My people, nor will they be written down in the register of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel, that you may know that I am the Lord God.

- First, the Lord says these men will no longer have anything to say to God's people
 - He will silence these men
 - And as we'll see, He will accomplish this by putting them to death through the very circumstances that they deny are coming
- Secondly, in v.9 the Lord says the names of these men will no longer be recorded in the registry of the house of the Lord
 - The Lord is saying these false teachers will lose their citizenship in Israel
 - And because they lose their citizenship, they will be denied the right to return to Israel after the exile ends
- Jewish identity was carefully guarded in Israel
 - The Jewish people were scrupulous in determining Jewish identity and verifying such claims
 - Generally speaking, in Ezekiel's day a person was considered Jewish if the father was Jewish
 - And the father's Jewish identity was determined in a similar way, that is, according to his father's identity and so on back to Jacob
 - In order to verify claims to Jewish identity, it was necessary to maintain genealogical records for all Jewish families
 - These records were the legal proof of a person's family identity
 - These records were kept in the temple building and could be checked when necessary to verify family or tribal identity
 - That's one of the reasons why the genealogy that begins Matthew's Gospel is so important
 - It was written before the temple's destruction, so Jesus' genealogy could have

been easily verified in that day

- So no one could dispute Matthew's record of Jesus' family line to David
- When the city of Jerusalem was taken by Babylon and the temple destroyed, those family records were carried into exile as well
 - During the years of exile, the Jewish leaders did their best to maintain these records as families continued to grow while in captivity
 - While most Jews remained pure while in exile, some chose to marry foreigners forfeiting their Jewishness
 - And in other cases, some family records were lost in the turmoil of the exile which meant these families could no longer vouch for their Jewish identity
 - These records became especially important when the exiles returned to the land 70 years later
 - As Ezra sought for men to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and temple, he ensured only true Jews were permitted to participate
 - If a Jew couldn't prove their Jewish identity, they were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and from the work of rebuilding
 - We see this situation reflected early in Ezra's book

Ezra 2:58 All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392.

Ezra 2:59 Now these are those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan and Immer, but they were not able to give evidence of their fathers' households and their descendants, whether they were of Israel:

Ezra 2:60 the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, the sons of Nekoda, 652.

Ezra 2:61 Of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and he was called by their name.

Ezra 2:62 These searched among their ancestral registration, but they could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood.

- You can see how families were being excluded from the priesthood
- And others were excluded even from joining the exiles at all, because their names weren't found in the registration
- Back to Ezekiel, we now understand what the Lord was saying to the false prophets
 - When the opportunity arises for the false prophets and their families to go home, they won't be able to return the Lord says
 - The Lord is literally going to separate them from the Jewish people by erasing their Jewish birth records
 - Somehow, their names will mysteriously disappear from the rolls
 - As a result, the false prophets will never return to the land of Israel again

- In this way, the Lord ensures that when the remnant of Israel returns, it will return without the scourge of these men
- Now at this point, we reach the third excuse that held back Israel's obedience to the word God gave Ezekiel
 - But the excuse is subtle, so it's a little hidden in the text

Ezek. 13:10 “It is definitely because they have misled My people by saying, ‘Peace!’ when there is no peace. And when anyone builds a wall, behold, they plaster it over with whitewash;

- The third excuse is found here in v.10, as the Lord repeats what the prophets have been saying to mislead the people
 - Specifically, the prophets were declaring that the future of Jerusalem would be one of peace
 - When in reality, what was coming for that city was not peace at all
 - Instead, the city would see the fulfillment of all disasters the Lord has been promising through the true prophets
 - And the people believed this report
 - So the third excuse was claiming that Ezekiel had been superseded by other prophets
 - Ezekiel has been predicting woe, but now other prophets are predicting peace
 - So it looks like God revised His prediction, issued an update, and we'll be ok after all...just a false alarm
 - Undoubtedly, we can assume there were multiple voices giving positive predictions of peace (i.e., flattering divination)
 - While on the other side, there were just a couple of men (Jeremiah & Ezekiel) saying otherwise
 - Faced with the choice of believing a minority negative report vs. a majority positive prophecy, the people chose the positive
 - And perhaps they took confidence in the fact that the majority of voices were against Ezekiel
- As we saw with the earlier excuses, the truth was not hard to see (had the exiles been truly interested in the truth)
 - First, the failures of false prophets must have been evident by now
 - Israel must have noticed that these flatterers were usually (if not always) wrong in their predictions
 - And so the people should have had the good sense to reject their predictions concerning Jerusalem no matter how positive
 - Secondly, if these people had turned to the word, they would have realized how demanding God's standard was for a prophet

- They could have measured the performance of these false prophets and discovered they weren't able to meet the test
- And as a result they could have dismissed them and ignored them
- Instead, they ignored the word so they could cling to a hope in something they preferred
- Thirdly, they could have seen how accurate Jeremiah and Isaiah had been in their predictions and known to trust them
 - Those men predicted the conquering of the city and it came to pass
 - And so when they predicted yet further destruction, Israel shouldn't have doubted
- In the second half of v.10 the Lord describes the work of the false teachers as like plastering over a wall with whitewash
 - In this metaphor the wall represents Ezekiel's prophecies concerning what will happen to the defenses of Jerusalem
 - Ezekiel has said the walls of the city and all that were within them would be destroyed
 - The Lord compares that prophecy to an ugly, decaying wall
 - To something rotten and soon to fall
 - But the Lord says false prophets were telling a different story, a lie intended to make the people feel better about the future
 - They were like men plastering and whitewashing over Ezekiel's rotten walls
 - They took the hard truth of God's coming judgment and they painted over it to make it look better
 - But underneath that whitewash is the same rotten wall
 - Though it suddenly looks better, the reality hasn't changed
 - The wall is still destined to fall and it won't be saved by a little paint and plaster
 - What a great picture of how false prophets work
 - They start with something God has said or done but then they cover it over with a thick coat of lies
 - They whitewash it, so to speak, so that it's unrecognizable to a true student of scripture
 - But to the ignorant or immature, it's all the more attractive and alluring
 - Nevertheless, in the end the whitewash is destined to crack and fall away, because only the word of God stands the test of time
- We will return to this passage next time to see how God exposes these liars, but before we end today, I have to ask have you used this excuse?
 - Have you ever given preference to a false teaching over the truth in the Bible simply because the lie sounded better than the truth?
 - You may say no but ask yourself this...

- When you hear Bible teaching or when someone offers you a perspective on the Bible, *how* do you know if they are speaking truthfully?
- The obvious answer is, we should compare their teaching to the Bible so you can double check what they say
- But many of us are too unfamiliar with what the Bible teaches to do that homework (and others are simply lazy)
- So uninformed or immature Christians will simply guess, and usually they choose to believe whatever sounds better to them
 - I think many of the doctrinal disputes that divide the church exist because of this excuse working in our thinking
 - We prefer what sounds better to us, and we discount any teaching to the contrary
 - Keep in mind, the Bible is perfectly clear about every major doctrine of our faith – including those doctrines that are often in dispute
 - If the church wanted to resolve these disputes, we could do it easily enough if we would just attend to the Bible without regard to preference
- You can see this excuse at work behind the recent rise in popularity of the heretical teaching that claims hell doesn't actually exist
 - People feel better rejecting the idea of hell because we prefer that no one suffers
 - And this view is gaining hold in some corners of the church despite the fact that the Bible says plainly that Hell is real
 - The truth is Hell is operating today and more people enter every hour
 - But if Hell isn't real, then what exactly did Christ die to save us from?
- So excuse #3 is believing only what we prefer, and dismissing contrary evidence even when it's compelling because we don't want to accept hard truth
 - It's an excuse made possible by believers who don't understand the Bible well enough to reason out the truth from scripture or they simply ignore it altogether
 - Therefore, they fall back on personal preference to determine what to believe
 - They may prefer a teaching because it agrees with a favorite pastor, or a spouse or parents' teaching or with their denominational position
 - That's painting the hard truths of the Bible in whitewash so as to obscure what it says and replace truth with palatable lies
 - We have to be good Bible students so we can defend ourselves and each other from this nonsense
- Unfortunately, the false voices speaking flattering lies in contradiction to God's word are getting louder and bolder
 - The two most common lies floating around the church today are the prosperity gospel and the word faith movement
 - The prosperity gospel says that a relationship with Christ is merely a means to

- receive wealth and success on earth
- While the word faith teaching says that we can “claim” a preferred outcome in any situation and the Lord promises to bring it to pass so long as we have enough “faith” in that outcome
- Each of these false teachings have a large community of false prophets and a devoted following of disciples
 - Both of these false teachings tell Christians things they want to hear, that we can have what we want in life
 - And both contradict the clear teaching of scripture
- Moreover, the majority of voices in the church today – certainly those on TV and the bookstand – echo these false teachings
 - While the voices that proclaim the truth of God’s word are getting harder and harder to find
 - So it would seem that popularity is on the side of the false teachers
- Therefore, if you should ever confront someone caught up in this nonsense telling them what the Bible actually says, they often won’t hear it
 - You show them from scripture that Christ didn’t promise to make His followers rich; He taught that we must be prepared to lose everything
 - Or you explain that the Bible says God does not cater to our desires but calls us to take up a cross, sacrificing our desires to follow Him...
- Still, they won’t hear it
 - They dismiss your counsel because it doesn’t appeal to them
 - And they say you’re just one voice, while there are many voices on TBN (Trinity Broadcasting Network) saying differently
- The believers who have been sucked into these miserable deceptions spread by hypocritical liars are following the same example of the exiles
 - They are giving attention to false words of counsel simply because they prefer that message over what the Bible says
 - They care little or nothing for what the Bible actually says
 - And these false teachers are experts in preying on these desires
 - Once again, the truth in these matters isn’t hard to find, so long as we’re willing to give our attention to God’s word
 - And giving attention means serious, life-long study
 - In days when the enemy is working so effectively to whitewash walls, we must set our minds on becoming even better Bible students



Ezekiel - Lesson 13B

Chapter 13:10-23

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- Let's return to Chapter 13 of Ezekiel, where the Lord is preparing to deal judgment against the false teachers deceiving Israel
 - And we're also moving through a series of eight excuses that Israel has offered for not repenting and heeding the word of the prophet
 - Last time we had just reached the third excuse
 - The excuse was a little hidden in the text in v10
 - Let's reread that verse and move forward a few more

Ezek. 13:10 “It is definitely because they have misled My people by saying, ‘Peace!’ when there is no peace. And when anyone builds a wall, behold, they plaster it over with whitewash;

Ezek. 13:11 so tell those who plaster it over with whitewash, that it will fall. A flooding rain will come, and you, O hailstones, will fall; and a violent wind will break out.

Ezek. 13:12 “Behold, when the wall has fallen, will you not be asked, ‘Where is the plaster with which you plastered it?’”

- In the third excuse, as you may remember, the prophets were declaring that the future of Jerusalem would be one of peace
 - When in reality, what was coming for that city was not peace at all
 - Instead, the city would see the fulfillment of all disasters the Lord has been promising through the true prophets
 - And the people believed this report
- So the third excuse was claiming that Ezekiel had been superseded by other prophets
 - Ezekiel has been predicting woe, but now other prophets are predicting peace
 - So they preferred to think God revised His prediction, issued an update, and so things will be ok after all
 - Ezekiel's warnings were just a false alarm
- Faced with the choice of believing a negative report vs. a positive prophecy, the people chose the positive
 - They chose this path even though it would have been clear that the false prophets had a track record of error
 - While the prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah in Jerusalem were coming true routinely
 - It was willful ignorance, selective attention, an excuse for rebellion
- So in the second half of v.10 the Lord described the work of the false teachers to be like plastering over a wall with whitewash
 - In this metaphor the wall represents Ezekiel's prophecies concerning what will happen to the defenses of Jerusalem
 - They said the wall would fall because it protected a corrupt rebellious people
 - But false prophets lied to make the people feel better, telling them the walls

- would not fall
 - The Lord compared that to workman trying to plaster over a crumbling wall
 - Whitewashing the truth, making the future look better than was actually true
- But underneath those whitewashed lies, the truth remains unchanged
 - The wall is still crumbling and destined to fall
 - This is the classic modus operandi of every false prophet
 - They always start with something God has already said or done but then they cover it over with a coat of lies
- They whitewash it, so to speak, so that it's unrecognizable to a true student of scripture
 - They entice the ignorant or immature with their ear tickling words
 - We'll only be prepared to spot those lies if we're students of the truth in God's word
- So because these false teachers were giving opportunity for Israel to make their excuse, the Lord responds to their whitewashing
 - In v.11 the Lord tells Ezekiel to tell the false prophets that claim good things are coming, that their prophecies will fail
 - Using the metaphor of a whitewashed wall, the Lord says that wall will fail
 - I like to imagine this metaphor literally
 - As if someone constructed a sheetrock wall to protect the city of Israel
 - And then the invading army just punches a hole right through it and it crumbles before them
 - The Lord uses images of flooding rain, hailstones and a violent wind to represent those invaders
 - Those natural forces would wreck havoc on a whitewashed wall
 - People of that day who had experienced such storms in the past knew exactly what would happen
 - The storm would erode the soil around base of the wall, dissolving the whitewash coating and blowing over the exposed stones
 - All of these things picture the coming destruction of the city by Nebuchadnezzar's army when they returned for the third time
 - You can see the extent of the destruction when you see what was required to rebuild the wall in Nehemiah's account
 - He reports that the walls were completely gone with only the foundation stones remaining and the city gates were burned with fire
 - That's how thoroughly the Lord blows them down so to speak
- In v.12 the Lord says the people will be asking the false prophets at that time, where did the plaster go?
 - Again, the Lord is using the metaphor to represent the lies of the false prophets
 - They said the walls would stand, the city would be preserved, the enemy would not conquer the city

- So when that proves false the people will be asking them, “What happened to your prophecies? Why aren’t they coming true?”
 - Where is that plaster you promised?
- Haven’t we seen this response ourselves? Haven’t we seen the astonished reactions of those deceived by false teachers when their lies fail them?
 - For example, the false prophet William Miller that started the Seventh Day Adventist religion predicted Christ’s Second Coming in 1843
 - When it failed to come to pass his followers were left asking, where is the whitewash?
- Charles Russell founded the Jehovah’s Witnesses religion claiming the Kingdom of God would come to earth in 1914
 - When that failed to come to pass his followers asked, where was the whitewash, and broke away to form a new movement
 - Then their leader, Joseph Rutherford, in 1920 made an announcement that the Hebrew patriarchs (such as Abraham and Isaac) would be resurrected in 1925, marking the beginning of Christ’s thousand-year earthly Kingdom
 - Disappointed by his unfulfilled predictions, tens of thousands of defections occurred during the first half of Rutherford’s tenure, leading to the formation of several new organizations
- More recently we’ve had Harold Camping predict the rapture, Ronald Weinland predict Jesus’ return...
 - Just two months ago David Meade claimed our planet would collide with Nibiru, a nonexistent planet, leading to Armageddon
 - The lady who claimed Niburi exists says she receives messages from extraterrestrials from the Zeta Reticuli star system, through an implant in her brain
- Throughout history, false prophets come and go, speaking against scripture, spreading lies, whitewashing over the truth
 - And when those lies fail the people always say, what happened?
 - They are astonished that these predictions failed to come to pass
 - Yet they go looking for the next false prophet to fill the void created by the former
 - The Lord delights to tear down these false voices, to expose their tricks and ridiculous predictions
 - Consider what He says next to Israel

Ezek. 13:13 Therefore, thus says the Lord God, “I will make a violent wind break out in My wrath. There will also be in My anger a flooding rain and hailstones to consume it in wrath.

Ezek. 13:14 “So I will tear down the wall which you plastered over with whitewash and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation is laid bare; and when it falls, you will be consumed in its midst. And you will know that I am the Lord.

- The Lord is at work tearing down false things to ensure that His truth stands unchallenged
 - In the case of Jerusalem, the more the false prophets said the walls would stand, the more determined the Lord was to knock them down
 - He did as He promised
 - He brought the walls down to their foundations
 - And more than that, He promises He will consume the false prophets within the city
- The only solution to this nonsense is for God's children to stand on the sure and solid rock of God's word
 - We need to know what God says in His word, and if we do, we won't care what the pretenders tell us
 - If you trust in the revealed word you won't be disappointed by the lies
 - That's what Israel failed to do
 - They had Ezekiel and Jeremiah speaking the truth, but they gave those men little attention
 - They preferred what they heard from the false prophets
 - We too have all we need to know about the things these false prophets claim
 - We know the Bible says the resurrection of the Church (i.e., the Rapture) is coming one day
 - But we also know that the Bible says believers won't know that day in advance
 - So anytime someone predicts that date, we know right away they are bound to be wrong...and they don't know their Bible
 - The Bible says the Lord will return one day, and His return will bring an age to its end leading to a Kingdom on earth
 - But the Bible also says His return happens as part of larger sequence of things that haven't even begun yet
 - And Armageddon does not involve a fake planet or alien implants
 - So again, when ridiculous prophecies come along, we reject them without a moment's thought...
 - Not because we are cynical or deny every prophecy, but because we already have true prophecy
 - This is the main reason why the Bible calls upon Christians to study prophecy eagerly
 - It's our insurance policy against being captivated by nonsense
 - If you believe in Christ and look forward to new things to come one day, then you also give attention to what the Bible teaches concerning those things
 - If you ignore prophecy in the Bible, you're likely to be tripped up sooner or later
 - False prophets take that truth and whitewash it to make it more exciting for

ignorant ears

- The Lord call us to listen to His voice, as Jesus declared, because the sheep know the Master's voice and follow the Good Shepherd
 - And to protect us, He delights to tear down and silence the false voices around us
 - As a new one comes to the foreground, the Lord exposes their lies soon enough
 - For example, look what the Lord did to those false voices in Israel

Ezek. 13:15 “Thus I will spend My wrath on the wall and on those who have plastered it over with whitewash; and I will say to you, ‘The wall is gone and its plasterers are gone,

Ezek. 13:16 along with the prophets of Israel who prophesy to Jerusalem, and who see visions of peace for her when there is no peace,’ declares the Lord God.

Ezek. 13:17 “Now you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who are prophesying from their own inspiration. Prophecy against them

Ezek. 13:18 and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Woe to the women who sew magic bands on all wrists and make veils for the heads of persons of every stature to hunt down lives! Will you hunt down the lives of My people, but preserve the lives of others for yourselves?

Ezek. 13:19 “For handfuls of barley and fragments of bread, you have profaned Me to My people to put to death some who should not die and to keep others alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies.””

- Following the attack on the city, the wall and many of the inhabitants of the city were destroyed (as we know)
 - And among those killed were the false prophets that had misled the city
 - The Lord says in v.15 He will bring His wrath on the wall and on those who lied to the people
 - The ones, in v.16, who gave visions of peace when there would be no peace
 - God's wrath is righteous anger directed against the sinful rebellion of the people and the sinful deceit of the false prophets
 - The Lord says He spent His wrath on these ungodly, and that gives us a good word picture for how sin works
 - As the ungodly do what they do, they are storing up wrath with a holy and just God
 - No sin goes uncounted, no offense will escape repayment
 - Sometimes the Lord spends some of that stored wrath against His enemies while still in this life
 - In other cases He forgoes judgment here, but in all cases He brings justice in eternity
 - Understanding how God's wrath works only serves to increase our appreciation

for the grace we've received in Christ

- Each of us has some story we could tell about the course of our lives before we came to know Christ
- In many ways we were storing up wrath with God, engaged in various sins without regard for a coming judgment
- Imagine all that wrath piling up...and then imagine the Lord placing it all on His own sinless Son for you and me
- He spent His wrath on Christ instead of you and me, for no reason except His love and mercy
- The more you appreciate your sin, the more amazing grace becomes
- Then in vs.17 the Lord moves to a specific condemnation of the female false prophets who were operating in the city as well
 - God did on occasion raise up women prophetesses in Israel, though they were far more rare
 - Nevertheless, they did exist and so did false prophetesses
 - And the Lord condemns these false prophets in a unique way
 - In fact, there is no greater condemnation of false female prophets in all the Bible
 - Like the men, these women were making things up and passing them off as if from God
 - In what the Lord says these women did, it's apparent they were working in cultic ways; using black magic to influence people
 - We know this because of the practices the Lord mentions here
 - In v.18 we're told the women were sewing cloth bands on their wrists and making full-length veils for themselves or those they prophesied over
 - These articles of clothing were intended to inspire awe and wonder in people
 - And they were part of the sorcery and witchcraft trade
 - Veils of this kind were usually associated with casting spells, which is an appeal to demonic forces
 - So the Lord's disgust with the female false prophets comes from their association with satanic powers
 - Apparently, the female false prophets operating in the city were particularly connected to the demonic realm
 - Perhaps more so than their male counterparts
 - And so they were doing particular damage among the people
- These witches practiced their divination for as little payment as a handful of grain, which makes their crimes all the more detestable
 - Because of their lies, evil people were allowed to live while innocent people died
 - We don't know exactly what they were doing
 - But we can imagine the same satanic practices we see in places today
 - Innocents dying like human sacrifices, while evil was promoted in celebrating

depravity of whatever kind

- All this for a meal of barley...it's like someone committing mass murder for a bag of potato chips
- Notice at the end of v.19 the Lord refers again to their prophecies as lies
 - Remember, these witches were likely working with demonic power
 - Which means they probably had the ability to display supernatural signs and wonders
 - And yet what they said turned out to be lies in the end
- That reminds us that even though someone has supernatural power or can produce wonders, doesn't guarantee they speak truth
 - They could be (and usually are) using power of an evil source
 - Ultimately, we need to test the fruit of what they teach
 - And if the fruit of what they teach is bad, then the tree is bad too
 - If what they say contradicts scripture, if it promotes sinfulness and excites the flesh, if it does not glorify God or promote holiness...
 - Then it's not of God and we have nothing to do with it
- And so then the Lord pronounces His judgment on these sorcerers

Ezek. 13:20 Therefore, thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am against your magic bands by which you hunt lives there as birds and I will tear them from your arms; and I will let them go, even those lives whom you hunt as birds.

Ezek. 13:21 “I will also tear off your veils and deliver My people from your hands, and they will no longer be in your hands to be hunted; and you will know that I am the Lord.

Ezek. 13:22 “Because you disheartened the righteous with falsehood when I did not cause him grief, but have encouraged the wicked not to turn from his wicked way and preserve his life,

Ezek. 13:23 therefore, you women will no longer see false visions or practice divination, and I will deliver My people out of your hand. Thus you will know that I am the Lord.”

- The Lord says He will break these magic bands off their arms, and in so doing free those held captive by their lies and divination
 - And He will tear off their veils by which they controlled the people and hunted down those that opposed them
 - Apparently, these women were very dangerous and held great demonic powers over the people
 - But they weren't more powerful than the Lord
 - And when the time came, the Lord stripped them of their power over the people
 - These women did far more than lie to the people

- The Lord says in v.22 they disheartened the righteous
- As those who loved the Lord and His word saw the power these women had and how they controlled the people, it must have been so discouraging
- The righteous must have felt like David when he cried in the Psalms

Psa. 35:11 Malicious witnesses rise up;

They ask me of things that I do not know.

Psa. 35:12 They repay me evil for good,

To the bereavement of my soul.

Psa. 35:13 But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth;

I humbled my soul with fasting,

And my prayer kept returning to my bosom.

Psa. 35:14 I went about as though it were my friend or brother;

I bowed down mourning, as one who sorrows for a mother.

Psa. 35:15 But at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered themselves together;

The smiters whom I did not know gathered together against me,

They slandered me without ceasing.

Psa. 35:16 Like godless jesters at a feast,

They gnashed at me with their teeth.

Psa. 35:17 Lord, how long will You look on?

Rescue my soul from their ravages,

My only life from the lions.

- For reasons God knows, the enemy and his people may get the upper hand for a while
 - And during these times we are bound to be discouraged
 - And we wonder why the Lord doesn't simply win the battle for us
 - The issue is simply timing
- The Lord has won the day in Christ; Satan's defeat is already assured
 - But like Jerusalem in this day, the Lord waits to reveal that victory on earth
 - It's already been won in the heavenly and it's secure in our hearts, for He Who is in us is greater than he who is in the world
 - But we wait for the Lord to bring that victory to every corner of the Earth according to His timing
- The evil of this world can't dishearten you if you maintain eyes for eternity
 - As long as you understand the promises of scripture and appreciate the sense of God's timing in these things, then you can look past a momentary defeat
 - The enemy gains ground on a day here or there
 - But he isn't holding the territory
 - And when the day comes, the Lord will break his strongholds
 - He can do that in your life in breaking habits, vices, weaknesses

- And He will do that in all Creation in a day to come
- Secondly, these women gave encouragement to the ungodly to sin with impunity
 - They encouraged evil and gave it protection from justice
 - They celebrated depravity and the occult
 - And in that way, they turned the wicked away from repentance, from any sense of guilt or the need to turn
 - And in that way, these women ensured the death of these ungodly
 - The same things are happening today as evil people, under the influence of demonic forces, are pushing our culture to become increasingly evil
 - Sin is celebrated as depravity is encouraged
 - The wicked feel less and less reason to repent or turn away
 - When the culture embraces and even celebrates your sin, you have no reason to turn
 - But they're just leading many to death, both here and in eternity
- These situations are not the end, they are just a stop along the way to the end
 - Just as it was in Jerusalem, the Lord will step in one day to strip the enemy and his people of power and rescue His people
 - Here again, knowing your Bible is key
 - If you understand how God works through evil in the world, then you can remain patient, even as we await His victory in a day to come
 - You won't fall under the spell of the demonic voices that are around us bringing discouragement
 - You can echo David's words as he finishes Psalm 35

Psa. 35:26 Let those be ashamed and humiliated altogether who rejoice at my distress;

Let those be clothed with shame and dishonor who magnify themselves over me.

Psa. 35:27 Let them shout for joy and rejoice, who favor my vindication;

**And let them say continually, "The Lord be magnified,
Who delights in the prosperity of His servant."**

**Psa. 35:28 And my tongue shall declare Your righteousness
And Your praise all day long.**

- As we like to say, "I've read the end of the book, and Jesus wins."
 - And as true as that is, don't forget the middle of the book too
 - God is always winning, but sometimes it doesn't look that way
 - Nevertheless, because we've read the whole book, we can see everything in proper perspective
 - We can see that evil has a purpose in God's economy at least for a time

- And we can appreciate we stand apart from this evil so we may be useful to the Lord in rescuing others out of it
- The Lord eventually broke the walls of the city and destroyed the false voices among His people
 - But the voices that were saved were those who heeded the counsel of the righteous in the city
 - That's where we need to see ourselves in this story...we're in a city with crumbling walls and a date with God's wrath
 - But we have already escaped that wrath and we're still here to tell others they can escape it too
 - Let's share the truth we know to save more from the lies

- Bill Clinton once remarked that running a country was a lot like running a cemetery... you've got a lot of people under you and nobody's listening
 - Leaders will lament to one another that they can't motivate their people to follow orders or follow their example
 - Sometimes that's true
 - But usually, leaders are greatly influential in shaping the thoughts and behaviors of those under their charge
 - Sometimes they influence their people for the better, and sometimes for the worse
 - Knowing this, good leaders will take personal responsibility for any failures while giving credit to their people for any successes
 - For example, Harry Truman kept a sign on his presidential desk that said "The Buck Stops Here"
 - It was a reference to that old saying of "passing the buck" which means passing off blame to someone else
 - Truman said he wouldn't pass the blame to someone else for his mistakes
 - The buck (meaning the blame) stopped with him
- But not all leaders are so courageous and responsible
 - Some pass the buck quite regularly, quickly finding someone else to carry the blame for their failures
 - Leaders like this, who are corrupt or incompetent or unaccountable, usually foster the same attitudes in those under them
 - Their people will learn to blame others and pass the buck too
 - This holds true not only in business but also in spiritual communities
 - The kind of men who lead God's people can have a dramatic impact on the community's spiritual maturity and godliness
 - Today in Chapter 14 of Ezekiel, we will see this principle at work clearly
 - This tendency to pass the buck lies at the heart of Israel's fourth excuse
- We're in the middle of studying the eight excuses Israel offered to God for why they need not give attention to Ezekiel's warnings and exhortations
 - These eight excuses are found in Chapters 12-19
 - Today we reach the fourth excuse in Chapter 14
 - Israel's excuse uses Harry Truman's philosophy
 - The people of Israel said the buck should stop with their leaders
 - They said God should blame only Israel's leaders for their idolatry and disobedience to the covenant
 - They expected to be excused in their own disobedience because they were only following the elder's example

- Let's see how the Lord responds to this excuse (and I bet you can guess how)

Ezek. 14:1 Then some elders of Israel came to me and sat down before me.

Ezek. 14:2 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezek. 14:3 “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all?

Ezek. 14:4 “Therefore speak to them and tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Any man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will be brought to give him an answer in the matter in view of the multitude of his idols,

Ezek. 14:5 in order to lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel who are estranged from Me through all their idols.”’

Ezek. 14:6 “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Repent and turn away from your idols and turn your faces away from all your abominations.

Ezek. 14:7 “For anyone of the house of Israel or of the immigrants who stay in Israel who separates himself from Me, sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet to inquire of Me for himself, I the Lord will be brought to answer him in My own person.

Ezek. 14:8 “I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from among My people. So you will know that I am the Lord.

- Chapter 14 is still set in the same time going back to Chapter 8
 - And for at least the second time in this period, the elders over the Jews in exile come to sit down before Ezekiel
 - By this point, these men must have thought Ezekiel was a first class agitator...a real “Debbie-downer”
 - He’s got nothing but bad news to share with the exiles, or so it probably seemed (though it’s not true)
 - And if so, it was because Israel had done nothing but bad things
 - We’ve learned a little about Israel’s elders in prior chapters
 - They were steering the people of Israel into idolatry and away from the Law
 - They were corrupt and godless, setting up abominations in the temple, telling Israel to pray to false gods
 - They had deceived generations of Israel
 - Which explains their present circumstances: Judah under conquest and Israel in

exile

- So now these corrupt leaders sit before Ezekiel, maybe to ask for his counsel or perhaps to ask him to tone it down a bit
 - Before the conversation gets going, the Lord begins to speak to Ezekiel
 - In v.3 the Lord says these men have set up idols in their hearts
 - And then put them right before their eyes to become stumbling blocks of iniquity
 - He asks Ezekiel, should the Lord receive counsel from such men?
 - It's rhetorical, because obviously these men have nothing to offer God or anyone who seeks godliness
 - Take a closer look at how the Lord describes how these men became corrupted
 - First, they began to worship an idol in their heart
 - Secondly, they produced an image of that idol and set it in front of themselves to reflect what was in their heart
 - And that physical object became a way of focusing their idolatrous gaze
 - God says it was "right before their faces" meaning it filled their field of view, it obscured everything else including the truth
 - And as a result, with their vision obscured, these men stumbled over their idol, spiritually-speaking
- This is the formula for all idolatry, for everything that leads us away from true worship and obedience to the Lord
 - It always begins because we fix our heart on someone or something that captivates us
 - That idol could be a false deity or belief system
 - Or it can be a physical pleasure or a harmful relationship or a greedy pursuit
 - Whatever form it takes in our hearts, we'll eventually set that desire before ourselves in physical form
 - We'll create images of our deity or beliefs
 - We'll satisfy that physical craving, we'll pursue that unhealthy relationship, we'll fill our shopping carts with stuff
 - And we set these things in front of our faces, so that we can't see anything else at least for a time
 - That idol will obscure our vision to become a stumbling block
 - Our gaze is so fixed on our idol that no matter which way we step, we're bound to trip, to fall
 - Like someone reading their iPhone while walking down the street...talk about an idol!
- Idols are cruel masters

- They'll demand more and more of our adoration
 - They are jealous and can't tolerate it when we look away
 - James describes this slippery slope this way:

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

James 1:15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

James 1:16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

- James says God never sets these temptations before the child of God, because we're plenty capable of doing it ourselves
 - James says it begins in our heart, when our own lusts tempt us
 - He's speaking of the idols that we manufacture in our heart
 - Eventually those lusts are conceived, which means they emerge from us as something physical that we set before our own eyes
 - And then we begin to serve them, leading us into sin
- But we ought not be deceived in this way, James says
 - The solution to eliminating an idol begins with removing those stumbling blocks, those physical things we're focused on
 - Eliminate the physical representations of the idol, and we begin to break its spell
 - Like the old saying: out of sight, out of mind
 - That's why time after time the Lord called the good kings of Israel to destroy the high places of idol worship
 - Israel's idolatry began in their heart, but those carved wood and stone representations focus their evil desires and made them seem real
 - So God took away that distraction, proving these things were powerless and empty
 - Which gave opportunity for deceived hearts to return to the Lord
- So these elders, men with their idolatrous hearts, sit down to converse with Ezekiel, and the Lord gives Ezekiel a message for these men
 - But it's not the message we might have expected
 - In v.4 the Lord says to Ezekiel say to any man in Israel who sets up an idol in his heart that he will hear from God
 - The prophet, Ezekiel, will give such a man a response from the living God, the very God that this man rejected

- The man who has devoted himself to serving false gods will receive an answer from the true living God
- The Lord says He will give an answer to such a man concerning the matter the man inquires about *because* of his idolatry
 - Notice at the end of the verse the Lord says “in view of the multitude of his idols”
 - So He’s talking about that Jew who has devoted his heart to idols and likely set up an altar in his home
 - He prays to these mute and deaf blocks of wood and rock expecting they will hear him and speak in response
 - His heart is captivated by lust and his gaze is fixed on dead things and he’s turned his back on God
- Yet when this man finally comes seeking advice from the true prophet, the Lord says He will answer him
 - And the Lord does so in order that He might break the spell of these idols on this man’s heart
 - Notice in v.5 the Lord seeks to lay hold of the hearts of those in Israel who are estranged from Him by their idols
- God is acting in mercy...this is grace
 - A God Who has been rejected by His covenant people, set aside for the sake of wood or stone, ignored and blasphemed...
 - That God still allows Himself to be sought and to be heard because He still desires to free their hearts from this slavery
 - Don’t let anyone tell you that the God of the Old Testament is different than the God of the New Testament
 - This is Old Testament grace, the same grace the Church receives from the Lord today
 - The Lord extends this same grace to you and me today
 - We’ve all harbored idols in our hearts from time to time
 - And perhaps we’ve even taken the next step of setting that idol right in front of our face, so to speak
 - We made it a stumbling block and it caused us to sin
 - But then perhaps one day, as we experience the weight of that sin, as we feel the consequences and pain and loss it brought, maybe we begin to seek for the Lord again
 - When that day comes, you can be sure He will answer you too
 - Come back to Him, seek His mercy, ask for rescue
 - And the Lord will speak to you as he did these men and He’ll do it for the same reason He did then
 - He wants to lay hold of your estranged heart, to bring it back to Himself

- As He does, just know He's going to say the same thing He said to Israel in v.6
 - Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your face away from the abominations you've set up before yourself
 - Notice that order again...first, break free from the physical things obscuring your vision
 - If it's a bad relationship, break it off
 - If it's a greedy desire, cut up the credit card
 - If it's a fear or anxiety or addiction or obsession, change your environment, erect fences of protection, seek godly counsel
 - Do whatever is necessary to regain clear vision, to turn your attention away from what has captured you
 - Once the idol has been smashed and you see some daylight, take advantage of that opening to run back to the Lord in repentance
 - Seek the Lord again in the word, in the company of godly people, in the comfort of prayer
 - Invest the energy you squandered on that idol into pursuing the disciplines of the faith that promote meaningful spiritual growth
 - Watch the Lord work to purge those unhealthy desires, evicting that idol from its home in your heart
 - It's like a see-saw, that as you invest in strengthening your spirit, the attraction of those idols will begin to fade
 - And if you think that sounds too easy, then try it...sincerely...prayerfully
 - Test to see if the word of God can be trusted
 - Weaker people than you have broken free with the Lord's help
- Now let's look back at v.4 for a moment...notice the Lord didn't distinguish between the elders and the rest of Israel
 - In fact, the Lord says quite specifically that His offer applies to any man of Israel
 - The leaders were at the forefront of leading the people into idolatry
 - Nevertheless the Lord is treating everyone equally
 - Both the elder and ordinary Jew are equally guilty
 - Both may receive mercy if they repent
 - This is our introduction into the fourth excuse...the people saying their leaders were the only ones to blame
 - Why were the people so sure that God would only judge the leaders for idolatry?
 - It goes back to the history of Jerusalem's capture by the Babylonians
 - Babylon's first attack against the city in 605 BC led to the king of Judah being deposed by Nebuchadnezzar
 - Babylon also took the nobles and leaders of the people into exile

- A few years later, the new king also rebelled against Babylon
 - So Nebuchadnezzar responded with a second attack of the city
 - And he again deposed that king and took yet more of the elite into exile
- So the people of Israel concluded that God directs His anger only against Israel's leaders
 - It became an excuse for them to dismiss the warnings of the prophet and to live without concern for God's judgment
 - But like the previous excuses, the people conveniently overlook the real facts
 - Yes the leadership were a focus of God's judgment, but they weren't the only ones to go into captivity
 - Many regular Jews had been caught up in slavery too or killed in the process
 - And soon enough, the rest were going into exile too
- So in vs.7-8 the Lord declares that anyone in the city who does not repent of idolatry will experience judgment
 - In v.7 He says this will apply to anyone of the house of Israel, both elders and common man
 - It even applies to the immigrants, the Gentiles who have set up a home in Israel
 - God will not be a respecter of persons but will deal justly in all cases
 - When such a person comes before the prophet again, having failed to repent, then that person will receive a word of judgment from the Lord
 - And specifically, they will receive God's answer from God personally – "in My own person"
 - Then in v.8 the Lord says He will make an example of such a person, or a proverb
 - The person will be cut off, killed, so that God's people will see that the Lord is truly the only God
 - Throughout these two verses, the Lord stresses over and over again the personal responsibility of each man for his own sin before the Lord
 - The people can't rest on the assumption that God will only judge the leaders
 - Each person's sin is before the Lord and each person must repent to survive the coming judgment against the city
- More than that, the people couldn't claim ignorance, for the Lord has spoken to them through the prophet

Ezek. 14:9 "But if the prophet is prevailed upon to speak a word, it is I, the Lord, who have prevailed upon that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel.

Ezek. 14:10 "They will bear the punishment of their iniquity; as the iniquity of the inquirer is, so the iniquity of the prophet will be,

Ezek. 14:11 in order that the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me and no

longer defile themselves with all their transgressions. Thus they will be My people, and I shall be their God,” declares the Lord God.”

- When these sinful elders have sat before the prophet seeking his counsel without repenting of their idolatry, the prophet will speak to them
 - But the Lord says these leaders and all the people need to recognize that what the prophet says is coming from God
 - Though the leaders asked the prophet to speak, nonetheless the Lord is responding
 - This reminds me of what God did through Balaam in Numbers 22
 - The prophet desired wealth, so he hired himself to the king of Moab who asked the prophet to curse Israel
 - The Lord permitted the prophet to go to the camp of Israel, but here’s what the Lord told the prophet

Num. 22:20 God came to Balaam at night and said to him, “If the men have come to call you, rise up and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do.”

- When Balaam went before the camp of Israel to pronounce a curse, the Lord only allowed blessings to emerge from the prophet’s mouth
- It didn’t matter what he had been asked to say, the Lord still ensured the prophet spoke God’s word
- That’s what He’s saying to Israel again here...it didn’t matter what they came to hear or what they asked the prophet to say
 - In the end, they should know they are hearing from the Lord
 - He’s saying you can’t blame your leaders and you can’t blame the messenger
 - You heard the truth straight from the Lord, so you can’t say you didn’t know or that the prophet couldn’t be trusted
- In fact, the Lord says in v.10 that should a prophet speak falsely, he too will be under judgment
 - And if a prophet were to sin in that way, they too would receive judgment
 - The Lord is holding everyone accountable and He’s preventing excuses
- And He’s doing all this, He says in v.11, to ensure that the people of Israel no longer stray and defile themselves
 - Remember, I said in an earlier lesson that the exile of Judah into Babylon put an end to idolatry in the land of Israel
 - Even after the people returned 70 years later, they never again returned to idolatry

- The nation remained steadfast in following the Law and refusing to worship idols
- The memory of the exile stuck just as God said it would
- Christians often quote Romans 8:28 that says

Rom. 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

- It's a beautiful verse, one that has given hope to countless believers living under difficult circumstances
- But sometimes we overlook what this verse is really saying
- The Lord causes all things to work together for good
 - Things that are not good can be harnessed to produce a good outcome
 - It means that God brings bad things sometimes, things we see as bad, but yet God sees them as necessary
 - And they're necessary because they are the best way to produce something good in our lives
- The Lord's desire was to break the stronghold of idolatry in the hearts of His people, to bring them back to Himself
 - As He says, they will be My people and I shall be their God
 - If that required Israel should endure generations of captivity in Babylon, then so be it
 - The outcome was worth it
 - He worked these terrible circumstances to good for the sake of His people
- If we're spiritually mature, we'll come to understand the same thing about our circumstances
 - When things are going poorly, when our life seems to be moving from bad to worse, remember that God is at work
 - He's working to bring good
 - But He's determined that the good He wants to accomplish is only possible through these difficult circumstances
 - Trust Him, be patient, seek an understanding and know that He hasn't forgotten you
 - And when the dust settles, and the good things have come, you'll understand
 - Sometimes the best lessons can only be learned the hard way

- I'm often annoyed by the way the world portrays devout Christians in the movies
 - The “cool” Christians are those who don't take their religion too seriously
 - They're vaguely religious, keeping their beliefs to themselves
 - They celebrate tolerance in the spirit of love
 - They even embrace other religions and even enjoy a little sin once in a while
 - That's the cool Christian
 - Then there are the evil, wacky Christians in the movies
 - We're the ones who actually believe the Bible
 - We dare to live according to what it says
 - We talk openly about the need to be forgiven of sin and the reality of hell
 - And we insist that unless you are born again by faith in Jesus Christ, you cannot see heaven
 - Those are the bad Christians, according to the movies
 - Of course, we know what's really going on here...
 - This is a spiritual battle, where the enemy is seeking to silence the Gospel and neutralize the witness of true believers
 - The world hypocritically calls for tolerance but will only tolerate Christians who hide their Christianity
 - They demonize Christians who actually live out their faith, because our witness prompts conviction and fear of judgment
 - So they try to pressure us into silence
- And yet, ungodly people often find comfort in an association with the godly as an insurance policy against bad things happening
 - We're like a lucky charm for them when things go really wrong in their life
 - They may ask us to say a prayer for them
 - Or they desire our friendship or counsel because they feel we're “closer” to God and we can provide them some protection
 - It's superstition born out of an ignorance of Who God is and how we find a relationship with Him
 - This misconception is not new...it's always existed among the ungodly and unbelieving of the world
 - And we'll see it at work among Israel today in Chapter 14 as well
- Last week we studied the fourth excuse of Israel, the excuse that Israel's leaders were personally responsible for the nation's idolatry
 - The people said they need not fear the word of the prophet since God's judgment would fall only their leaders
 - They thought they would be spared since they were merely following the example of the elders

- So they ignored the prophet's warning and went on sinning
- The Lord declared their excuse to be invalid by calling all Israel to repent personally or else face judgment
 - God said His mercy was available equally to all who repented
 - But likewise, His judgment would fall upon all who failed to repent of idolatry
- That fourth excuse exposed a bias within the people of Israel, a false understanding of how God operates
 - They assumed that the behavior of one person could be the basis for God's relationship to an entire group of people
 - Just as they thought the Lord would let judgment for their bad behavior fall on a leader
 - In the same way, they assumed that the good behavior of one person in the group would be cause for God to overlook the sin of the group
- These are excuses for sin, and the Lord is setting them straight
 - Last week He corrected their misconception concerning leaders
 - And in the second half of the chapter He explains that another's righteousness will do us no good

Ezek. 14:12 Then the word of the Lord came to me saying,

Ezek. 14:13 “Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send famine against it and cut off from it both man and beast,

Ezek. 14:14 even though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves,” declares the Lord God.

Ezek. 14:15 “If I were to cause wild beasts to pass through the land and they depopulated it, and it became desolate so that no one would pass through it because of the beasts,

Ezek. 14:16 though these three men were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord God, “they could not deliver either their sons or their daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the country would be desolate.

Ezek. 14:17 “Or if I should bring a sword on that country and say, ‘Let the sword pass through the country and cut off man and beast from it,’

Ezek. 14:18 even though these three men were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord God, “they could not deliver either their sons or their daughters, but they alone would be delivered.

Ezek. 14:19 “Or if I should send a plague against that country and pour out My wrath in blood on it to cut off man and beast from it,

Ezek. 14:20 even though Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord God, “they could not deliver either their son or their daughter. They

would deliver only themselves by their righteousness.”

Ezek. 14:21 For thus says the Lord God, “How much more when I send My four severe judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts and plague to cut off man and beast from it!

- The Lord says if a country (namely, Israel) sins against Him in unfaithfulness to the covenant, then He will stretch out His hand against them
 - In response, He will bring various calamities against the land and the people
 - The calamities include four categories of disaster
 - First, in v.13 the Lord describes a famine so great it cuts off man and beast
 - In v.15 he describes attacks by wild animals that run people out of the land
 - Those two would seem to go together, for as famine increases we would expect wild animals to attack humans for food
 - Then in v.17 the Lord warns of war devastating the country
 - And finally, in v.19 the Lord warns of a plague so great it leaves no one alive
 - These four disasters are uniquely specific, and they draw our attention back to a certain chapter of the Law found in Leviticus
 - In other words, these warnings are not new information for the people of Israel
 - The Lord promised these outcomes in the covenant of the Law as penalty for disobedience and unfaithfulness
 - Specifically, in Leviticus 26 the Lord promised:

Lev. 26:14 ‘But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments,

Lev. 26:15 if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant,

Lev. 26:16 I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that will waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you will sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up.

Lev. 26:21 ‘If then, you act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you seven times according to your sins.

Lev. 26:22 ‘I will let loose among you the beasts of the field, which will bereave you of your children and destroy your cattle and reduce your number so that your roads lie deserted.

Lev. 26:25 ‘I will also bring upon you a sword which will execute vengeance for the covenant; and when you gather together into your cities, I will send pestilence

among you, so that you shall be delivered into enemy hands.

Lev. 26:26 'When I break your staff of bread, ten women will bake your bread in one oven, and they will bring back your bread in rationed amounts, so that you will eat and not be satisfied.

- In Lev 26 we find all four types of calamities mentioned here in Ezekiel
 - These curses were part of what God promised to Israel in the Law as repercussions for breaking His covenant
 - And Lord reminds Israel of these judgment to make clear that He's simply acting in keeping with His word
 - He's remaining faithful to His covenant even as Israel did not
 - Because He's a covenant-keeping God
- Remember, the Old Covenant was a national covenant that obligated all the people of Israel to a single response from God
 - If the entire nation obeyed the covenant, then they all received the promises
 - But if the entire nation wasn't faithful to the covenant, the entire nation would see these curses
 - So God is only doing what He promised to do
- But then the Lord moves to making His point concerning associated righteousness
 - He says in v.14 that even if three especially godly men were living among them, nevertheless His judgments would still come against Israel
 - The three men were Noah, Daniel and Job
 - The Lord is speaking entirely hypothetically, because these three men didn't live at the same time in history
 - Noah lived thousands of years earlier, Job lived hundreds of years earlier and Daniel was still alive
 - By the way, Ezekiel's mention of Daniel refutes those who say Daniel's book was written long after the events he predicted
 - God chose these three men from history to emphasize the point that one man's righteousness has no bearing on another's fate
 - For example Noah was a righteous man, but his righteousness couldn't save the world when the flood came
 - Daniel was a righteous man, but his righteousness couldn't save his nation when Babylon came
 - And Job was a righteous man, but his righteousness couldn't save his own family when the enemy came
 - An upright man couldn't save the world nor a nation nor even a family
 - Their righteousness only served to save themselves
 - The rest suffered the penalty they deserved

- Few principles of scripture could be more important than this: we are each accountable to God for ourself
 - No matter how “good” someone is, that person will not be cause for God to overlook another’s sin
 - You may have an especially godly mother or father
 - Or you may be married to an especially godly spouse
 - Or you may be best friends to Billy Graham or you might shine the pope’s shoes or mow the pastor’s lawn...
 - But none of that counts for anything when you stand before God for your judgment
 - There is only one relationship we can have that will pay dividends for us at our judgement
 - That’s our relationship with God through Jesus Christ
 - Jesus is the one true righteous man, the one man who never sinned
 - And because He was perfect, He pleased God the Father
 - No other human being can make that claim
 - Therefore, if we hope to be saved from the judgment we deserve for our sin, we need to receive credit for Christ’s perfection in place of our sin
 - Placing faith in Jesus Christ results in God crediting us with Christ’s righteousness
 - And God counts Christ’s death as the payment our sin required
 - That’s the only association that pays us dividends in Heaven
- That’s what made Noah, Daniel and Job righteous in the first place
 - They were righteous by faith, credited with the righteousness of Christ, and their faith saved them
 - In v.20 the Lord says these three men were delivered by their own righteousness, which refers to their saving faith in God’s promises
 - And that salvation wasn’t transferrable
 - Notice the Lord repeats this conclusion three times in the passage I read
 - In v.14, v.16 and v.20 the Lord says these men couldn’t even save their own sons and daughters
 - Noah, Daniel and Job needed a Savior too
 - Every person is equally guilty of sin before the Lord
 - In fact, if these three men HAD been living in the city, it would have only made the judgment that much more appropriate
 - In v.21 the Lord says how much more when He sends His four judgments against the city...
 - He’s saying that if Noah, Daniel and Job were living in the midst of the city, He

- would preserve them from judgment because of their righteousness
 - But then after preserving them and removing them from harm's way, how much more would the remainder of the city deserve what was coming?
 - So rather than saving the city, these men would only serve to convict the city all the more, since the city should have seen their good examples and followed after them
- To quote Jesus in Luke 18:19, there is no one good but God alone
 - Therefore, none of us have any "spare" righteousness to offer another
 - We all obtain righteousness by our faith, and that righteousness is not our own, it's Christ's righteousness given to us
 - So we don't have anything to give to anyone else
- Yet among the unbelieving in the world, people still assume God works this way
 - The world likes to think they may earn God's approval one way or another
 - And conveniently, the world thinks the standard for heaven is low enough that they can meet the requirements with just a little effort
 - So when they come across someone who is especially devoted to serving God, the world assumes that person has an *excess* of heavenly credit
 - They are doing way more than what's required to get into heaven, so they can afford to share that wealth with other people
 - So by associating with that person, they're getting a heavenly insurance policy
 - That thinking lies at the heart of the Catholic teaching on saints
 - They teach that certain people lived such a commendable life that they merited excess favor with God
 - And so their excess merit they can be shared with others
 - So when things begin to go wrong for a Catholic, they turn to these "spiritual" all-stars seeking comfort and protection
 - They pray to their favorite saint expecting a heavenly transfer of favor
 - And this superstition is also evident in personal relationships
 - Have you noticed how unreligious people will sometimes seek out a committed Christian to ask for prayer in times of desperation?
 - Or maybe they joke about you putting in a good word for them with "the Man upstairs"
 - You find this happening especially in families where there's a lone Christian in the group
 - I see this happening in my own family every year about this time, as Thanksgiving and Christmas roll around
 - The family I came from is not religious at all and so we never bother with saying a prayer before a meal
 - Except when I'm at the table and it's a holiday

- There's that awkward pause before everyone eats as they all look at me helplessly expecting me to pray so they can eat
- Because God hears my prayers since I'm so "spiritual"
- That's the same kind of thinking we're talking about here
 - Though Israel was unwilling to obey God, they expected the Lord to be merciful to them because a few Jews among them were obedient
 - Like their reasoning for their fourth excuse, they assumed history supported their assumption
 - Last week I mentioned that the history of Babylon's attacks on the city of Jerusalem may have given the people reason to think that their leaders alone would be judged
 - But as I said, they had selective memory, because they overlooked that many Jews besides the leaders were caught up in the destruction
 - And perhaps the people have again drawn the wrong conclusion from their history
 - Perhaps they remembered the account of Abraham saving Lot from Sodom's destruction
 - In that account, Abraham asked God to spare the city if ten righteous people could be found
 - That story seemed to suggest that God saves cities if there are any righteous living in them
 - If that's what they thought, then they conveniently overlooked the outcome for the city of Sodom in that story
 - While the Lord fulfilled His promise to Abraham concerning Lot and his family, in the end the city of Sodom was destroyed and all the ungodly with it
 - Only those who were willing to obey the voice of the Lord spoken through His messengers, the angels, escaped the judgment
 - So though a righteous man lived in the city, in the end the city still received judgment
- In Jerusalem's case, the city would be judged and nothing was going to stop it
 - The die was cast, because the people had violated the covenant
 - But even still, we've been watching the Lord giving warning after warning
 - He's told the people time and again through Ezekiel that this judgment was coming
 - And He's told them how to survive the attack by repenting
 - If they did as He asked, they would survive and be given safety in exile
 - In that way the Lord could both be faithful to His promises in the covenant to judge Israel's unfaithfulness and yet He can also be merciful to His people
 - Despite His patience and mercy, the people continue to make excuses for why they should ignore Ezekiel's warnings

- Remember this pattern when you reflect on what the Lord is preparing to do in Jerusalem
- The Lord has been merciful and patient with His people, and yet He is also faithful to His word
- That's what a good father does...He keeps His word while looking for every opportunity to show mercy and grace
 - When my kids used to get into trouble and we had to discipline them, sometimes they would expect us to overlook their mistake
 - They wanted to avoid punishment, of course, but as parents we had to balance maintaining respect for our authority
 - So I would tell my kids, "You did the wrong thing, and now I have to do the right thing in disciplining you. You can't expect me to do the wrong thing also."
- Nevertheless we looked for every way we could to show mercy and restraint in that discipline, depending on the degree of repentance the child demonstrated
 - More repentance, more mercy
 - Less repentance, less mercy
 - But in all cases, we had to keep our word to bring some kind of consequences otherwise our word quickly meant nothing
 - That's how you should see the Lord responding here to His covenant people
- In fact, notice how the chapter ends

Ezek. 14:22 "Yet, behold, survivors will be left in it who will be brought out, both sons and daughters. Behold, they are going to come forth to you and you will see their conduct and actions; then you will be comforted for the calamity which I have brought against Jerusalem for everything which I have brought upon it.

Ezek. 14:23 "Then they will comfort you when you see their conduct and actions, for you will know that I have not done in vain whatever I did to it," declares the Lord God.

- In spite of everything the city has done in worshipping idols and setting up abominations and failing to repent, still the Lord will preserve survivors
 - In fact, the Lord says that the city would see the conduct of these people and that would bring them comfort in the calamity
 - The Hebrew word translated conduct and actions literally means evil actions
 - So the Lord is saying that the exiles will see the kind of people who will join them from Israel
 - Evil people will be preserved through the judgment
 - And as these evil people come to Babylon in captivity to join the rest of the exiles, they will testify to what they did

- And they will explain how the Lord preserved them nonetheless
- And then the people of Israel will take some comfort in seeing the big picture
 - They will understand why the Lord brought everything that He did against the city and the people
 - And they will appreciate the Lord's mercy and kindness and restraint in the face of His righteous judgment
- Moreover, the Lord says in v.23 that they will find comfort in seeing that His judgment wasn't in vain
 - The Lord is alluding to the change of heart He knows this judgment will bring to His people
 - The exiles will cease their rebellion in idolatry
 - They will acknowledge their wicked past
 - And they will commit themselves to remaining faithful to the covenant in the future
 - Earlier the Lord said that not even Noah, Daniel and Job could save their sons and daughters from the coming judgment
 - But now in v.22 God says He would save both sons and daughters
 - By His mercy He would preserve a remnant within Israel
 - What Noah, Daniel and Job could not do, God did
 - Righteousness couldn't spare the guilty
 - But a righteous God could, by responding to their repentance with grace
- This is our relationship too...before coming to faith in Jesus, we were no better than Israel was
 - We engaged in different sin, but it made us just as unholy and just as deserving of judgment
 - We too may have thought that we would escape judgment by our own righteousness
 - Or perhaps that of our parents or spouse
 - But they couldn't save us... and we couldn't even save ourselves
 - But God can save us
 - The Lord is prepared to save those who throw themselves on His mercy, who acknowledge their sin
 - And those who accept the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ are receiving the righteousness that can't be found any other way
 - In the end, that person will be saved from judgment



Ezekiel - Lesson 15

Chapter 15

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- Today we temporarily wrap up our Ezekiel study with Chapter 15
 - Our break is made necessary, of course, by my transition out of this pulpit and into the next
 - One day soon I hope to restart the Ezekiel study in Chapter 16
 - So stay tuned for the rest of the book
 - But today we have a brief chapter to complete
 - As you glance down the page of your Bible, you'll notice that we only have 8 verses to cover today
 - If you're thinking to yourself, "I wonder how Steve will fill an entire Sunday sermon with just 8 verses?"...
 - Then you are a visitor, and we welcome you to OHBC this morning
 - Because the regulars know this is no challenge for me
 - Chapter 15 brings us the fifth of eight excuses that Israel relied upon to tell themselves they have no reason to fear Ezekiel's warnings
 - We've been studying these excuses and God's response to each
 - And we've been considering whether we too use the same excuses for our own disregard for God and His word
 - The fifth excuse runs two chapters, Chapters 15 & 16
 - We see the excuse in Chapter 15, and then the Lord uses two chapters to respond
 - Normally, I would have preferred to cover both of these chapters in quick succession so we could see God's full response
 - But as short as Chapter 15 is, Chapter 16 is exceedingly long
 - In fact, Chapter 15 is the shortest chapter in the book of Ezekiel, while Chapter 16 is the longest
 - So it's simply not possible to cover both in the time I have left
 - Not unless you want me to cover Chapter 16 for our Christmas service...
 - So we'll save Chapter 16 for the day I resume this study
- Meanwhile, Chapter 15 lies ahead of us, and it offers quite a bit to consider on its own, so we'll take our time this morning examining it
 - Chapter 15 is a parable, and like all parables it teaches a profound spiritual truth using a simple, everyday metaphor
 - So first, we'll understand the metaphor
 - Then we'll apply that metaphor to understand the spiritual truth God is teaching
 - In the process we'll discover Israel's excuse and see God's response
 - Given the chapter's short length, I'll read it all at once

Ezek. 15:1 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezek. 15:2 "Son of man, how is the wood of the vine better than any wood of a

branch which is among the trees of the forest?

Ezek. 15:3 “Can wood be taken from it to make anything, or can men take a peg from it on which to hang any vessel?

Ezek. 15:4 “If it has been put into the fire for fuel, and the fire has consumed both of its ends and its middle part has been charred, is it then useful for anything?

Ezek. 15:5 “Behold, while it is intact, it is not made into anything. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it still be made into anything!

Ezek. 15:6 “Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘As the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem;

Ezek. 15:7 and I set My face against them. Though they have come out of the fire, yet the fire will consume them. Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I set My face against them.

Ezek. 15:8 ‘Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have acted unfaithfully,’” declares the Lord God.

- The Lord speaks to Ezekiel once again with a word for those in Israel making excuses for ignoring the counsel of the prophet
 - The Lord begins with a question for the prophet
 - He asks how is the wood of a vine better than the wood of any tree branch in the forest?
 - The vine God mentions is a grapevine, and grapevines grew throughout Israel
 - Grapes and the wine made from them was an important part of Jewish diet and culture, so every Jew knew this plant well
 - And the branches of trees in the forest refer to the limbs of tall, old growth trees common to the forests of ancient Israel
 - So God asks Ezekiel (and Israel) to compare the worth of the wood of a grapevine with that of the wood of the trees of the forest
 - It’s an easy question for any Jew to answer
 - In fact any child in Israel could have answered the question
 - Grapevines are good for one thing...producing grapes
 - But their wood is virtually worthless
 - It’s too soft, too weak and too gnarled to be useful for any serious purpose
 - The Lord goes on to ask, could you even make a peg out of the wood?
 - Grapevines, even older, thick ones, are so soft they cannot be used even to make pegs to hold up a kitchen pot
 - They would snap under any weight
 - So no one bothered using grape wood for anything except fueling a fire
 - So the answer is no, grapevine wood is not superior to the wood of the forest trees

- Next, the Lord asks in v.4 that if that vine wood was thrown into a fire, and it was partially consumed by the fire, would the charred remains be more useful or less useful?
 - With both ends burned and only the center untouched, would the wood become stronger or weaker?
 - Would someone be more inclined to use it in construction or less?
 - Given how useless it was to begin with, burning the ends would only serve to make it less useful, of course
 - In v.5 the Lord affirms the obvious answer
 - If that wood was good for nothing while it was intact, how much less useful is it now
 - Here again, the answer would have been easy even for a small child
 - Obviously, the Lord is using this parable to lead Israel to a certain conclusion
- And the Lord moves to making that application in v.6 by comparing that grapevine to the people of Israel still living in Jerusalem
 - The Lord says He's bringing a "fire" to the "forest", and if that fire can burn tall, stately trees, then it will surely burn the weak, useless grapevine too
 - This comparison is consistent with God's use of the grapevine as a picture of Israel in the whole Bible
 - Grapevines are one of three, common agricultural symbols of Israel used in the Bible, along with fig and olive trees
 - We can find a grapevine picturing Israel in Genesis 42, Deut 32, Ps 80, Isa 5, Jer 2 and in the New Testament in Matt 21 (among others)
 - So that part of the parable was relatively straightforward
 - So the Lord says Israel (i.e., the grapevine) is a weak and useless nation
 - They were not a mighty or numerous people compared to the Gentile nations that surrounded them
 - In fact, Israel has never been very powerful as a people, not compared to the great Gentile powers
 - God made Israel great, but apart from God, the Jewish nation was small, weak and inconsequential
 - It was like grape wood growing in a forest surrounded by tall trees
 - So by logical extension, the other tall, majestic trees of the forest must represent the Gentile nations of the earth
 - And many of these nations were far more numerous and far stronger than Israel
 - Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Moab, Ammon were all stronger than Israel
 - They were like tall, strong, stately cedars compared to the crooked, weak grapevine of Israel
- But then the Lord says He is bringing a "forest fire" that will consume all these trees
 - He is referring to the fall of nations at the hands of great empires that the Lord

was in the process of raising up

- Assyria, Babylon...eventually Persia, Greece and Rome
- All the mighty Gentile nations that Daniel foretold would dominate Israel over many centuries
- These series of conquests began with Babylon's march in Jerusalem
- And Ezekiel is warning Israel that yet one more Babylonian invasion is coming, one that will topple all opposition including Israel
 - God compares these conquests to a fire raging through a forest of cedars, taking down those majestic sentinels
 - Egypt, Assyria, Moab, Ammon...
 - Even the strongest and tallest "trees" were going to fall under the onslaught of God's appointed victor
- In the midst of the conquering forest fire, there stands a single grapevine... weak, soft and alone
 - How likely is it that this vine would survive the advancing fire?
 - Obviously, it will burn up easily and quickly
 - If cedars can't defeat the enemy, a grapevine has no hope
 - That's what the Lord wants His people to realize
 - The Lord has ordained Babylon to subdue all other nations, and in particular Israel
 - These things were foretold by the prophets as God's judgment against Israel for violating the Old Covenant
 - Hundreds of years earlier, Isaiah told Israel to expect Babylon to conquer them

Is. 13:1 The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.

Is. 13:2 Lift up a standard on the bare hill,

Raise your voice to them,

Wave the hand that they may enter the doors of the nobles.

Is. 13:3 I have commanded My consecrated ones,

I have even called My mighty warriors,

My proudly exulting ones,

To execute My anger.

Is. 13:4 A sound of tumult on the mountains,

Like that of many people!

A sound of the uproar of kingdoms,

Of nations gathered together!

The Lord of hosts is mustering the army for battle.

Is. 13:5 They are coming from a far country,

From the farthest horizons,

The Lord and His instruments of indignation,

To destroy the whole land.

Is. 13:6 Wail, for the day of the Lord is near!

It will come as destruction from the Almighty.

Is. 13:7 Therefore all hands will fall limp,

And every man's heart will melt.

- Isaiah told Israel that Babylon would conquer the land
 - They were God's consecrated warriors executing His anger against His people
 - And they would not be defeated
- So the parable reminds Israel that Babylon's conquest was a foregone conclusion
 - The first two attacks were merely prelude to the coming battle
 - The city would be taken and the rest of the people exiled
 - The Lord concludes vs.7-8 that He has set His face against them
 - They will come out of the fire, that is they will not be destroyed, but the fire will consume them
 - With the result being they will know I am the Lord, they will cease their idolatry
- This leads us to understanding Israel's fifth excuse
 - The people were assuming God would preserve them from the prophet's dire predictions of coming destruction because they were God's people
 - Being the chosen Jewish nation, they expected God would always protect them
 - The other nations were falling, but Jerusalem wouldn't fall
 - God would protect His people in the end
 - So the Jews remaining in Jerusalem took comfort in the assumption they were special people and the rules didn't apply to them
 - To which the Lord responds yes, Israel is special, but not in the good sense of that word
 - They were disadvantaged compared to other people
 - He told them that long ago

Deut. 4:37 "Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power,

Deut. 4:38 driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today.

Deut. 7:7 "The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,

Deut. 7:8 but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

- Notice the Lord emphasized to Israel in their Law that He chose them because of His love for their fathers, not because they earned His love
 - The Lord set His love on them not because they were so numerous nor mighty but because He was keeping a promise to Abraham
 - And they conquered mighty nations in taking possession of the land because the Lord did the fighting for them
- Elsewhere in Deuteronomy, the Lord told Israel not to become puffed up by these successes nor to think themselves so good or worthy

Deut. 9:4 “Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God has driven them out before you, ‘Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,’ but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is dispossessing them before you.

Deut. 9:5 “It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

- When Israel went conquering throughout the land of Canaan, the Lord knew they would be tempted to boast
- They would claim the Lord was on their side because they were the good guys while the Canaanites were the bad guys
- Well they were half right...the Canaanites were bad guys, but Israel wasn't much better apart from their relationship with God
- The Jewish people were so certain they were special that they assumed God was *prohibited* from acting against them as they sinned
 - They thought God's hands were tied by His promises to them in the covenant He made with Israel
 - And they assumed this despite the terrible atrocities Israel committed in pursuit of idolatry
 - This was their excuse for ignoring Ezekiel...our special status renders Ezekiel's warning null and void
- But once again, their excuse was based on a conveniently selective memory
 - First, they conveniently overlook the fact that Jews were already sitting in exile in Babylon
 - Remember, in the parable the Lord asked Israel if the vine becomes better after having its ends burned?
 - The Lord was referring to the first two attacks that Babylon brought against the city
 - The first attack was likened to burning one end of the vine, while the second attack was likened to burning the other end
 - That left only the “middle” of the vine intact

- And so the Lord asks Israel that if the vine couldn't withstand the fire when it was whole, how can it expect to endure after two ends are charred?
 - Clearly, the people had no reason to think the Lord would defend the city from a third Babylonian attack
 - Their own captivity was proof that Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord wasn't a guarantee of protection
- Secondly, that covenant relationship was itself responsible for God's wrath coming against the city
 - As we saw last week, the Old Covenant spelled out the very disasters Ezekiel was predicting would come against the city
 - They were appointed by the Lord as the consequence for Israel's disobedience
 - So that covenant relationship didn't tie God's hands...it bound Israel to receive the very disasters they said couldn't happen
- Finally, Israel made the very mistake God warned about in Deut 9
 - They thought they were *inherently* worthy of God's protection
 - They assumed they would be protected merely because they entered into a covenant yet they failed to consider its terms
 - That's like us expecting to be protected by our government under all circumstances merely because we are citizens
 - But if we do not obey our country's laws, then we will not be protected...we will be punished
 - Similarly, the covenant God made with Israel called for national obedience to the Law as a condition for receiving His protection
 - That covenant relationship did make Israel unique among the nations of the world, but it did not make Israel *inherently* special
 - If the people of Israel lived according to the covenant's commandments, then Israel would receive God's protection
 - But if they disavowed their God, engaged in idolatry and disobeyed His covenant, then they receive His wrath
 - In the end, the nation will always be preserved in some form, because the Lord made a promise to their forefathers
 - But along the way, many in Israel would see the consequences of the nation's disobedience
 - And in Ezekiel's day, that meant emptying the city and destroying the temple and walls to purge idolatry from Israel forever
 - God was taking drastic steps to cut away a cancer in order to save the patient
 - If the Lord had taken less serious action, that cancer of idolatry would have remained in the hearts of the people
 - Like any cancer, if you leave even a few cells alive, they eventually come roaring back
 - Eventually, idolatry would have destroyed God's people
 - So instead, the Lord cut it all out, which was painful and left scars among the

people

- But in the long run, that radical step saved the patient
 - The nation survived and when they finally return to the land, they come back changed
 - Never again did the nation bend their knee to an idol
- Christians too can presume that our relationship with Christ is like a magical force field that protects us from every bad thing
 - Some Christians believe that nothing bad will befall a Christian because of our covenant relationship with Christ
 - These believers repeat favorite phrases like “God loves us and has a plan for our lives”
 - They misquote scripture saying, anything I ask in Jesus’ name will be done, and that no weapon formed against me may prosper, etc.
 - They believe these things mean God has promised to keep us from all harm
 - I call this Jingo Christianity
 - Jingo Christianity reduces our expectations of God to a cosmic genie, and makes us invincible superheroes
 - It’s a blind faith in a hyped and false view of what our covenant relationship with Christ says about our future
 - It’s believing what the Jews believed in Ezekiel’s day
 - That God will never allows us to suffer defeat, just as God would never let Babylon defeat Jerusalem
 - But just like the Jewish people, such thinking is self-evidently false
 - Bad things do happen to Christians all the time
 - Christians get cancer, Christians go bankrupt, Christians lose their jobs
 - Christians experience wars and earthquakes and fires
 - Christians are attacked and murdered and worse
 - If we’re promised to be like Christ in the eternal life, than we ought to expect to experience what Christ did in His earthly life
 - In His earthly life, Christ was tempted by the enemy...and so will we be
 - Christ felt sorrow and loss...and so will we
 - Christ was mistreated and slandered...and so we will be
 - Christ was beaten, tortured and murdered...and so will go the lives of many Christians
 - A slave is not greater than the Master, as Jesus said
- But these things do nothing to change our relationship with God or our eternal future, much less our salvation
 - We are saved by our faith in Jesus Christ, and that salvation is assured forever because God has made promises to us
 - He’s come to dwell in us forever to prove His intention to fulfill those promises

- He has made us a new creature, and our old nature has passed away never to return
 - And He says He will never leave us nor forsake us
- Meanwhile, we serve Christ for a time while living here in a fallen and sinful world
 - Sin is all around us
 - In fact, it's still inside us, dwelling in our physical bodies
 - So until we shed this body and receive our new body, we will know the ravages of sin
 - We will commit sin and we will suffer its consequences whether at our own hands or at the hands of others
- But the good news is God is using those “bad” things to accomplish wonderful, amazing eternal things
 - For example, God used terrible things in Job's life to author a book that has given hope to countless millions who faced similar devastation
 - God used the terrible things of Israel's exile to put an end to their soul-crushing idolatry
 - And God used nails and whips to disfigure and kill His own Son so that we might know God's perfection and glory and love
 - Good things coming from bad things
- But there's a second way we can repeat Israel's excuse, and it's even more dangerous
 - We might begin to think that our covenant relationship with Christ means we're special and the rules no longer apply to us
 - We might tell ourselves that since Christ died to pay for our sins, God won't give regard to our sin
 - That we can do no wrong now
 - Certainly, by our faith in Jesus, the Lord has set aside the penalty for our sin
 - Because of our faith in Him, we are credited with Christ's righteousness, and the penalty for sin fell on Him rather than us
 - But that does not mean God overlooks our disobedience or that we have free license to sin
 - Such presumption is the pride that goes before the fall in a believer's life
 - It's the same self-deception Israel used to excuse away the prophet's warnings
 - Like Israel, it stems from assuming we are *inherently* deserving of God's protection
 - Once again, we need to separate our eternal life *in* Christ from our life lived *for* Christ
 - Living in Christ, we are deserving of mercy and forgiveness and protection because the Father loves the Son
 - Living in Christ, we are assured eternal glory because we are heirs to Christ's promises
 - These promises are spiritually true for us now by our faith in Christ

- And one day they will become our experience in the age to come
- But in the meantime, we are expected to obey the Bible's commands for how to live for Christ
 - Living for Christ, we discipline our flesh to prevent its sin nature from ruling us
 - Living for Christ, we put away sin to please Him and to become a more effective ambassador in His name
 - Just like Israel, our covenant relationship didn't tie God's hands from responding to our sin
 - It bounds us to serving the God Who has saved us, and to living according to His commandments or experience His discipline
- Ironically, one of the strongest warnings in the New Testament against this attitude involves the same analogy

John 15:1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

John 15:2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

John 15:3 "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

John 15:4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.

John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

John 15:6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

John 15:7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

John 15:8 "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

John 15:9 "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.

John 15:10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

- In this parable, Jesus is the vine and we're His branches
 - The Father is the vinedresser, caring for the branches
 - We gain our spiritual supply in Christ
 - We are nothing apart from Him, just as Israel was nothing apart from the relationship with the Lord
 - We abide in Christ by keeping His commandments, for to love Christ is to keep His commandments, just as Christ loved the Father by obeying the Father
 - And we glorify the Father by bearing much fruit

- Fruit bearing is doing works that glorify the Father while putting away the sin that displeases Him
- We can do these things when we depend on the supply of the Vine
- But that branch that will not abide, that will not obey, is taken away
 - He dries up and is gathered for burning
 - That's the same picture Ezekiel used for the Israel that disobeyed the Lord, a vine being burned
 - Just as Israel didn't cease to be God's chosen nation, neither is that Christian who is taken away ceasing to be God's child
- The disobedient Christian risks being set aside from the work of glorifying the Father
 - That's a useless life, a life wasted
 - But it doesn't have to be that way, of course
- It think it's appropriate that the first part of this Ezekiel study should end with this reminder, since I think it neatly sums up my overall teaching perspective
 - To quote Jesus, to whom much is given, much is expected
 - In Christ, we have been given so much, more than we can even imagine
 - When we see the glory of Christ's appearing to us, and when we see the heavenly realm and the kingdom age to come, we will be stunned by all that the Lord has prepared for us
 - We will be overwhelmed by His love
 - Only then will we begin to appreciate all that we have been given in Christ
 - And in that moment, we will also appreciate why the Lord had right to expect so much from us
 - Let's be ready for that moment
 - Let's all be ready to say we held nothing back from Christ, because He gave us everything
 - Abide in Him, keeping His commandments, and not making excuses for our sin
 - Let's bear fruit



Ezekiel - Lesson 16A

Chapter 16:1-34

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- After a long break we're finally ready to resume our study of the book of Ezekiel
 - I began this study in 2017
 - I taught twenty lessons covering the first 15 chapters of the book before I had to suspend the study at the end of 2017
 - And now nine months later, I'm ready to return to the book
 - Unfortunately, during those intervening 9 months, I transitioned to a new church and therefore a new audience
 - None of you were present when I taught those first 15 chapters, which presents a dilemma for me
 - Do I restart the study from the beginning or pick up where I left off?
 - While I'm sure most of you would vote for me to start from the beginning, I've decided to pick up where I left off
 - Those first 20 lessons were recorded and are available online, so I've been pointing folks to go there to get what they've missed
 - So for those who have been following this study online, tonight mostly picks up where we left off in Ezekiel's prophecies (*jump to page 11*)
 - But because so many are joining us tonight for the first time in this study, I need to provide a little context and review
 - Beginning with the prophet himself
- Ezekiel was a man, a priest of Judah, who lived long ago in the nation of Israel
 - Ezekiel was a major prophet of the OT called to speak to Judah in the days of the Babylonian captivity
 - He is a unique – even enigmatic – character in scripture
 - God asked things of him that God asked of no other prophet
 - But he received rare and marvelous visions that no other prophet received
 - And the Lord called this man to deliver some bad news to the nation
 - God required this man to deliver the whole truth to Israel
 - He warned Ezekiel to hold back none of the terrible details of the judgment God was preparing to deliver
 - He didn't sugarcoat anything but explained in graphic detail the circumstances Israel was facing for their disobedience to God
 - He spoke in graphic and even vulgar terms to awaken the nation to its depravity and hardheartedness
 - He sought to offend Israel, just as they had offended their God
 - And as a result, like most prophets, Ezekiel was rejected by his own people, who responded to his declarations with cynicism
 - History does not record his birth or death or even if he had children
 - In fact, there are no records of his life outside the book he wrote
- His name means “strengthened by God”, and surely he was strengthened by God because he had a very difficult mission

- He was told to explain to Judah the reason for God’s harsh judgment, and Ezekiel delivered that message just as God required
 - He didn’t mince words, he didn’t soften the blow, and he didn’t worry about hurting feelings
 - God told Ezekiel to arrest a disobedient Israel with dramatic words of judgment so they would be without excuse
- But in the midst of the bad news, God also gave Israel a glimmer of hope
 - Ezekiel provided Israel with a stunning preview of the glory God has prepared for the nation in the Kingdom
 - He assured the captive nation they would one day return from their scattering
 - They would see a renewed temple filled with the Glory of God
 - Then even as Israel was unfaithful to the covenant, nevertheless God would remain faithful to His promises
- In earlier chapters, we’re told Ezekiel wasn’t expecting to be a prophet
 - He was training to to serve in the temple as a priest in Jerusalem
 - Upon his thirtieth birthday, he would have begun that service
- But before he could serve the Babylonian army, led under the command of King Nebuchadnezzar, conquered Judah and the city in 605 BC
 - Babylon’s conquest was foretold 120 years earlier by another prophet, Isaiah
 - Isaiah warned a stubborn nation that the Lord was preparing to bring a severe penalty for their disobedience to the covenant
 - That penalty came first in the form of the Assyrian army who conquer the northern tribes in Israel
 - Then later Babylon conquered the southern kingdom of Judah
- Babylon’s conquest consisted of three separate waves of invasion
 - Beginning in 605 BC and continuing over the next ten years, the southern kingdom of Judah was defeated and taken captive by Babylon
 - During each wave, Jerusalem experienced more destruction and greater numbers of its citizens were taken into captivity
 - Ezekiel was among those Jews taken to Babylon during the second of these waves of deportation
- After he reached the community of Jewish exiles now living in Babylon, Ezekiel was called by God to be their prophet (*see Chapters 1 & 2*)
 - Along with Ezekiel serving the exiles, the Lord also sent His people Jeremiah in Jerusalem and Daniel in Babylon
 - The ministries of these prophets testifies to the Lord’s continuing grace for His people even as they came under His wrath
 - To the exiles in Babylon, the Lord gave them Ezekiel to explain what was happening and why it was happening
 - To protect the exiles while in captivity, the Lord raised Daniel up to assume a high government position in Babylon

- And for those Jews who remained back in the land for a time, the Lord gave them Jeremiah to warn them to repent
- So our study of Ezekiel considers important things God said to His people as they lived in exile as captives of their enemy, Babylon
 - The Lord had two principle purposes in speaking to His people through Ezekiel
 - First, the Lord explained to Israel why they were suffering in such difficult circumstances – and in a word, the reason was rebellion
 - In the previous chapters of this book, the Lord chronicled Israel's rebellion against Him and the covenant
 - For centuries the people of Israel had disobeyed the word of God, ignored the Law and engaged in gross idolatry
 - They had even brought prostitution into the temple and engaged in child sacrifice to Molech and Baal
 - So the Lord tells His people through Ezekiel that a reckoning would now be required, one that would purge the nation of idolatry forevermore
 - That judgment would begin with the destruction of their previously-unconquered city
 - Babylon would rob and destroy the temple, flatten the walls, kill Israel's corrupt leadership and purge the nation of rebels
 - Finally, all the people would be exiled, taken out of the land and made to serve their enemy
 - The Lord promised Israel that after the nation was permitted to return to her land, idolatry would never again return
 - Through Ezekiel the Lord promised to bar the return of corrupt leaders so that a new generation of godly leaders could take their place
 - History records that men like Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah lead the people back to obedience, at least for a time
 - And remarkably, in the 2,500 years since Israel returned to her land, the nation of Israel has never again tolerated idol worship
 - They may have tolerated other sin of various kinds – chief among them, rejecting the Messiah – but idolatry has never returned
 - That is one of the lasting effects of the Babylonian captivity, just as God promised through Ezekiel
- But the Lord had a second purpose in speaking to His people, one that extends into future generations of Israel
 - The Lord used Ezekiel to provide Israel with a preview of their coming glory in a promised Kingdom
 - To know their judgment in Babylon didn't mean God was forsaking the nation or withdrawing His promises of blessing
 - Ultimately He would fulfill all His promises to His people, including bringing Israel into the Kingdom
 - But first, they must undergo a refining, a purging, a testing, an atoning for their sins

- Because the same covenant that promised Israel a glorious future also promised the present judgments for disobedience
- So the first half of the book emphasizes the severity of God's judgment made necessary by Israel's sins
 - While the second half reveals the magnitude of Israel's future glory made possible by God's faithfulness
 - In that day, rather than being a captive of their enemies, Israel will reign over all their enemies
 - Their flattened city will rise again, and a new temple will be built
 - And more than merely restored, these things will become far greater in the Kingdom
- And at the juncture between the first and second parts, we find a new promise from God to Israel
 - A new covenant, to be specific, that would make the transition from judgment to blessing possible
 - That new covenant promises Israel a new heart, one that will finally fully obey and serve the Lord
- But before all that, the Lord must convince the Jews that they were, in fact, experiencing God's judgment and that a rescue wasn't coming
 - Because as crazy as it sounds, even after several years in Babylon, the exiles still clung to the belief that God was going to save Jerusalem
 - At the point of Chapter 16, Jerusalem had already experienced two waves of attack by the Babylonians
 - Jerusalem had suffered great destruction and many of its inhabitants were already in exile in Babylon
 - But the walls still stood at least partially and the temple still operated and the city was still occupied, at least for now
 - So the exiles still assumed God would preserve the city in the end and defeat Babylon and rescue them from captivity
 - It was a vain hope centered on the delusion that Israel's covenant with God tied His hands
 - The people assumed the Lord was obligated to save them from this calamity because He had made promises of glory to them
 - They thought the covenant relationship obligated God to favor Israel regardless of how Israel behaved
 - In a way, Israel's thinking was correct
 - The Lord *did* commit Himself to preserving the nation, including ensuring Israel triumphed over their enemies in the end
 - But Israel conveniently overlooked that their covenant had multiple terms
 - It also obligated God to bring judgments against Israel to their disobedience to its commandments and statutes
 - And God could no more overlook the covenant's requirements for judgment than

He would ignore its promises of blessing

- If Israel was so sure God would ignore His word concerning judging Israel, how could they be so certain He would keep His promises concerning blessing Israel?
- But the Lord is faithful to His word in all cases, so He brought Israel under severe discipline just as He promised for a time
- In fact, later, the nation will be restored to their land for a time, and much later they will receive the glory God promised
- But for now, they must experience the judgment God promised for their disobedience
- Today we start Chapter 16, which is part of a section I've called Israel's excuses
 - When Ezekiel told the exiles they were enduring God's judgment for disobedience, the people responded by saying Ezekiel got it wrong
 - And they offered alternative explanations – or excuses – for why they need not be worried despite all that had come against them
 - Altogether, the people offered eight excuses or reasons why they could safely ignore the prophet's warnings
 - And for each excuse, the Lord gave Ezekiel a response refuting the exile's reasoning
 - The Lord's eight responses are found in Chapters 12-19
 - Today we're at Chapter 16, which means we're dropping into the middle of the excuses
 - Specifically we're looking at the fifth excuse in Chapter 16
 - And the Lord's response to the fifth excuse actually started back Chapter 15 and continues into Chapter 16
 - So before we can dive into Chapter 16, we need a few more moments of review in Chapter 15
- First, Chapter 15 is the shortest chapter in Ezekiel while Chapter 16 is by far the longest chapter in the book
 - In fact, Chapter 16 is the longest single prophecy in the Old Testament and the longest allegory in all the Bible
 - Chapter 15 also contains an allegory
 - And both these allegories work together to paint a vivid and graphic picture for the people of Israel
 - The Lord's point is that Israel should stop fooling themselves by thinking God is obligated to protect them because of the covenant
 - That the Lord won't allow His city, Jerusalem, to be captured
 - Or that He won't allow His temple to be destroyed or His people to be taken completely out of the land
 - Despite the fact that these things had already happened twice, the people were so stubborn and rebellious they still told themselves they would be okay
 - The cavalry would soon arrive

- The Lord would protect them, protect the city and defeat Babylon for them
- And why? Because they were God's covenant people
- So the fifth excuse Israel offered for why Ezekiel's warnings weren't to be believed was because God was obligated by His covenant to save them
 - Back in Chapter 15, the Lord used a simple allegory to correct this bad assumption
 - And since the chapter is so short, let's re-read it

Ezek. 15:1 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezek. 15:2 “Son of man, how is the wood of the vine better than any wood of a branch which is among the trees of the forest?

Ezek. 15:3 “Can wood be taken from it to make anything, or can men take a peg from it on which to hang any vessel?

Ezek. 15:4 “If it has been put into the fire for fuel, and the fire has consumed both of its ends and its middle part has been charred, is it then useful for anything?

Ezek. 15:5 “Behold, while it is intact, it is not made into anything. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it still be made into anything!

Ezek. 15:6 “Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘As the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem;

Ezek. 15:7 and I set My face against them. Though they have come out of the fire, yet the fire will consume them. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I set My face against them.

Ezek. 15:8 ‘Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have acted unfaithfully,’” declares the Lord GOD.

- If you want a full explanation of this allegory, please revisit Lesson 15, but for now, I can summarize it for you quickly
 - The allegory begins with a grapevine alone in a forest
 - It is surrounded by much more stately trees in the forest
 - Those trees are far grander, far more powerful than a grapevine
 - Moreover, the wood of a grapevine is of poor quality
 - It's weak and good for nothing, especially when compared to the strong wood of old growth trees
 - And to make matters worse, this grapevine has been burned on both ends leaving only the middle of the vine wood untouched
 - That vine was utterly useless even before it was burned
 - But now that the ends are charred, it's even weaker and less majestic
 - That vine represented Israel in Ezekiel's day
 - Israel is commonly pictured in Scripture as a grapevine, something God plants and cultivates to produce fruit

- But when compared to the strength of its surrounding neighbors, Israel was a weak nation
 - Israel was small and insignificant, while its neighbors like Assyria and Babylon were much more numerous and mighty
 - The only thing that allowed Israel to contend with such powers was God's might acting on their behalf in protecting them
- But what if God were to withdraw His protection? What chance did Israel stand against such powerful adversaries?
 - Israel had no inherent strength, no inherent worth or value that could assure its safety
 - And in fact, as the allegory depicts, Israel had already been twice-burned by Babylon
 - Two-thirds of the city have been captured and exiled
 - Only one third remained in what was left of Jerusalem, so as weak as the nation had been to start, it was far weaker now
- The message of Chapter 15 was very straightforward...the exiles had no reason to be so confident of their future success against Babylon
 - First, it's obvious they have no inherent strength or ability to fight
 - Israel was decimated and Babylon was the most powerful nation on earth at that time by far
 - If they had already lost twice, there was no reason to expect Israel to prevail in the third battle that Ezekiel promised was coming
 - That meant Israel's only chance to prevail against Babylon was if the Lord fought on their behalf
 - Which leads Israel to the second conclusion of Chapter 15
 - If the nation was too weak to prevail even in the first battle, then clearly they lost because the Lord withdrew His hand of protection
 - Clearly, the Lord was not protecting them, and after two defeats they had no reason to assume He would give them victory in the third attack
 - As the Lord says in v.6. Babylon was the forest fire the Lord was using to consume His people and their city
 - The Lord says He has given the inhabitants of Jerusalem over to Babylon as fuel for a fire
 - And He will make the land desolate as a testimony against them
 - So Chapter 15 is refuting the first part of the excuse, which said that God would always protect His people
 - Self-evidently, that wasn't true...there are times when God allows His people to feel the weight of their sin
- But God still needs to deal with the misconception that a covenant relationship with God obligates Him to deliver His promises on our terms
 - In Chapter 16 the Lord uses a second allegory to explain why Israel's covenant relationship wasn't a shield for the exiles but rather assured their defeat

- The Old Covenant promised Israel great blessing in a future Kingdom
- But it also included severe penalties for the nation should they fail to keep the terms of the Law
- Now by Ezekiel's day, Israel had already failed for centuries to keep the Law
 - They had rebelled despite the Lord repeatedly giving them time to repent, and issuing warnings about what was coming
 - So in Chapter 16 He uses another type of covenant, a marriage covenant, to make an illustration
- The Lord compares His relationship with Israel to that of a husband to an adulterous wife
 - In the allegory, the Lord is the husband and Israel is His wife, called the wife of Jehovah
 - The Lord is portrayed as a Husband Who has graciously and lovingly extended a marriage covenant to His wife
 - Nevertheless, the wife spurns His love and deals treacherously with Him repeatedly and in the worst possible manner
 - And so the Lord responds to his wife's treachery with a harsh but just response intended to restore her in repentance
- Finally, a brief warning....this allegory is famous for its uncharacteristically rough language
 - Some have even called this chapter "semi-pornographic" for Ezekiel's graphic descriptions
 - I believe the language is so strong because the Lord wanted to make a strong impression, but it may offend sensitive ears

Ezek. 16:1 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezek. 16:2 "Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations

Ezek. 16:3 and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem, "Your origin and your birth are from the land of the Canaanite, your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite.

Ezek. 16:4 "As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths.

Ezek. 16:5 "No eye looked with pity on you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born.

- The allegory begins with the Lord reminding Israel of their humble origins by describing the birth of an unwanted child
 - The child pictures the inhabitants of Jerusalem
 - The Lord says specifically in v.3 that He is speaking to those in Jerusalem
 - But obviously all Israel is in view as well

- But the city of Jerusalem is singled out because it is the capital of the nation, and because it will be the focus of the third and final attack
- The Lord says Israel and her capital city were born out of Canaan
 - He says Jerusalem had an Amorite for a father and a Hittite for a mother
 - Now we know the city was initially a Jebusite settlement, another of the Canaanite peoples
 - And in the table of nations in Genesis 10, the Jebusites are listed between the Amorites and the Hittites
 - So in effect the Lord is emphasizing that the city was a Canaanite city through-and-through without a hint of redeeming qualities
- Jerusalem was so worthy of disdain that the Lord compares the city's origins to an abandoned child
 - In those days if a woman didn't want her child, she might go out into the wilderness to give birth
 - There she would leave the child to die, exposed to the elements
 - That's the situation the Lord is describing here
 - The baby hasn't had its cord cut off, nor has the body been washed and sanitized...all normal procedures to protect a child after birth
 - Instead, the Lord says in v.5 that no one looked with compassion upon this child
 - Jerusalem was like a child thrown into an open field, abhorred in the day it was born
 - So Israel's capital was birthed out of ungodly peoples and circumstances, not from a place of privilege or blessing
 - The city was not valuable or even desirable
 - Remember, that when Joshua led the people of Israel into the Promised land, they completely overlooked Jerusalem
 - They never tried to take it nor thought much of it, probably because it was a despised place
 - It was only centuries later when the Lord directed David to take the city and make it Israel's capital that it became beloved
- Had the city been left to itself, it would have eventually died, like a child abandoned in a field
 - Only because the Lord took pity on it and determined to rescue it and make it something special did the city prosper

Ezek. 16:6 “When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you while you were in your blood, ‘Live!’ Yes, I said to you while you were in your blood, ‘Live!’

Ezek. 16:7 “I made you numerous like plants of the field. Then you grew up, became tall and reached the age for fine ornaments; your breasts were formed and your hair had grown. Yet you were naked and bare.

- The Lord says He passed by and took note of the city squirming in its blood and determined that the city should live
- But as an act of His grace, the Lord determined to make Jerusalem something special
- He prepared a people to occupy the city and made the people numerous like the plants of the field
 - Like a young girl, the city and its people grew up and matured
 - And at a certain point the people of Israel reach marrying age, which the Lord pictures as the child reaching puberty
 - This part of the allegory pictures Israel being formed out of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
 - And then later being incubated in Egypt in slavery
- Then at a point, the people of Israel had grown to the point that the Lord was ready to form her into a nation
 - The passage says that as Israel reached this point, she was naked and bare, which at first sounds provocative and even risqué
 - But notice the Lord says “yet you were naked and bare”
 - He’s not speaking about something attractive or enticing but rather something shameful
- Going back to the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden, nakedness is associated with shame for sin
 - Sin places us in a position of debt before God
 - Our sin debt requires a payment, specifically a payment of death
 - So at the moment of the first sin, Adam and Eve developed an instinctive sense of their jeopardy before a just and holy God
 - And that instinct manifested within them as feelings of shame for being naked in public
 - We inherit the sin nature of Adam and Eve so we also inherit our instinctive feelings of shame over nakedness
- But as Israel was ready for a suitor and required someone to cover the shame of their sin, the Lord came in mercy and grace

Ezek. 16:8 “Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 16:9 “Then I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil.

Ezek. 16:10 “I also clothed you with embroidered cloth and put sandals of porpoise skin on your feet; and I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk.

Ezek. 16:11 “I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands and a necklace around your neck.

Ezek. 16:12 “I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head.

Ezek. 16:13 “Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey and oil; so you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty.

Ezek. 16:14 “Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you,” declares the Lord GOD.

- The Lord is speaking of establishing Israel as a nation and entering into the covenant He made with them at Sinai
 - By the time the nation had endured hundreds of years in Egypt they had become as numerous as the plants of the field
 - They had matured to the point that the Lord was ready to make them a nation, give them His law and enter into a covenant with them
 - This covenant would bring them blessing and it would give a way for Israel to cover their sin and shame
- But then He describes that process using a marriage ceremony
 - The Lord acted as a husband to Israel, spreading His skirt over Israel, which was a way of making a marriage proposal
 - You can see a similar moment in the story of Ruth and Boaz

Ruth 3:8 It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet.

Ruth 3:9 He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative.”

Ruth 3:10 Then he said, “May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich.

- The Lord covers Israel’s nakedness, redeeming Israel from slavery in Egypt and giving her a covenant as a man enters into a covenant with his wife
 - Israel, above all peoples of the earth, would be God’s people, His wife
 - He placed Israel in a privileged and unique place, completely undeserved and for no reason except by His grace
 - Metaphorically, the Lord describes this moment as someone passing by who washes the abandoned infant
 - The Lord in effect elected to become Israel’s caretaker and provider
 - And then later He anointed the young lady in oil in preparation for her marriage ceremony
 - He clothed her in fine linen and silk and expensive leather sandals
 - He gave her tokens of marriage like bracelets, rings and ornaments that made

her even more beautiful and signified a covenant was established

- The nation received the wealth of gold and silver and ate the best of the land
- The Lord even crowned Israel as the greatest of all nations
 - That refers to the Solomonic period, when Israel reached the apex of her glory in this age
 - No nation before or since has equalled Israel's strength and glory and riches in Solomon's day
- She was exceedingly beautiful and her fame went before all the nations
 - We remember the Queen of Sheba traveling from far away to see Solomon's kingdom it was so impressive
 - The Lord says He bestowed all these things upon His people as a sign of His love and as a result of His covenant relationship
 - The nation's rise to beauty and glory were entirely the result of God's power and grace
 - Apart from God, the city would have died out and the people would never have survived or even existed
- Then notice in v.13 the Lord adds that the nation was "advanced to royalty"
 - That's a confusing way to translate the Hebrew
 - A better translation would be "headed to Kingdom prosperity"
 - In other words, Israel was well on her way to seeing the glory of the Kingdom that they were promised by the covenant
 - Once Israel's Messiah arrived and set up the Kingdom, Israel would have entered ready to receive all the blessings God has promised
- So things were going really well for Israel at that point, all because of God's mercy and grace...but then the wheels fell off and the good times came to an end

Ezek. 16:15 "But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame, and you poured out your harlotries on every passer-by who might be willing.

Ezek. 16:16 "You took some of your clothes, made for yourself high places of various colors and played the harlot on them, which should never come about nor happen.

Ezek. 16:17 "You also took your beautiful jewels made of My gold and of My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images that you might play the harlot with them.

Ezek. 16:18 "Then you took your embroidered cloth and covered them, and offered My oil and My incense before them.

Ezek. 16:19 "Also My bread which I gave you, fine flour, oil and honey with which I fed you, you would offer before them for a soothing aroma; so it happened," declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 16:20 "Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me and sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so

small a matter?

Ezek. 16:21 “You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire.

Ezek. 16:22 “Besides all your abominations and harlotries you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare and squirming in your blood.

Ezek. 16:23 “Then it came about after all your wickedness (‘Woe, woe to you!’ declares the Lord GOD),

Ezek. 16:24 that you built yourself a shrine and made yourself a high place in every square.

Ezek. 16:25 “You built yourself a high place at the top of every street and made your beauty abominable, and you spread your legs to every passer-by to multiply your harlotry.

Ezek. 16:26 “You also played the harlot with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, and multiplied your harlotry to make Me angry.

Ezek. 16:27 “Behold now, I have stretched out My hand against you and diminished your rations. And I delivered you up to the desire of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who are ashamed of your lewd conduct.

Ezek. 16:28 “Moreover, you played the harlot with the Assyrians because you were not satisfied; you played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied.

Ezek. 16:29 “You also multiplied your harlotry with the land of merchants, Chaldea, yet even with this you were not satisfied.””

Ezek. 16:30 “How languishing is your heart,” declares the Lord GOD, “while you do all these things, the actions of a bold-faced harlot.

Ezek. 16:31 “When you built your shrine at the beginning of every street and made your high place in every square, in disdaining money, you were not like a harlot.

Ezek. 16:32 “You adulteress wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband!

Ezek. 16:33 “Men give gifts to all harlots, but you give your gifts to all your lovers to bribe them to come to you from every direction for your harlotries.

Ezek. 16:34 “Thus you are different from those women in your harlotries, in that no one plays the harlot as you do, because you give money and no money is given you; thus you are different.”

- As we’ve heard before, pride goeth before the fall
 - Israel’s ascent to her place of privilege among the nations led to pride
 - Because of her fame, the nation played the harlot, the Lord says
 - The word harlot means a prostitute, so we’re not simply talking about a wife being seduced by another and committing adultery
 - The Lord is talking about something even more depraved and senseless
 - He’s describing Israel selling herself out to others rather than remaining faithful to the Husband Who has done so much for her

- Israel was rescued from abandonment and adorned with the best of everything by an adoring, loving husband, but turned away from him
 - And instead of honoring him for his love, she rents herself out to anyone who might be willing to have her the Lord says in v.15
 - It's the most absurd turn of events, senseless and self-destructive
- Israel's harlotry is a picture of her idolatry, of worshipping other gods rather than Jehovah
 - The Bible commonly compares idolatry to prostitution because the comparison works on numerous levels
 - First, it reminds us that our relationship with the Lord is the only proper worship relationship we should pursue
 - Like a wife who remains devoted to her husband, we should have eyes for no one else
 - But if we stray into worshipping other gods, we are playing a harlot
 - We're not merely committing adultery, cheating on God
 - But more specifically, we're playing the part of a prostitute
 - Because like prostitution, idolatry is never about love
 - Remember, love in the Bible is a verb, not a noun
 - It describes selfless actions, not warm fuzzy feelings
 - And false idols can't show us love...they can't serve us or do anything for us
 - They can't show us love and therefore we don't respond to them out of love
 - Rather, we pursue idols out of greed and pride and selfishness
 - We seek something from them, just as a prostitute seeks payment for her services
 - It's a counterfeit relationship, one that gives the appearance of genuine love and affection but lacks the substance
 - It's a transaction, one that trades the infinite love and grace of the true God for the temporary and vain promises of earthly gain
- But in the case of Israel's idolatry, the situation was even worse, the Lord says
 - Because in her folly Israel didn't receive anything for her prostitution but instead she paid her clients
 - In vs.31-34 the Lord describes how men typically have to pay their harlot
 - But Israel paid her lovers, bribing them to come to her, doing something completely absurd, gaining nothing in return for what she traded away
 - Back in v.16 the Lord describes those gifts saying Israel took her good things from the Lord and used them to honor idols
 - In each of these details the Lord is alluding to aspects of the temple worship
 - For example, Israel took her fine linens and used them to make the high places of idol worship
 - The Lord compares it to bedding for her sexual acts
 - And Israel took her precious gifts of gold and silver to make the male images

she then fornicated with, spiritually speaking

- Israel took the embroidered cloth and incense of the temple to adorn and worship their idols
- The showbread and the produce of the land were dedicated to these gods rather than to the true God Who gave them to His wife
- And perhaps worst of all, Israel reached a point of depravity where they willingly sacrificed infant children to pagan gods
- The nation's suitors included her worst enemies, the very nations that the Lord had been protecting her from and giving her power over
 - Israel gave her wealth and allegiance to the false gods of Egypt and Assyria and Babylon
 - So not only did Israel disregard her Husband's kindness, but she returned that kindness by making friends with His enemies
- So the Lord says Israel has already been suffering under penalties brought about by these insults
 - In v.27 He says that the nation will see its rations reduced
 - The Lord is alluding back to a husband and wife allegory
 - In ancient times, a husband serves as a master over his household, including his wife
 - His authority was absolute to the degree that if a wife openly disobeyed her husband, he could impose penalties
 - One such penalty might be reducing her food rations
 - It was like us sending a child to bed without supper
 - In the case of Israel, though, the Lord was talking about the deprivation they would suffer as captives in Babylon
 - He goes on to say they would be delivered into the hands of those who hate you, a reference to their coming captivity
 - The people would not have the plenty they had known but only starvation rations at times
 - But this reference to being delivered into the hands of enemies also has a marriage parallel
 - Because another possible penalty for a disobedient wife, and perhaps the harshest penalty, was to be put out of the house
 - A husband could literally bar a wife from her home for a time, forcing her to live off the street or to be taken in by others
 - And typically the only type of person who would give shelter to a disgraced wife were men willing to take advantage of her...meaning who would treat her as a harlot
 - And that's what the Lord means by turning Israel over to her enemies, to the very people whose gods Israel had found so attractive
- Back in v.20, the Lord asks rhetorically if such harlotries should be seen as a "small matter?"

- Obviously, they are a huge matter, so how could Israel not expect the Lord to respond in some way?
 - Remember, the people were using the excuse that the Lord wouldn't bring the judgments Ezekiel was promising because they were God's covenant children
 - So now the Lord is reminding Israel of how they spurned that special relationship over centuries of idolatry
 - They took everything good that they received and threw it in God's face
- And in v.22 the Lord says it all began because the people of Israel forgot their origins
 - They forgot that they were nothing without Him
 - They overlooked how vulnerable they were, and they lost a sense of gratitude and awe for all that God had done for them
 - And as a result, pride crept in and turned their perspective upside down
- This is the classic and enduring pattern in all Creation
 - First comes God's provision of grace
 - He assigns privilege and blessing through a relationship He establishes
 - And at first, things are glorious and perfect
- But then at a point, the creature loses sight of its dependence and connection to its Creator
 - He begins to see himself as inherently glorious, inherently powerful and worthy of glory
 - And in that moment, pride is born and sin is conceived
- Later in this book we'll study the fall of Satan in detail, but it's easy to see this pattern reflected in his situation in just a few verses from Chapter 28

Ezek. 28:14 “You were the anointed cherub who covers,
And I placed you there.

**You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.**

Ezek. 28:15 “You were blameless in your ways
From the day you were created
Until unrighteousness was found in you.

Ezek. 28:16 “By the abundance of your trade
You were internally filled with violence,
And you sinned;
Therefore I have cast you as profane
From the mountain of God.

**And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub,
From the midst of the stones of fire.**

Ezek. 28:17 “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;
You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.
I cast you to the ground;

**I put you before kings,
That they may see you.**

- Satan was given the most privileged place in all God's creation – guarding God's glory in the Heavenly tabernacle
 - But because of his high privilege, the abundance of his trade or assigned position, he tried to take the glory of God by force
 - And in the end, pride took Satan down
- Man's fall in the Garden took a similar course
 - Adam was the highest creature on Earth, blessed with perfect surroundings and everything he could desire
 - And had dominion over everything
 - But because of his freedom and place of honor, he took advantage of that freedom to act against God's direction
 - To act independently from God and from God's word
- In effect, the nation of Israel collectively repeated this pattern, God declares in v.22
 - They did not remember from where they came, meaning they lost sight of their dependence on God and His grace and mercy
 - They acted as if they could sin with impunity and define for themselves a Kingdom
- What Satan did, what Adam did, what Israel did, we too do from time to time
 - The way we sin will differ, but the engine for our sin is always the same: pride
 - It begins when we begin to think we can exist and act and prosper independent from God
 - As if we have inherent worth and power and glory
 - Assuming we answer to no one but ourselves and the gods we sell ourselves to
 - When believers fall into the trap of pride, we will inevitably begin to sell ourselves to something in the world just as Israel did
 - It's the natural course because if you do not serve God through your obedience, then you are left with nothing else to serve except the world
 - And the prince of this world knows how to manipulate our pride to bring us into all manner of sin
 - If this happens, don't be surprised that the Lord may begin to treat us like a husband dealing with a rebellious wife
 - He acts in measured ways to bring us to repentance so that the relationship may be restored
 - He never puts an end to our relationship, of course, but He may allow it to pass through some difficult times in order to purify us
 - To purge rebellion out of our spirit just as He purged rebels from Israel



Ezekiel - Lesson 16B

Chapter 16:35-63

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- Excuses, excuses...we all hate hearing them but we love to rely on them
 - Israel certainly relied on excuses, and we're in the middle of studying them
 - During the early years Israel spent in exile as captives in Babylon, they lived in self-denial
 - They told themselves that they need not worry that the Lord's judgment was coming for them
 - When Ezekiel, their prophet in Babylon, told them that Jerusalem would be destroyed and the people barred from the land, they scoffed
 - They offered excuses for why Ezekiel's prophecies weren't to be trusted and therefore why they need not repent
 - Altogether they offered eight excuses, and we're in the middle of studying the Lord's response to each one
 - And as we look at one, we're also considering how we too can justify our own disobedience at times using similar excuses
 - We're currently studying Excuse #5 which began in Chapter 15 and continues into Chapter 16
 - The excuses themselves are often missing from the text, so we have to understand them by what the Lord says in response
 - In this case, we've learned that Israel's fifth excuse declared that Israel wasn't in jeopardy of judgment because the covenant protected them
 - God couldn't wipe Jerusalem off the map or bar the people from the land for hundreds of years because that would violate His promises to the nation
- The Lord's first response, found in Chapter 15, simply pointed the exiles to the reality of their circumstances in Babylon
 - Using an allegory, the Lord emphasized Israel was a weak nation twice-defeated by powerful enemies and sitting in exile
 - So their present circumstances were proof that the covenant God made with Israel didn't preclude such calamities
 - So they had no reason to think that couldn't happen again as Ezekiel was promising
 - Then in the first part of Chapter 16, Ezekiel used a second allegory to illustrate why the covenant itself couldn't protect Israel from retribution
 - The Lord compared His relationship to Israel to a husband's relationship to a wife
 - In the allegory, the wife was a poor abandoned child before the Lord took pity on her
 - In time, she grew up to marrying age and then the Lord made her His wife
 - He cared for her lovingly and graciously
 - But rather than remain faithful and grateful, Israel turned on her Husband
 - She rented herself out as a prostitute to passers-by
 - And instead of being paid, the wife took the beautiful things she received from her husband and offered them to her clients

- In literal terms, Ezekiel was describing Israel's choice to pursue idolatry instead of remaining faithful to the Lord
- So Israel played the harlot with the gods of her enemies, and as a result Israel has provoked her Husband to respond with jealousy and wrath
 - This is the key point the Lord is making...that rather than preventing disaster, the Old Covenant actually called for Israel to suffer these things
 - It was the marriage covenant that prompted the husband's strong reaction against His wife
 - In other words, the covenant relationship didn't tie the husband's hands
 - On the contrary, it was the covenant that enabled and necessitated the husband's response
 - Likewise, it was Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord that prompted His strong reaction against His people
 - Their covenant obligated Israel to keep the Law and worship the Lord God only
 - And it also obligated the Lord to judge Israel should she chase after foreign gods
 - The Law even warned Israel in advance that the Lord was a jealous God, like a jealous husband
 - So when the nation played the harlot and worshipped false gods, they should know that the covenant was no protection
 - Instead, they should imagine themselves like a cheating wife who has been discovered by her jealous husband
 - Will a husband say to himself, "I can't do anything about the situation, because after all, she's my wife."
 - Or will he say, "I must do something to correct my wife's behavior and bring her back to me, *because* she's my wife."
 - That's what the Lord was saying to Israel in this allegory
- So let's complete Chapter 16, as the Lord explains how in jealousy and wrath He will respond to Israel's sin as a husband would to his wife

Ezek. 16:35 Therefore, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD.

Ezek. 16:36 Thus says the Lord GOD, "Because your lewdness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered through your harlotries with your lovers and with all your detestable idols, and because of the blood of your sons which you gave to idols,

Ezek. 16:37 therefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, even all those whom you loved and all those whom you hated. So I will gather them against you from every direction and expose your nakedness to them that they may see all your nakedness.

Ezek. 16:38 "Thus I will judge you like women who commit adultery or shed blood are judged; and I will bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy.

Ezek. 16:39 "I will also give you into the hands of your lovers, and they will tear

down your shrines, demolish your high places, strip you of your clothing, take away your jewels, and will leave you naked and bare.

Ezek. 16:40 “They will incite a crowd against you and they will stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords.

Ezek. 16:41 “They will burn your houses with fire and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women. Then I will stop you from playing the harlot, and you will also no longer pay your lovers.

Ezek. 16:42 “So I will calm My fury against you and My jealousy will depart from you, and I will be pacified and angry no more.

Ezek. 16:43 “Because you have not remembered the days of your youth but have enraged Me by all these things, behold, I in turn will bring your conduct down on your own head,” declares the Lord GOD, “so that you will not commit this lewdness on top of all your other abominations.

- The Lord’s graphic language in the allegory continues on, now depicting a jealous husband taking corrective action against his unfaithful wife
 - And as harsh as this language sounds to us, husbands in that day would have understood and even sympathized with what the Lord is saying
 - Because as husbands they would have done the same thing
 - This wife’s behavior is outrageous and almost without equal
 - So in the allegory, her husband has no recourse except to let her experience the full weight of her mistakes
 - And so it was for the Lord and Israel
 - Israel committed idolatry and exposed her nakedness (her sins) before her enemies
 - She shamed the name of the Lord, and even went so far as to murder her children
 - So the Lord says He will bring her suiters back against Israel
 - They will further humiliate Israel, exposing her nakedness again
 - There is a play on words here in Hebrew, because the words naked and exile are virtually the same
 - Because Israel exposed herself to her enemies in idolatry, therefore the Lord will exile Israel into her enemies’ lands
 - In v.38, the Lord says He’s treating Israel the way a harlot or idolator or murderer would be judged under the Law
 - In the Law, these crimes were punishable by death
 - An adulterer or murderer was stoned to death while one who practiced idolatry was killed by the sword
 - So here’s another irony...Israel wasn’t willing to abide by the covenant of Law
 - Nevertheless, the Lord says He *will* remain faithful to His covenant by applying its penalties against Israel
- Literally speaking, the Lord’s punishments against Israel came in the form of an army

devastating the city, temple and people who remained in it

- Of course, many would be killed in the fight and the rest would be taken in captivity
 - Notice in v.39 the Lord says Israel will be delivered into the hands of her “lovers,” referring to the pagan nations around her
 - As promised, the Babylonian army burned houses, tore down shrines, took away possessions, and left the people and city bare
- The attack also resulted in the nation losing free access to her land and temple for hundreds of years, as Ezekiel predicted back in Chapter 4
 - Notice in vs.40-41 the Lord warns that Babylon would cut Israel to pieces, referring to their scattering abroad
 - But then notice how v.41 ends, with God promising that this harsh judgment will result in Israel ceasing to play the harlot
- Because of her experience in Babylon, Israel will no longer pay her lovers, meaning Israel will cease in making sacrifices to idols
 - As I mentioned last week, the history of Israel demonstrates that their time in Babylon cured them of any desire for idolatry
 - After they returned, they remained faithful to Yahweh thereafter
 - And as a result of their repentance, in v.42 the Lord says His fury against Israel would depart and He would be pacified
 - Finally in v.43, the Lord summarizes what’s coming and why...the nation will see the consequences of their sins come down on their heads
- Now, take a second look at v.41, where the Lord says that many women would witness Israel’s downfall
 - That refers to the other idolators surrounding Israel, the ungodly cultures that compromised Israel’s walk when Israel turned to them instead of to the Lord
 - Now the Lord begins to elaborate what He meant by Israel being judged in the sight of these other “women”

Ezek. 16:44 “Behold, everyone who quotes proverbs will quote this proverb concerning you, saying, ‘Like mother, like daughter.’”

Ezek. 16:45 “You are the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and children. You are also the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite.

Ezek. 16:46 “Now your older sister is Samaria, who lives north of you with her daughters; and your younger sister, who lives south of you, is Sodom with her daughters.

Ezek. 16:47 “Yet you have not merely walked in their ways or done according to their abominations; but, as if that were too little, you acted more corruptly in all your conduct than they.

Ezek. 16:48 “As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “Sodom, your sister and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done.

Ezek. 16:49 “Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy.

Ezek. 16:50 “Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it.

Ezek. 16:51 “Furthermore, Samaria did not commit half of your sins, for you have multiplied your abominations more than they. Thus you have made your sisters appear righteous by all your abominations which you have committed.

Ezek. 16:52 “Also bear your disgrace in that you have made judgment favorable for your sisters. Because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they, they are more in the right than you. Yes, be also ashamed and bear your disgrace, in that you made your sisters appear righteous.

- So you may remember from last lesson how the Lord described Israel as the “love child” of an Amorite father and Hittite mother in v.3
 - In other words, Jerusalem and Israel were not inherently better than the pagan Canaanites that lived in the land before her
 - And now the Lord returns to that comparison saying Israel will become the subject of a proverb: like mother, like daughter
 - The mother and sisters in this allegory are the idolatrous nations around Israel
 - In the course of the passage, we find that the mother was the Hittites, which stands for all Canaanite peoples who occupied the land prior to Joshua
 - And the older sister is Samaria and the younger sister is Sodom
 - Notice they are described as to the left and right of Israel
 - But on the map, they are north and south respectively
 - So in order for them to be on the left and right, one would need to be facing East
 - And the direction East represents sin and ungodliness in the Bible
 - So Israel has set her face toward evil, and in that orientation, she is like Samaria and Sodom in her evil conduct
- But she’s even worse than they are, the Lord says, and He then goes on to makes comparisons between them and Israel
 - Beginning with the city of Sodom, the Lord says the people of Jerusalem acted worse than those of Sodom
 - Now every Bible student knows how bad Sodom was
 - They are immortalized in the Bible for their depraved conduct
 - The New Testament tells us the Lord destroyed the city in such dramatic fashion to make it an example for the ages to come

2Pet. 2:6 and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who

would live ungodly lives thereafter;

- In vs.49-50 the Lord recaps the sins that brought about Sodom judgment
- We remember the city's gross immoralities of men taking men, but it went further than that
- Namely, the people of Sodom were arrogant because the Lord gave them abundant food and a carefree lifestyle
 - Remember Lot chose to settle in Sodom because he took note of how well-watered it was and prosperous
 - This prosperity made Sodomites haughty, thinking they were wealthy and self-sufficient and could do whatever they wanted
- Remember what we learned last week... first comes God's blessings, which leads to pride
 - And pride causes us to forget our dependence on God, which leads us to act in sin
 - That was Satan's pattern, Adam's pattern and Israel's pattern
 - And now we see it was Sodom's pattern too
- In Sodom's case it eventually drove them to gross sexual immorality
 - Yet somehow Israel acted even worse, the Lord says
 - Israel did most, if not all, that Sodom did too
 - But then they added worse sins like child sacrifice – something Sodom never did
- And then there were the Samaritans, the people in the central Israel mountains with mixed Jewish-Gentile heritage who sought recognition as true Jews
 - Samaritans counterfeited Judaism, but in reality they were pagan worshippers
 - But despite being pagan, the Lord says they acted more reasonably than true Jews, not doing even half of what Israel did
 - Samaritans never allowed prostitution to enter into their temple on Mt. Gerizim
 - They never corrupted their priesthood or went after Canaanite gods on high places
 - And they certainly never engaged in child sacrifice
 - But the true Israel did all those things while they looked down their noses at the Samaritans
 - And Israel acted in these ways despite having the knowledge of the living God and His Law to guide them
 - The Samaritans were actually ashamed of the Jews in the south over these things
 - So the Lord says that Israel actually made these "sisters" appear righteous by comparison
 - As a result, the Lord will show mercy to these enemies in the judgment that befalls Israel
 - Babylon allowed Samaritans to remain in the land even after the invasion

because Samaria was willing to fall in line

- And while Sodom was wiped out, the region around that town continued to be inhabited by Edomites afterward
- So the Lord says He will bring Israel back into the land, but when she returns, her neighbors will still be there waiting
 - And the descendants of the Samaritans and Sodomites will remember how Israel's sins gave rise to the region's calamity

Ezek. 16:53 “Nevertheless, I will restore their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and along with them your own captivity,

Ezek. 16:54 in order that you may bear your humiliation and feel ashamed for all that you have done when you become a consolation to them.

Ezek. 16:55 “Your sisters, Sodom with her daughters and Samaria with her daughters, will return to their former state, and you with your daughters will also return to your former state.

Ezek. 16:56 “As the name of your sister Sodom was not heard from your lips in your day of pride,

Ezek. 16:57 before your wickedness was uncovered, so now you have become the reproach of the daughters of Edom and of all who are around her, of the daughters of the Philistines — those surrounding you who despise you.

Ezek. 16:58 “You have borne the penalty of your lewdness and abominations,” the LORD declares.

- Understanding this section requires some appreciation for the poetic nature of this passage
 - The Lord starts saying nevertheless, meaning, in spite of how bad Israel has been, the Lord will restore His people from captivity one day
 - This is a promise that their captivity will not be the end of the nation
 - But likewise, when Israel returns they will find that Samaria and Sodom will have been restored from captivity too
 - Now that's where this can get confusing, because we know that Sodom and Samaria weren't captured
 - We have to understand the Lord is speaking circumspectly here
 - He's using the word “captivity” to represent judgment in general, so He can draw a connection between Israel and these nations
 - Which is that Israel was judged for her sin, and she will also be restored after a time of judgment outside her land
 - But God also judged Samaria and Sodom for their sins, and they were judged for far lessor sins
 - So to be fair, the Lord says He must give opportunity for the descendants of the Samaritans and Sodomites to be restored too
 - The Samaritans would continue to be neighbors of Israel even after this

chapter of history has been concluded

- And the descendants of the Sodomites, called Edomites, will also be in the land
- He restores these nations because Israel has behaved worse than they did, and it wouldn't be just to exclude them
 - Notice in v.55 He says your sisters will return to their former state as you will to your former state, that is living in the land again
 - In other words, how can the Lord treat Sodom or Samaria worse than Israel when Israel committed worse offenses?
 - That's what He means in v.52 when He states Israel's depravity made judgment favorable for her enemies
- In v.54 He adds that as Israel becomes a consolation to her neighbors, she will feel ashamed at what their behavior produced in the land
 - The point is that Israel will be a source of consolation to Samaria and Edom who will recognize that Israel suffered worse than they did
 - And in seeing the Lord treating Gentile pagan people better than He treats Israel itself will shame Israel even more
 - It's like a wayward wife watching her husband giving greater mercy to a neighbor's wife than for her
- And in one final irony, the Lord says in vs.56-57 that though back in the day Israel wouldn't dare pronounce the name of Sodom...
 - In the future the role will be reversed
 - The people of Edom and those living in the Philistine cities in the region of Samaria won't dare mention the Jews of Jerusalem
 - The Jews will be those who were unmentionable
 - All of this is penalty for her lewdness and abominations
- So in summary, the Lord says:

Ezek. 16:59 For thus says the Lord GOD, “I will also do with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath by breaking the covenant.

- The Lord says I will deal with you as you've dealt with my covenant
 - The people of Israel despised the covenant God gave them
 - And so the Lord will despise His people for a while
 - At this point, you may be tempted to wonder if God is taking this too far with His people
 - What about forgiveness and mercy and love, you might say?
 - Have you heard someone suggest that the God of the OT is different than the God of the NT?
 - A person reads passages like this one and thinks they see a vengeful, unforgiving God

- But then they turn to the Gospels and hear Jesus say turn the other cheek and love your enemies
 - And they can't reconcile the two perspectives
- Of course God hasn't changed...He's always holy, perfect and good
 - The problem is our perspective
 - Because if you lose the appreciation of the Lord's purposes, you may start to question God's goodness in this situation
 - We overlook obvious differences between how God and mankind operate
 - And we judge God's methods rather than seeking to understand His purposes
- First, we overlook differences between God and man – especially differences between our relationship to people and our relationship to God
 - The Lord has directed us to be forever forgiving and loving, both to our brothers and sisters in the Lord and to our enemies in the world
 - Jesus tells believers to forgive our brothers and sisters 70 x 7 times
 - Which means we show limitless forgiveness because we've been forgiven far more by Christ
 - If you ever suppose you have a right to be unforgiving toward another believer, it's a sign you've begun taking your own forgiveness with Christ for granted
 - Remember, what Jesus said to Simon the self-righteous Pharisee

Luke 7:47 “For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

- Jesus says if you keep in mind how much you've been forgiven, then you can't help but love others unconditionally
- But when you forget how much sin you have and how much the Lord has forgiven you, then that allows your pride to take control
- And that leads to an unloving, unforgiving attitude toward others
- Secondly, we're called to love our enemies for the same reason
 - Christ loved us while we were yet His enemy, Paul says in Romans
 - Had Christ waited for us to love Him first, no one would have ever been saved
 - So again we're called to follow Christ's footsteps, which means forgiving those who hate us or persecute us without condition
 - Because that's how we may win them over for Christ, which is our mission
- So the NT calls for believers to turn the other cheek, because that's what God did for us
 - But is that in contradiction with what we see God doing in Ezekiel and elsewhere in the OT?
 - No, because God is different than human beings
 - God has no need to be forgiven of anything, and He's not bound by the rules He has assigned to His fallen Creation

- Moreover, He's the judge of His Creation, so eventually everything in His Creation must face His judgment

1Pet. 4:17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

- Judgment comes to both the Church and to the world in different ways and different times, but it comes nevertheless
 - We can't turn to God and condemn Him when He chooses to bring righteous judgment
 - That's the right thing for the Judge to do...to do otherwise would be unjust
- So we can't turn God's words against Him claiming that He should turn the other cheek
 - On the contrary, every day the Lord delays that judgment is grace and mercy to the sinner
 - And when the Lord finally brings that judgment, we have no right to question it
- Which brings us to the second point, that we mistakenly judge God's methods instead of considering His purposes
 - God is long-suffering in the face of sin, and yet when He acts He does so with the intent to restore His people, not to destroy them
 - Consider all that Israel has done in violation of their covenant
 - How many centuries should God have waited in the face of such sin?
 - How many years did God stand by while prostitutes operated in the temple?
 - How long did God allow Israel to make gifts and offerings to false gods on high places?
 - How many prophets did God send with warnings only to watch them be killed by mob violence?
 - How many Jewish children were slaughtered on pagan altars?
 - So if you're tempted to question God's love or His willingness to show forgiveness, I ask you, would you have waited as long as God did?
 - I doubt any of us would have been so patient
 - We probably would have cut Israel off a lot sooner than God did
 - Yet a holy just God waited and waited for centuries for the repentance of Israel
 - So how can we accuse God of acting in vengeful or cruel or unforgiving ways when He responds to Israel in the way we read here in Ezekiel?
 - In reality, He's showing even more patience than us, more forgiveness than we would under the same circumstances
 - He's carefully calibrated His response to ensure that in the end He saved Israel from self-destruction

- He's not acting to destroy Israel but cleanse it
- And in His omniscience God determined that this was the best way to cure His people of idolatry
 - And He's not done with His people...

Ezek. 16:60 “Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.

Ezek. 16:61 “Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, both your older and your younger; and I will give them to you as daughters, but not because of your covenant.

Ezek. 16:62 “Thus I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD,

Ezek. 16:63 so that you may remember and be ashamed and never open your mouth anymore because of your humiliation, when I have forgiven you for all that you have done,” the Lord GOD declares.

- One more time the Lord changes direction and says nevertheless, He wouldn't leave Israel despised and rejected
 - In v.60 the Lord makes a blockbuster revelation through Ezekiel that even in the midst of these difficult times for Israel, the Lord will remember His covenant
 - This covenant is one made with Israel in the days of her youth
 - The youth of Israel refers to the very beginnings of the nation, which is a reference back to the patriarchs
 - So we're talking about the Abrahamic Covenant
 - The Abrahamic Covenant was given to Israel hundreds of years prior to the Old Covenant, and it made sweeping promises

Gen. 12:2 And I will make you a great nation,

And I will bless you,

And make your name great;

And so you shall be a blessing;

Gen. 12:3 And I will bless those who bless you,

And the one who curses you I will curse.

And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

- Notice the terms of this covenant didn't depend on obedience
 - It's a suzerainty covenant, which is a one-way grant of privilege from a greater to a lessor
 - In that covenant the Lord promised Abraham's descendants would have land, blessing and peace unconditionally
 - And that covenant also made provision for other nations to enjoy the same blessings
 - These things will come to pass based solely on the Lord's faithfulness to His word

- Later, the Lord took Abraham’s descendants and gave them another covenant called the Mosaic Covenant
 - That covenant made Abraham’s descendants a nation of people, bound together by a Law and under the authority of God directly
 - The Mosaic Covenant established the rules by which the nation would live while they awaited the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant
 - If Israel lived according to these commandments, the Lord would ensure Israel great blessing on earth
 - And if Israel disobeyed the covenant, the Lord would hold the nation accountable
 - But regardless, the nation would one day see the blessings promised in the Abrahamic Covenant
 - And on an individual basis, each Jew had opportunity to be included in these blessings by faith in God’s promise – just as Abraham had faith in the promise
 - The Old Covenant has no bearing on an individual’s salvation
 - It wasn’t a covenant of personal salvation but of national identity
 - Its terms were directed at the the nation as a whole
 - It was the Old Covenant that married the nation of Israel to the Lord as the wife of Jehovah
 - And that covenant mandated Israel’s obedience to the Law and subjected her to penalties for disobedience
 - And so it was the Old Covenant that necessitated Israel’s exile and all the other judgments that were coming upon her now
- But in v.60 the Lord says that their calamity in Babylon won’t mean the end of the nation because of that other covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant
 - So that no matter how bad things got for Israel under the terms of the Old Covenant – and they certainly could get very bad – the Abrahamic Covenant set a limit
 - The Jewish people would never cease to exist, or else the Lord could not be faithful to His promise to Abraham
 - And the nation couldn’t be outside her land forever for the same reason
 - So the Lord says He will remember His covenant with Abraham made in Israel’s youth
 - And that covenant will ensure that Israel still has a bright future
 - Remember, that covenant had no prerequisites, no preconditions
 - So one day Israel will have the blessings of a Kingdom just as the Lord said they would
 - But how will the Lord move Israel from disobedience to glory in the Kingdom?
 - The answer comes at the end of v.60
 - The Lord says He will establish yet another everlasting covenant with Israel
 - This is not a reference to the Abrahamic or Mosaic Covenants, because these

covenants have already been established

- He's talking about a future covenant
- This is the first direct reference in Ezekiel to the New Covenant
 - The Lord promises to give His people a New Covenant, one that unites the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants in a sense
 - The New Covenant fulfills the promises made to Abraham by covering our sins which separate us from God and His Kingdom
 - And at the same time the New Covenant fulfills the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant by assigning us credit for Christ's perfection under the Law
 - So by the New Covenant, the Lord will grant both Israel and Gentiles access to glory
 - But notice in v.61 the Lord also tells Israel that in the day these things are fulfilled, Israel's evil "sisters" will become her daughters
 - As sisters, Samaritans and Sodomites shared in Israel's sins
 - But as daughters, these Gentile nations will share in Israel's glory
 - The Lord is describing how Israel will see these peoples again in the Kingdom, when we will all be children of God by faith
 - Notice at the end of v.61 the Lord says the Gentiles will be with Israel as daughters but not because of your covenant
 - "Your covenant" refers to the covenant given only to Israel, the Mosaic Covenant
 - In other words, the Gentiles will receive what God has promised to Israel, but not because of the Mosaic Covenant
 - Rather, the Gentiles receive the Kingdom because of the New Covenant
- And in that day to come, the people of Israel will be ashamed by memories of their past behavior toward God
 - They will be surprised to see their ungodly neighbors included in God's plan
 - And in that moment, the Lord says Israel will remember that she acted so badly toward God when they should have known better
 - Meanwhile, ungodly Gentiles who lacked the Law of God acted better
 - For now Israel's immediate future was bleak, but their ultimate future was bright because the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable
 - So because of what the Lord promised Abraham, He now affirms to Israel that He will restore them through a New Covenant
 - With one of the effects of that covenant being making all Israel know the Lord
 - This is another important promise for the nation
 - Israel was in the midst of terrible judgment because they couldn't obey the Lord's word and keep the Law
 - Moreover, most of the nation was unbelieving and did not even know the Lord
 - In fact, this remains the state of Israel even today
 - Since unbelief and disobedience cannot please God nor even enter His presence,

how can God ever allow Israel into the Kingdom?

- What will prevent Israel from repeating these same mistakes over and over again?
 - A sinless heart is required to keep the Law and to receive the promises of the Old Covenant
 - And a sinless heart is also required to enter into the Lord's presence in the Kingdom
 - So the answer is they need a new, sinless heart, one that knows the Lord truly and obeys Him always
- And at the end of v.62 the Lord says this New Covenant will solve this problem as well
- It will result in all Israel knowing that I am the Lord, He says
 - In the Kingdom, Israel will be glorified, living in new bodies that cannot sin
 - So in that day when Israel is living in peace in her land with Gentile nations around her, Israel will have a different heart
- But in that day, the nation will remember its past disobedience with regret
- This suggests that in eternity in the Kingdom, we will have some recollection about how we used our time on this earth
 - And by that recollection we may carry a certain degree of appreciation for missed opportunities
 - Let that help motivate you to make the most of every opportunity to serve Christ and love your neighbor
- More importantly, they will never again open their mouths in objection or disobedience
- Instead they will live in peace, forgiven by God for all they have done, He says
 - This is the grace of the New Covenant made in Christ's blood
 - Ezekiel has a lot more to say about this coming covenant
 - And at the same time, his contemporary, Jeremiah, was revealing similar things to the Jews in Jerusalem

- We're studying Israel's excuses to Ezekiel and God for why they need not worry about coming judgment
 - So far we've studied five of the eight excuses in this section of Ezekiel's book
 - Each excuse has shown us how self-deceived the people of Israel had become
 - And it also gives us an opportunity to consider whether we use similar excuses at times for our own disobedience to God's word
 - It's our human (sin) nature to think that we can get away with sin, but Scripture reminds us that the Lord is aware
 - And He encourages us to serve Him obediently
 - So we want to understand the historical circumstances of Israel's excuses and the Lord's response so we can be better prepared to serve the Lord too
 - Tonight we move to excuse #6
 - This excuse, like many of the others, is only reflected in the text indirectly
 - We come to understand the excuse by noting what the Lord said in response
 - In the previous two chapters, Israel's excuse was that the Lord's covenant with Israel prevented Him from executing judgment so they need not fear
 - So the Lord's response was to review in detail all the sins of the previous generations which justified His judgment
 - But that recap generated a new excuse, which the Lord then addresses in Chapter 17
 - That new excuse was that the Lord can't punish this generation for the sins of those past generations
- So this chapter is the Lord's response to that claim
 - And He opens with a parable

Ezek. 17:1 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 17:2 "Son of man, propound a riddle and speak a parable to the house of Israel,

Ezek. 17:3 saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "A great eagle with great wings, long pinions and a full plumage of many colors came to Lebanon and took away the top of the cedar.

Ezek. 17:4 "He plucked off the topmost of its young twigs and brought it to a land of merchants; he set it in a city of traders.

Ezek. 17:5 "He also took some of the seed of the land and planted it in fertile soil. He placed it beside abundant waters; he set it like a willow.

Ezek. 17:6 "Then it sprouted and became a low, spreading vine with its branches turned toward him, but its roots remained under it. So it became a vine and yielded shoots and sent out branches.

Ezek. 17:7 "But there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage; and behold, this vine bent its roots toward him and sent out its

branches toward him from the beds where it was planted, that he might water it.

Ezek. 17:8 “It was planted in good soil beside abundant waters, that it might yield branches and bear fruit and become a splendid vine.”

Ezek. 17:9 “Say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Will it thrive? Will he not pull up its roots and cut off its fruit, so that it withers — so that all its sprouting leaves wither? And neither by great strength nor by many people can it be raised from its roots again.

Ezek. 17:10 “Behold, though it is planted, will it thrive? Will it not completely wither as soon as the east wind strikes it — wither on the beds where it grew?””

- The Lord tells Ezekiel to present Israel with a riddle and parable
 - The prophecy is a riddle because its meaning has to be decoded...it’s not obvious
 - And it’s a parable as well because the story presents an allegory, which is a message told through symbols
 - The riddle part challenges the intelligence of the listener, and in that way is designed to excite interest in learning the message
 - And the message holds the meaning of the prophecy
 - Combining a riddle with a parable obscures the meaning beyond the ability of the listener to make sense of the prophecy
 - Which in turn makes Ezekiel’s audience dependent on the Lord to explain the meaning
 - So in short, this form gets and holds their attention so that they might hear the message
 - In vs.1-10, the Lord presents the riddle/parable and in the verses that follow He explains it
 - So we will simply observe this first section and let the Lord explain it to us
 - The story centers around eagles, trees and vines
- First, a singularly impressive eagle flies to the cedars of Lebanon
 - Today we think of Lebanon as a place distinct from Israel, but in Ezekiel’s day Lebanon was another name for the northern region of Canaan
 - Lebanon was part of the land God gave to Israel and therefore Lebanon was another name for Israel
 - But when the Bible uses the name Lebanon, it’s referring to the northernmost region of Israel, which was famous for the very tall cedar trees planted there
 - Today in Israel you can again find cedars in many places
 - But these trees were only planted during the last century following the deforestation of Israel by the Ottoman Empire

- So they aren't nearly as stately as the cedar forests of ancient Israel, which had grown up over several centuries
 - So Lebanon is a reference to the cedar forest of northern Israel
 - And in particular, calling Israel by the name Lebanon was a way of referring to the fruitfulness and grandeur of Israel
- And then an impressive eagle plucks off tops of these trees and carries them to a land of merchants and traders
 - And the eagle also took some vine seeds from Lebanon and planted it in a fertile well-watered area
 - As a result, that vine sprouted with roots secure in the ground
 - And as the vine spread out, it's branches reached up toward the eagle that planted it
- Then in v.7 another somewhat less majestic eagle appears and the vine suddenly shifts its attention from the first eagle to the second
 - The vine's branches grow upward toward the new eagle seeking for that second eagle to water it instead of the first
 - In v.8 we are reminded that the vine's desire for the second eagle to water it is unnecessary because it was already planted in a well-watered area
 - It's been fruitful in that place, and so there should be no need to seek for a new source of water
 - So in vs.9-10 the Lord asks rhetorically, wouldn't the owner of that vine respond by pulling it out of the ground so that it withers?
 - Because the vine did not respond faithfully to the one who planted it and nourished it, but instead went after another provider, it will be despised by its owner
 - So it will suffer the fate of being uprooted
 - And despite having great roots, it cannot survive at that point since it has been detached from the land
- Now we see the Lord interpreting the riddle/parable, and first Ezekiel interprets it historically and then makes a theological application

Ezek. 17:11 Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezek. 17:12 "Say now to the rebellious house, 'Do you not know what these things mean?' Say, 'Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, took its king and princes and brought them to him in Babylon.'

Ezek. 17:13 'He took one of the royal family and made a covenant with him, putting him under oath. He also took away the mighty of the land,

Ezek. 17:14 that the kingdom might be in subjection, not exalting itself, but keeping his covenant that it might continue.

Ezek. 17:15 'But he rebelled against him by sending his envoys to Egypt that they

might give him horses and many troops. Will he succeed? Will he who does such things escape? Can he indeed break the covenant and escape?

Ezek. 17:16 ‘As I live,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘Surely in the country of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke, in Babylon he shall die.

Ezek. 17:17 ‘Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company will not help him in the war, when they cast up ramps and build siege walls to cut off many lives.

Ezek. 17:18 ‘Now he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, and behold, he pledged his allegiance, yet did all these things; he shall not escape.’”

- The Lord now begins to assign meaning to the various characters and events
 - Beginning with the first eagle, which represents the king of Babylon
 - When Scripture uses eagles symbolically, they typically represent leaders or powerful entities with authority from God
 - For example, in Exodus 19, God uses an eagle to represent how He escorted Israel out of Egypt
 - In this case, the Lord gives us the answer to the symbol, but He also gave the answer to Israel earlier in a prophecy in the Law

Deut. 28:47 “Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things;

Deut. 28:48 therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you.

Deut. 28:49 “The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand,

Deut. 28:50 a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.

- Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, is the eagle and the tops of the trees of Lebanon represent the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem
 - So as Babylon came upon Israel like a hot wind from the east (see v.10), it carried off the king and court of Israel
 - In 597 BC the army invaded Jerusalem and took the Judean king, Jehoiachin, and all his senior advisors
 - This group was represented by the tops of the trees
- They were taken to Babylon, a place of traders and merchants
 - There are several references in the Old Testament to Babylon as a city of traders and merchants

- And this same description continues into the New Testament, as the book of Revelation refers to Babylon in the same way
- Then in v.13, the Lord says Babylon took another king of the family of Judah, Zedekiah, and placed him in power over Jerusalem as their vassal
 - This is pictured by the seed planted in fertile soil from v.5
 - Nebuchadnezzar expected this new king to be compliant to Babylon's wishes, since he owed his power to them
 - They supported his rule and allowed him and the rest of the city's people to remain and survive on the condition that he obey
 - In that sense, they were well-watered and could flourish in their place
- As Nebuchadnezzar installed Zedekiah he entered into a covenant with the new king
 - A covenant is a life-long binding agreement where the penalty for breaking the agreement is always death
 - Men didn't enter into covenants without considerable forethought, because so much was on the line
 - In Zedekiah's case, the covenant stipulated that he obey Nebuchadnezzar in all things
 - And in response, Nebuchadnezzar pledged to provide and protect Judah from all enemies
 - Under the terms of that covenant, Zedekiah and Jerusalem flourished for a time
 - They remained in the land and were left to live life without restraint
 - In v.14 the Lord says the key to the nation's prosperity under these circumstances was to remain subjected to Babylon
 - The nation should not try to exalt itself, that is seek to rebel against the Lord's appointed judgment
 - In that sense, Judah's roots were to remain planted in the land and its branches were to reach upward to the eagle acknowledging its authority
 - Its branches only turned up to the eagle
 - The vine itself did not grow upward but instead spread outward
 - This was a less-than-sincere acknowledgement of Babylon's authority
 - And historically, this is the record of the time of Zedekiah's ruling
- But in 588 BC, Zedekiah decided to break his covenant and rebel against Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon
 - Obviously Zedekiah knew his army couldn't possibly withstand another attack from Nebuchadnezzar, so he sought an ally
 - Zedekiah reached out to Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt, the enemy of Babylon, seeking assistance
 - Zedekiah asked for horses and troops to defeat Nebuchadnezzar's army for when he inevitably invaded again

- That Pharaoh is the second strong eagle that the vine turned to for water despite already being well-watered already
- Interestingly, we know that Ezekiel issued this prophecy around 592 BC, so he's telling Israel of Zedekiah's rebellion 3 years before it happened
 - But he also tells the people that this rebellion can't hope to succeed
 - In v.15 the Lord asks, can someone break a covenant and survive?
- The Lord says in v.16 that the king will die in the country that put him on the throne and whose covenant the king broke
 - Remember, that when a man entered into a covenant, he swore by the name of his God
 - So Zedekiah would have sworn by the name of the Lord
- And so the Lord is now swearing through Ezekiel to hold that man accountable for breaking that covenant
 - Remember, he hadn't broken it yet, but the Lord knew that he was going to break it
 - So he says that though His people broke the covenant, Babylon would keep their part of the bargain
 - J. Vernon McGee said concerning this irony:

"The interesting thing is that Nebuchadnezzar kept his side of the covenant. God's people broke the covenant, but the pagan nation kept their side of it. What a picture! In some churches you will find people still carrying their Bibles, but their hearts are far from God and you cannot believe what they say. On the other hand, there are businessmen who, although they are unsaved, are men of integrity."

- In vs.17-18 the Lord says that the Pharaoh wasn't going to be able to save Zedekiah in the end
 - The Lord will ensure that Babylon succeeds in conquering Zedekiah
 - You can find an account of how this happens in Jeremiah 37
 - The city's third conquest by Babylon is pictured by the vine being pulled up by the roots
 - Zedekiah and the nation were going to be uprooted from the land and allowed to wither in captivity
 - Now remember, the nation was saying that they weren't going to see the destruction Ezekiel was predicting because they weren't responsible
 - Their forefathers may have done terrible things but this generation wasn't to blame
 - So here's the Lord showing the people that their current leadership is just as rebellious as prior generations

- Breaking the covenant is reason enough for the Lord to put an end to Zedekiah and his rule
 - But even before that point, the king was guilty of repeating most of the sins of past generations
 - In 2 Kings 24, you find the record of Babylon's three attacks against Jerusalem and the three kings he installed
 - At the end of that chapter, we hear about Zedekiah's installment

2Kings 24:17 Then the king of Babylon made his uncle Mattaniah king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

2Kings 24:18 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.

2Kings 24:19 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done.

2Kings 24:20 For through the anger of the LORD this came about in Jerusalem and Judah until He cast them out from His presence. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

- Notice we're told that during Zedekiah's short reign he repeated all the sins of the king, Jehoiakim
 - And earlier in that chapter we're told that Jehoiachin also did everything Jehoiakim, his father, had done
 - And even earlier in that chapter we're told that Jehoiakim had shed the blood of the innocent, indicating child sacrifice
 - So all three kings carried on the same abhorrent practices of earlier generations
- So the nation had no basis for claiming it was innocent of their forefathers' sins
 - On the contrary, they were just as guilty and just as deserving of judgment
 - So now the Lord makes a theological application

Ezek. 17:19 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "As I live, surely My oath which he despised and My covenant which he broke, I will inflict on his head.

Ezek. 17:20 "I will spread My net over him, and he will be caught in My snare. Then I will bring him to Babylon and enter into judgment with him there regarding the unfaithful act which he has committed against Me.

Ezek. 17:21 "All the choice men in all his troops will fall by the sword, and the survivors will be scattered to every wind; and you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken."

- The world would see Babylon's third defeat of Judah as simply another struggle

between nations

- And the result would make perfect sense to a student of the ancient East
- When conquered nations resist the power of their conquerors, they will be crushed
- Such was Judah's fate following their second rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar
- But now the Lord adds a theological interpretation to these same events, for Israel's sake
 - The Lord would ensure that this final defeat would wipe Israel off the map for a while
 - The king will be captured and brought to Babylon where he will be judged personally
- We covered the way in which this king was killed back in Chapter 12, where Ezekiel uses similar language of a snare to trap him
 - And when Nebuchadnezzar came face to face with Zedekiah, he decided to make an example of the man
 - Nebuchadnezzar killed Zedekiah's son in his presence and then plucked out the king's eyes so that his last memory was seeing his son's dying
 - Nebuchadnezzar then left Zedekiah to live as a blind man in Babylon
- The Lord says that when these things happen and the nation's army is vanquished and the survivors scattered abroad, Israel would know the Lord had indeed spoken to them
 - How could the Lord be sure that Israel would get this message?
 - Because He's told them about the outcome before it happens
 - Jeremiah told the inhabitants of Jerusalem, while Ezekiel prophesied to the exiles in Babylon
 - Both groups heard of these events in advance, and when they came to pass exactly as the Lord promised, it made an impression
 - So at that point, the people remaining in exile gave heed to what the prophets said and to the meaning of these things
 - They recognized that the Lord had executed judgment against the people for their offenses against Him
 - And we know from history that the people then committed to never again pursuing idolatry
 - The memory of Babylon was so seared into the collective consciousness of the nation that they feared the Lord's response should they ever stray again
 - Of course, that doesn't mean the entire nation turned to Him in faith
 - There is a big difference between following the Law in obedience and following the Lord in faith
 - The Lord used the Babylonian captivity to return Israel to obedience to the Law
 - And He uses obedience to the Law as a tutor to bring some to Messiah
 - Still, the first priority was preserving the nation from idolatry so that it would

serve the Lord's purpose in bringing the Messiah to the world

- But as we already know, the Lord has two messages for the people, one of judgment and one of glory
 - First comes judgment to address the rebellious hearts of the people in keeping with the Old Covenant's requirements
 - But later comes the promise of glory which is fulfilled solely on the basis of God's faithfulness to His covenant to Abraham
 - So once more, the Lord ends His promise of coming judgment with a promise of ultimate glory

Ezek. 17:22 Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will also take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and set it out; I will pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain.

Ezek. 17:23 "On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches.

Ezek. 17:24 "All the trees of the field will know that I am the LORD; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform it."

- The Lord draws upon the same parable from earlier to extend a new message of glory to the people of Israel
 - He says He Himself will cut off a young, tender shoot of the very top of the loftiest cedar in Lebanon and set it up
 - This shoot would be planted on a high and lofty mountain
 - It will bear great fruit and provide shelter to many branches below it
 - Furthermore, birds of every kind will nest in it
 - Moreover, at that time all the rest of the trees in Israel will know that the Lord is the Lord of Israel
 - And high trees will be humbled while the lowly trees will be exalted
 - The green trees will dry up while the dry trees will flourish
 - The Lord has spoken it and so He will do it
- The symbology is clear...as we learned earlier, the tops of these stately cedars represent the rulers of Israel
 - So planting a cutting from the top of the highest tree is an allusion to the return of the Davidic line and specifically the ruling Messiah
 - So the Lord is promising to install the Messiah as leader over Israel in a day to come
 - He will be the highest ruler over all Israel

- And not just Israel, but birds of all kinds, meaning Gentile nations, would also nest under this tree
- And under this coming ruler, all Israel will flourish and be protected
 - All Israel will be obedient and believing
 - And He will rule from the seat of David on Mt. Zion
- Finally, the effect of Messiah ruling will be to humble the proud and to exalt the humble
 - Which is a very different arrangement from the way Israel worked in Ezekiel's day and in most days
 - The powerful and elite in the nation held the power and abused it for their own sake and at the expense of the people
- Obviously, this is exactly the opposite of what the Lord desired from those who ruled over His people
 - Consider that the Lord's favorite metaphor for a leader over His people is the shepherd
 - The Lord always wanted men who cared more for their flock than for themselves
 - And would be willing to sacrifice their own interests for those they care over
- Israel hasn't had that in a long time, and now the Lord is promising to bring that to Israel in the ultimate sense of Jesus
 - Jesus is the perfect representation of such a shepherd
 - Willing to lay His life down for the sake of the sheep
 - And when He returns to rule over Israel and the world, He will judge the nations with perfect righteousness
 - He will humble the proud
 - He will exalt the humble
 - When Isaiah speaks of the day that the Lord enters into His Kingdom, he describes it this way

Is. 2:10 Enter the rock and hide in the dust

From the terror of the LORD and from the splendor of His majesty.

Is. 2:11 The proud look of man will be abased

And the loftiness of man will be humbled,

And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.

Is. 2:12 For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning

Against everyone who is proud and lofty

And against everyone who is lifted up,

That he may be abased.

Is. 2:13 And it will be against all the cedars of Lebanon that are lofty and lifted

up,
 Against all the oaks of Bashan,
 Is. 2:14 Against all the lofty mountains,
 Against all the hills that are lifted up,
 Is. 2:15 Against every high tower,
 Against every fortified wall,
 Is. 2:16 Against all the ships of Tarshish
 And against all the beautiful craft.
 Is. 2:17 The pride of man will be humbled
 And the loftiness of men will be abased;
 And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day,
 Is. 2:18 But the idols will completely vanish.

- The Lord alone will be exalted but He will be against the proud
 - Including the cedars of Lebanon referring to those proud and evil leaders over Israel
 - Most importantly the idols in Israel will vanish
- So to review the chapter, the people were dismissing Ezekiel's warnings saying that they wouldn't be held liable for the sins of their fathers
 - And the Lord responds saying Israel will be held accountable for the sins of their own generation
 - He used the parable to explain that their present king was just as evil as previous kings
 - So the Lord says they will be held accountable, predicting what will happen in three year's time:
 - The king's plan to rebel will not succeed, the city will be taken, and the people will go into exile
 - But because of this prophecy, the people will know that the Lord was the One bringing these judgments
 - And because of the serenity of what happens, the people are willing to set aside idolatry forever
 - The combined effect is to draw Israel back to a faithful walk under the Law
 - Or at least they lost their desire to pursue pagan idols
 - And that zealotry continues for the most part today among the Jewish people
 - And in the Kingdom it will finally be put away forever
- Now in response to that prophecy, the people decide to double-down on their excuse
 - After complaining that they were being punished for their father's sins, the Lord said their generation of leaders had sins too
 - But they basically ignore the Lord's response and continue insisting they were being punished for the sins of their fathers

- So the Lord takes the next chapter to specifically address that charge
- We won't do all of 18 tonight, but since these two chapters are so closely related, we are going to move into it a little

Ezek. 18:1 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezek. 18:2 “What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying,

‘The fathers eat the sour grapes,
But the children’s teeth are set on edge’?

Ezek. 18:3 “As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.

Ezek. 18:4 “Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.

Ezek. 18:5 “But if a man is righteous and practices justice and righteousness,

Ezek. 18:6 and does not eat at the mountain shrines or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, or defile his neighbor’s wife or approach a woman during her menstrual period —

Ezek. 18:7 if a man does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, does not commit robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing,

Ezek. 18:8 if he does not lend money on interest or take increase, if he keeps his hand from iniquity and executes true justice between man and man,

Ezek. 18:9 if he walks in My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully — he is righteous and will surely live,” declares the Lord GOD.

- This chapter of Ezekiel is one of the more often studied for what it reveals about God’s justice
 - The Lord tells Ezekiel to rebuke the people with these words, beginning with a proverb Israel was telling itself
 - They were saying “the fathers eat sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge”
 - Eating sour grapes sets your teeth on edge, so to speak
 - So the proverb claimed that in Israel the children receive the consequences of the fathers’ poor choices
 - This proverb was a not-so-subtle indictment of God’s character
 - The proverb reflected the nation’s self-deception
 - They thought God treated them unfairly for the sin of others
 - While conveniently overlooking their own sins which justified the Lord’s wrath
 - But the Lord denies the truth of this proverb beginning in v.3
 - He says, as long as I live the nation will no longer use this proverb

- How long does God live? Eternally
 - So in other words, this proverb disappeared from Israel forever
- To set the record straight, the Lord says in v.4 that all souls are the Lord's: the soul of every father and the soul of every son are known
 - This is a powerful statement of God's sovereignty over the destiny of humanity
 - God is saying that every living person, every human being who has ever possessed a soul, including unborn children, belong to Him
 - He knows them, He determines the course of their path in life and the outcome of their soul in the end
 - No one exists outside the Lord's view, which tells us that all will be accountable to Him too
 - None will escape His judgment in a day to come
 - And the Lord says that the one who sins will die
 - On the other hand, the one who is righteous and practices justice and righteousness according to the terms of the Law lives
 - The Lord gives examples of what the righteous would do or not do during these evil days
 - The righteous would not eat meat sacrificed to idols, pray to idols, commit adultery or violate other Laws regarding lying with women
 - Furthermore, the righteous don't oppress others, fail to repay debts
 - He doesn't rob others but gives to the needs of the poor, etc.
- In summary, the righteous man under the Law walks in those ordinances
 - In v.9 the Lord says walking in the statutes of the Law, which means obeying as much as possible, was dealing faithfully with the Lord
 - Such a heart displays righteousness and that person will live
 - In this context living or dying refers to physical death, the penalty for sin under the Old Covenant
 - That's the question at issue here...whether the Lord was justified in holding Israel accountable for their sins under that Covenant
 - The people said they were being unfairly treated because they were being put to death for the sins of their fathers
 - The Lord defends Himself saying that every soul in Israel will be held responsible under that covenant for their own behavior
 - If they had a heart of obedience, they would not fall under the Law's penalty of death
 - If they sinned doing the very sorts of things he just listed, then they will die
- Moreover, there is no link between father and son...

Ezek. 18:10 “Then he may have a violent son who sheds blood and who does any of these things to a brother

Ezek. 18:11 (though he himself did not do any of these things), that is, he even eats at the mountain shrines, and defiles his neighbor’s wife,

Ezek. 18:12 oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore a pledge, but lifts up his eyes to the idols and commits abomination,

Ezek. 18:13 he lends money on interest and takes increase; will he live? He will not live! He has committed all these abominations, he will surely be put to death; his blood will be on his own head.

Ezek. 18:14 “Now behold, he has a son who has observed all his father’s sins which he committed, and observing does not do likewise.

Ezek. 18:15 “He does not eat at the mountain shrines or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, or defile his neighbor’s wife,

Ezek. 18:16 or oppress anyone, or retain a pledge, or commit robbery, but he gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing,

Ezek. 18:17 he keeps his hand from the poor, does not take interest or increase, but executes My ordinances, and walks in My statutes; he will not die for his father’s iniquity, he will surely live.

Ezek. 18:18 “As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother and did what was not good among his people, behold, he will die for his iniquity.

- The Lord lists examples of two different sons
 - In vs.10-13 the Lord lists the example of a righteous father who happens to have an unrighteous son
 - Unlike his father, that son does all the abominable things described earlier
 - As a result, he will be put to death as the Law required
 - No one would be able to say that this child was dying for his father’s sins, for his father was righteous
 - His own blood was on his head
 - Godly parents should remember this example if they have concern for a wayward child
 - The Lord never hints at any link between the father and the child
 - In fact, the father’s life is impeccable
 - And yet the child emerges with issues, and so the father is not accountable
 - We still wish for our prodigal children to do better, but we need not worry that we are responsible
- Conversely, in vs.14-18 the Lord lists the example of a son who has done what’s righteous despite being raised by an unrighteous father
 - He walks in the Lord’s ordinances and statutes and will live because of his

obedience under the Law

- Moreover, the Lord says in v.17 that he will not die for his father's sins
- These are not new determinations by the Lord...this is always the way it had been
- The Lord is simply reminding Israel of that fact to deny their silly proverb
- Notice His summary in vs. 19-20

Ezek. 18:19 “Yet you say, ‘Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity?’ When the son has practiced justice and righteousness and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live.

Ezek. 18:20 “The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

- He asks Israel, why are you saying that I’m causing the son to bear the father’s iniquity?
 - The evidence argued to the contrary...children who did the right thing were not punished under the Law
- Only the person who sinned was accountable
 - This is a basic principle of Scripture, and the Lord has never practiced it any other way on an individual basis
 - But there is a companion principle for the nation of Israel uniquely from the Law

Deut. 5:7 ‘You shall have no other gods before Me.

Deut. 5:8 ‘You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

Deut. 5:9 ‘You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Deut. 5:10 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

- In multiple places in the Law, the Lord declared to Israel that the nation must have no gods other than the Lord
 - And that if the nation violated this Law by entering into idolatry, then the Lord would react in jealousy
 - He doesn’t specify at this point how He would respond, except to say that His wrath would extend for generations
 - But later the Lord says in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel that the penalty for idolatry would be exile from the land

- Of course that exile lasted 3-4 generations, which is what the Lord was talking about in the Law
- So the Lord wasn't suggesting He would hold sons accountable for a father's sin
 - Rather He was speaking about national penalties for national sins
 - Under the Old Covenant of Moses, there were laws for the individual Jew with penalties for disobedience
 - And there were expectations for the nation as a whole with penalties for the nation
- The covenant itself stipulated that the nation would experience these judgments for failure to keep its terms
 - In Leviticus the Lord spelled out the blessings for obedience and the consequences for failure to keep the covenant
 - And included in those consequences was the exile that Judah was now facing

Lev. 26:14 'But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments,

Lev. 26:15 if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant,

Lev. 26:16 I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that will waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you will sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up.

Lev. 26:31 'I will lay waste your cities as well and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your soothing aromas.

Lev. 26:32 'I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it will be appalled over it.

Lev. 26:33 'You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste.

Lev. 26:36 'As for those of you who may be left, I will also bring weakness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies. And the sound of a driven leaf will chase them, and even when no one is pursuing they will flee as though from the sword, and they will fall.

Lev. 26:37 'They will therefore stumble over each other as if running from the sword, although no one is pursuing; and you will have no strength to stand up before your enemies.

Lev. 26:38 'But you will perish among the nations, and your enemies' land will consume you.

- These were part of the national consequences for failure to keep the covenant and they were separate from the consequences for individual sin
 - These two lines of consequence worked in conjunction with one another
 - The entire nation would experience the national consequences independent of how any given individual in the nation lived
 - So individually, each person (i.e., soul) would live or die depending on whether they obeyed this covenant's terms
 - And the nation would prosper or not depending on how it kept the covenant
 - And if the nation stumbled as a whole, then the consequences would extend for generations
 - Knowing these things, then we also understand that these verses do not directly speak to how the Lord deals with His Church
 - We are not under Law and therefore we are not treated according to these Laws
 - We are not held to the penalties of the Law in Deuteronomy or Leviticus
 - So we will not be sent into exile in Babylon, and our third and fourth generations will not be captives as a result, etc.
 - There is simply no direct comparison to be made except the obvious comparison that we too are called to live obediently
 - And we too will be judged individually by the Lord
 - He doesn't judge us according to our sin, since Christ has taken our sin on Himself
 - But he does judge us individually according to our works
 - Reason enough to deal faithfully with the Lord

- Let's return to Chapter 18 and to the Lord's response to Israel's seventh excuse
 - The exiles of Israel sitting in captivity in Babylon had reasons they thought they could justifiably ignore the Lord's warnings of judgment
 - The Lord told them through Ezekiel that the city of Jerusalem was on the verge of total destruction at the hands of Babylon
 - And it was about to suffer this fate because of the many sins of Israel, perpetrated against God and their covenant through Moses
 - But the people wouldn't believe that such a destruction was likely or even possible
 - So they told themselves eight excuses for why they could safely ignore the prophet's warnings
 - Last week we looked at the sixth and seventh excuses, which were related to one another
 - Israel's sixth excuse proposed that God would never hold the current generation of Israel accountable for the sins of prior generations
 - The Lord answered that objection by reminding the nation of how sinful they themselves were
 - They repeated the pattern of sin of prior generations
 - They had evil kings as did prior generations and they followed their kings into all manner of depravity
 - So this generation was equally guilty and therefore equally due judgment
- But the Lord's response simply prompted the people to give a new excuse, their seventh excuse
 - The people said that if judgment was truly coming, then there was no purpose in repenting as Ezekiel demanded
 - There was nothing to be gained in their repentance
 - They would pay for the sins of the nation regardless, since they couldn't change the past
 - We read through v.20 last week, as the Lord corrected Israel again
 - He said He never holds a person accountable for the sin of another
 - Each person is accountable for his or her own sin before the Lord
 - And therefore, if a Jew living under the Law of Moses acted righteously, that is if he obeyed the covenant, then he would live
 - But if he disobeyed, he would die as the Law required
 - When we looked at these statements last week, I told you that "live" and "die" refer to physical life and death, not spiritual life or death
 - The Lord was simply expressing the reality of the Law's power over those who lived under it
 - Just like our laws today, if we obey them, we will enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness

- If we disobey the law, we should expect to suffer the consequences
- In Israel's case, the Law given through Moses specified death for anyone who failed to live obediently under the Law
 - Mistakes could be made, and when they were made a sacrifice must be offered at the temple
 - But for the Jew who purposely disobeyed the Law or refused to participate in the sacrificial system, the Law required a penalty of death
 - So the Lord has told Israel that they are paying the price for their own sins, not for the sins of their forefathers
 - And the price that the Law required was death
- Nevertheless, there was still good reason for Israel to consider repenting in the face of the prophet's warnings
 - Because if they repented, the Lord was willing to grant them mercy and spare their lives
 - Let's pick up there again tonight as we move to the end of this chapter and enter into Chapter 19

Ezek. 18:21 “But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Ezek. 18:22 “All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live.

Ezek. 18:23 “Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the Lord GOD, “rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?

Ezek. 18:24 “But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die.

- Here we find the Lord's argument against the seventh excuse that their repentance would be useless at this point
 - The Lord says not so, repentance very much still matters...because it's the only way the wicked will save their earthly lives
 - In v.21 the Lord promises that if the wicked among the people of Israel turn from their sins and observe the Law again, they will survive the coming invasion
 - In earlier chapters Ezekiel told the people that the third invasion was going to be devastating and no one will escape it
 - But now the Lord now says that when Nebuchadnezzar's army assaults the city for the third time, those who have repented will be spared

- They won't be spared from the attack or even from the captivity
- But they will be spared from the sword
- They will be permitted to go into captivity safely and while in captivity, the Lord will care for them
- Simply put, they may share in Ezekiel's fate rather than Zedekiah's fate
- Now take note of how generous the Lord's mercy is for Israel
 - If they repent at this late point, the Lord will not remember their past sins under the Old Covenant
 - That's quite some leniency
 - The people of this generation – like prior generations – were intensely wicked people
 - They engaged in sexual perversion, gross idolatry and even child sacrifice
 - And yet the Lord was willing to spare their lives overlooking the requirements of the Law simply because they heeded the prophet and repented
- Now once more, we're talking about matters in relationship to the Old Covenant, which are never matters of eternal salvation
 - No one receives eternal life by following the Law...the Bible is clear about that
 - So when the Lord calls for repentance, He means repenting of living in defiance to the Law
 - And when the Lord promises He will not remember their sins, He is speaking of their sins under the Law
 - Finally, when He promises the repentant sinner may live, He simply means they will be spared the penalty of the Law, which was physical death
- None of these things are speaking about eternal matters
 - This was not a call to repent so that they might escape judgment in eternity
 - He is not suggesting they can receive eternal life by abiding by the Law
 - Salvation eternally is only found by faith in the Messiah
 - In this case, the Lord is offering His people an escape from an earthly judgment coming because of their sins under the Old Covenant
- We get our confirmation of this interpretation in v.24, when the Lord says that the one who lives righteousness at first but then commits iniquity will not live
 - Clearly, that statement can only be true of someone living under the Old Covenant
 - The Old Covenant stood ready to condemn anyone living under it at any time
 - A man could live 80 years observing the Law yet if he ceased obeying the Law in 81st year, he would then suffer the penalty of the law and die
 - His first 80 years of obedience wouldn't exempt him from that penalty in his 81st year
 - No different than if we refrained from murder for 80 years but then committed

murder in our 81st year

- The law would still require the judge throw the book at us
- But that's not how the grace of the New Covenant works for those who are in that covenant by faith in Jesus
 - When we come to faith in Jesus, our sins are covered and paid for by the blood of Christ
 - That includes sins past, present and future
 - Simply put, you can't sin your way out of a covenant of grace
 - The Bible says that by your faith in Jesus you are forgiven and eternally a child of God
- So the Lord was promising a way to live for those in Israel who practiced idolatry under the Old Covenant
 - He would extend that mercy to anyone who repented, even to those who had committed many sins for many years
 - But for those who did not repent, the full penalty of the Law would come down on their heads...they would die in the invasion
 - The Babylonians would effectively serve as the Lord's judges and executioners to carry out the terms of the covenant against Israel
 - And this penalty would come even against those who had previously lived righteously but had become caught up in Israel's idolatry
- Nevertheless, the Lord was not bloodthirsty in bringing this judgment
 - Notice in v.23 the Lord asks rhetorically do I have any pleasure in seeing people dying, even the wicked?
 - No, the Lord says, He would rather see the wicked repent and live longer on earth
 - Of course, for those of us who know the Lord by His Spirit and word, this statement is not surprising
 - We stand amazed at the grace of God, at what He did to redeem us and set us free from sin and bring us into glory in eternity
 - But that makes it even more remarkable that God also cares about how long we live on the earth
 - He even cares about the length of life of the sinful unbeliever
 - He desires to see men and women living their lives as a testimony, a record of obedience
 - That's God's heart...that our lives might be a canvas on which He paints a story of His faithfulness to us and our obedience to Him
 - So He says He takes no pleasure in bringing judgment against the wicked
 - Nor does He enjoy ending life earlier than necessary in order to put an end to such wickedness

- Rather, the Lord takes pleasure in seeing the evil turn from their ways, and by that repentance, living a while longer on earth
- But one way or another, the Lord will make each person's life a testimony – either of obedience or judgment
- But He makes clear here which of those two roads He prefers
- That's remarkable insight into the heart of the Almighty God
 - That even though God is sovereign and brings all history to an appointed end... nonetheless our place in that plan still matters to Him
 - We are not just pawns on a chessboard that God moves around indiscriminately and dispassionately
 - Certainly, believers are those chosen of God, holy and beloved in Christ, and loved into eternity
- But even those in Israel who weren't believing were still precious to God such that He desired they might live in peace under His law
 - He asked them to obey His word, so they would have a blessing of a longer, more peaceful life
 - It could have been a win-win for them...obey and live longer
 - And maybe, by their obedience to the Law, the Lord would have led some to a saving faith in Messiah too
 - But most never heard this call or knew of God's mercy
 - They were too busy making excuses

Ezek. 18:25 “Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not right.’ Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?”

Ezek. 18:26 “When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and dies because of it, for his iniquity which he has committed he will die.

Ezek. 18:27 “Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life.

Ezek. 18:28 “Because he considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Ezek. 18:29 “But the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not right.’ Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right?”

- Despite the Lord's offer of mercy, the people continue to insist that the Lord is not dealing rightly with them
 - Yet it's complete hypocrisy and self-deception
 - The Lord calls them out plainly asking are not their ways the problem?
 - The Lord is actually acting righteously, holding His people accountable to the very covenant the nation agreed to keep

- So though they were disobeying the word of their covenant with the Lord, He was intent on keeping His word
- And in that word, the Lord promised to bring these penalties against the people for their sins
- But the Lord was going even beyond the terms of the covenant in that He was willing to spare their lives
 - The covenant called for the death of the one who set aside the Law of Moses
 - Still, the Lord was offering clemency
 - Without a doubt the Lord was dealing rightly with Israel, despite the people's claims to the contrary
- Unfortunately, this is human nature...to blame both the messenger and anyone who would hold us accountable
 - If we violate the law, we blame the policeman who tickets us and the judge who sentences us
 - The policeman was just the messenger...he or she was just delivering the news that we have violated the law
 - And the judge is simply carrying out the terms of the Law, holding us accountable as the law requires
 - Don't we feel anger or resentment toward them?
 - Like it's unjust, they haven't listened to our excuses
 - And yet, if we remain objective we must agree that they are not the problem...it was our unrighteousness that created the circumstance
 - And it's further unrighteousness to turn from the results they have determined for our consequences
- Still, it requires a godly and mature perspective to appreciate this truth and to live according to it
 - And Israel lacked that insight...they saw Ezekiel, God's messenger, as the problem
 - And they blamed God for being unfair when He promised to hold them accountable under the Law
 - But the Lord refutes their hypocrisy reminding them that He acts in perfect fairness and justice as He holds His people accountable
 - Look, if you're strategy for your own judgment moment boils down to debating with God over whether you were truly as bad as He says, let me encourage you to rethink that plan
 - You aren't going to twist the facts or put a pretty face on your behavior
 - And the Lord isn't going to entertain such hypocrisy
 - He will be shown to be the perfect judge that He is, and His judgments will stand apart from your protests
 - As Jesus says

Mark 4:22 “For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light.

- So the nation’s seventh excuse was completely bankrupt as have been all their excuses, so the Lord sums up His response at the end of the chapter

Ezek. 18:30 “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,” declares the Lord GOD. “Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you.

Ezek. 18:31 “Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel?

Ezek. 18:32 “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.”

- The nation of Israel had allowed their sin of idolatry to become a stumbling block to them
 - We usually think of a stumbling block as that thing that leads us *into* sin, and that is true
 - But the Bible also talks of sin itself being a stumbling block anytime our investment in sinful practices impedes our ability to repent
 - We can become so wedded to our lifestyle of sin or to a particular type of sin that putting it away becomes too great a loss
 - We are deceived by the sin into thinking that keeping it is somehow better for us than letting it go
 - That was Israel’s problem...they were so invested in their idolatry and sexual perversions that they couldn’t see a way out
 - They couldn’t imagine a life without such things
 - And in that way their iniquity became a stumbling block
 - It was as if they heard the call of God to repent and even desired to save their lives from the impending judgement
 - Yet as their hearts contemplated moving in that direction, they came up against the reality of walking away from the life they knew, and it was too much to ask
 - They stumbled over their sin, and so they remained in it
- The writer of Hebrews describes a similar concern for the believer who indulges their sin too long

Heb. 3:12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

Heb. 3:13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called

“Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

- As the writer appeals to believers in the church, he draws upon the experiences of the unbelieving generation of Israel that left Egypt
 - Though they had been exposed to great signs and wonders during the Exodus, nevertheless their hearts remained unchanged
 - They were an unbelieving generation, the writer says elsewhere
- And they remained in that state because they had been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, specifically of the sin of apostasy
 - As we pursue sin over time, we learn to live in rebellion against God – which is apostasy
 - And as we become comfortable with apostasy, we become deceived into thinking we can get away with this
 - Things have worked out to our advantage so far, or so we suppose
 - We aren’t thinking about our judgment or the consequences of our behavior...we’re just lost in our moment of sin, enjoying the fruit of it
- That’s what it means to be deceived by sin: to think that there is nothing at risk, nothing to worry about, nothing to gain by repentance
 - And that attitude will harden the heart
 - A hard heart is not receptive to God’s offer of mercy
 - It has no interest in mercy because it doesn’t sense jeopardy
- Soft hearts, on the other hand, are hearts that can sympathize with God’s own sorrow over our rebellion
 - A soft heart hears the counsel of the Spirit, responds to conviction in a healthy way
 - And in the end, desires to return to God much like the prodigal son turned back and went home
 - Remember, in that parable the son eventually returns because he remembers that his father is a kind man who treats even his servants well
- That’s the heart God desires in His children, so that even when we wander away for a time we might be won back by His love
 - So that as the Lord says in v.32, I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies
 - He would rather see us repent and live
 - For Israel, He called for repentance under the Law so they might live a longer life
 - And ultimately, to everyone, God calls for repentance from dead works and turning to Christ in faith so that we might live eternally
- Finally, we’re now ready to begin Israel’s 8th excuse, the final attempt to remain skeptical of Ezekiel’s prophecies
 - And appropriately enough, the people chose to place their hope for salvation in the very men who had brought them into this situation in the first place: their kings

- Since the division of Israel following Solomon, the southern half of Judah had swung back and forth between good kings and bad kings
- Good kings typically required Israel to follow the Law and did not tolerate idolatry
- These kings became a blessing to the land and the people
- But increasingly, the people were ruled by evil men who encouraged idolatry and all the sinful practices that accompanied idols
 - These men were largely responsible for the downfall of the people and the judgment that was not coming to rest upon them
 - These men killed the prophets sent to them to warn them of God's displeasure in them
 - And yet the people continued to embrace each one and follow after his wicked ways
- Yet even as they were now sitting in exile as a result of what these evil leaders had done, the people were still expecting God to raise up a new king to save them
 - And so this became their final excuse to ignore Ezekiel...they said that they need not fear Babylon because a king would save them
 - Somehow, a new king would come to the throne, in the line of David, who could vanquish the Babylonian army
 - It was fantasy, of course, and it just reflects how self-deceived the people had become
 - Since after two attacks already, it should have been obvious to everyone that no king could resurrect the glory of Israel under these circumstances
- So the Lord responds through Ezekiel once more to set aside this excuse
 - And in this chapter, the Lord takes a unique approach with His answer: He sends Israel a lamentation for their kings
 - A lamentation is a form of poetry written as historical commentary over some tragedy or disaster
 - We have a book of the Bible written by Jeremiah called Lamentations, which records the third and final attack of Babylon on Jerusalem
 - That entire book laments what Ezekiel is prophesying about here: the coming destruction of the city
 - But in this one chapter of Ezekiel, we have a mini lamentation over the downfall of the dynasty of David in Israel; the end of kings ruling
 - The prophecy has two parts...the first part uses allegory of a lioness and her cubs while the second part uses an allegory of a vine

Ezek. 19:1 “As for you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel

Ezek. 19:2 and say,

‘What was your mother?

A lioness among lions!

**She lay down among young lions,
She reared her cubs.**

Ezek. 19:3 'When she brought up one of her cubs,
He became a lion,
And he learned to tear his prey;
He devoured men.

Ezek. 19:4 'Then nations heard about him;
He was captured in their pit,
And they brought him with hooks
To the land of Egypt.

Ezek. 19:5 'When she saw, as she waited,
That her hope was lost,
She took another of her cubs
And made him a young lion.

Ezek. 19:6 'And he walked about among the lions;
He became a young lion,
He learned to tear his prey;
He devoured men.

Ezek. 19:7 'He destroyed their fortified towers
And laid waste their cities;
And the land and its fullness were appalled
Because of the sound of his roaring.

Ezek. 19:8 'Then nations set against him
On every side from their provinces,
And they spread their net over him;
He was captured in their pit.

Ezek. 19:9 'They put him in a cage with hooks
And brought him to the king of Babylon;
They brought him in hunting nets
So that his voice would be heard no more
On the mountains of Israel.

- This is part 1, and the allegory centers around a lioness and her cubs
 - Now before we go very far in interpreting the allegory, we have one obvious detail to work from right from the start
 - When working in the context of Israel, the symbolism of a lion in scripture is very clear
 - It represents the Davidic line of rulers that come out of Judah
 - In fact the lion of Judah is a term that refers to the coming Messianic ruler of Israel, born in the line of David
 - So an allegory about lions points in the direction of the Davidic line of kings in Israel

- And the details of the allegory match that context well
- Notice the lamentation is addressed to the “princes” of Israel, and prince is another term in the Bible for a king or leader of people
- Which is further confirmation that the allegory is speaking about the kings of Judah
- So this lamentation is directed to any man within Israel during Ezekiel’s day who thought he might assume the throne of David
- In v.2 the allegory begins asking such a man, what was your mother?
 - Or we could say, where do the kings of Israel come from?
 - And the answer is they are cubs of a lioness
 - The former kings of Israel were like a lioness that produced cubs
 - So each generation of king would have sons, naturally, and in time these sons would become king in their day
 - So the allegory describes each king raising up the next generation of kings
- Then in v.3 we learn that in a particular day, a certain king (i.e., lion cub) came to power and took control of the kingdom
 - He learned to tear his prey apart
 - A lion doesn’t typically tear its prey apart
 - It eats it, of course, but the lamentation is describing something different
 - This is describing the lion tearing its prey to pieces with great savagery and senselessness
 - Moreover, the lion started devouring men
 - As this king went about his tirade of rule, we’re told in v.4 that another nation heard of his antics and took advantage of the turmoil in Israel
 - This foreign power, Egypt, captured him in a pit and brought back in chains
 - These events describe the reign of King Jehoahaz, which you can read about in 2 Kings 23:31

2Kings 23:31 Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem; and his mother’s name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.

2Kings 23:32 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.

2Kings 23:33 Pharaoh Neco imprisoned him at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and he imposed on the land a fine of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold.

2Kings 23:34 Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the place of Josiah his father, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But he took Jehoahaz away and brought him to Egypt, and he died there.

- After Jehoahaz was imprisoned in Egypt, the Judean people held out some hope that their king would be returned
 - Despite his tyranny, the people still wanted him back on the throne
 - Yet he never returned, which serves as a lesson to the people in Ezekiel's day that they ought not wish for the Lord to reinstate an evil king
 - Given Jehoahaz' experience, history says He isn't likely to do it
- Then in v.5, the allegory goes on to describe the mother lioness, meaning the line of David, raising up another cub to fill the place on the throne
 - We hear him mentioned in 2 Kings 31 also; the man Jehoiachin
 - Jehoiachin was the grandson of the last good king of Judah, Josiah and he was the next cub to occupy the throne
 - Technically, there was another king that came between Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin, the man mentioned in 2 Kings 31; Jehoiakim
 - That king is skipped in this story because he too only lasted 3 months and this story is focused on the end not the middle
 - So in vs.6-9 we hear that this second "cub" was just as bad as the prior king (no surprise there)
 - He came to power after the Babylonians had already conquered Judah once, and as he did, he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar
 - He destroyed the fortifications that Babylon constructed in the land
 - And he rampaged over his own people raping the land and the cities of wealth
 - Naturally, this appalled Babylon, which conquered Judah again and hauled off Jehoiachin back to Babylon
 - Notice at the end of v.9, the lamentation comments that the sound of the lion cub's voice would no longer be heard in the land
 - This wasn't just a comment about Jehoiachin
 - It was a commentary on the immediate future of the Davidic line
 - The Babylonian captivity put an end to the line of David ruling in Israel for a time
- Which brings us to the second part of the chapter's allegory: the vine

Ezek. 19:10 'Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard,
 Planted by the waters;
 It was fruitful and full of branches
 Because of abundant waters.

Ezek. 19:11 'And it had strong branches fit for scepters of rulers,
 And its height was raised above the clouds
 So that it was seen in its height with the mass of its branches.

Ezek. 19:12 'But it was plucked up in fury;

**It was cast down to the ground;
And the east wind dried up its fruit.
Its strong branch was torn off
So that it withered;
The fire consumed it.**

**Ezek. 19:13 ‘And now it is planted in the wilderness,
In a dry and thirsty land.**

**Ezek. 19:14 ‘And fire has gone out from its branch;
It has consumed its shoots and fruit,
So that there is not in it a strong branch,
A scepter to rule.’”**

This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.

- The subject of this lamentation hasn’t changed, though the imagery does
 - Now we’re looking at a vine, which is a classic bridal picture of Israel
 - So speaking of the nation as a whole, the lamentation says in v10 that the nation was planted in a fruitful place by God
 - And it had “strong” branches to uphold the scepters of its rulers
 - In other words, the Davidic line of kings were a strong and majestic jewel in the crown of Israel
 - The nation and its rulers prospered in the land because they obeyed the Lord and He blessed that obedience
 - At the height of its glory, the nation had such strong branches that it “rose above the clouds” in v.11
 - It’s height was seen from everywhere, speaking of the days of David and particularly Solomon when Israel was the power of the world
 - But in a certain day, the vine was uprooted from the land in a fury, according to v.12
 - The reign of kings was cast to the ground and torn off, and fire consumed it
 - This is picturing the end of the line of kings ruling in Judah when Babylon brought an end to the city and to any king reigning in the land
 - As Ezekiel speaks this prophecy to Israel, these events had not yet come to pass
 - So at v.10 and beyond, the lamentation become a prophecy
 - Notice in v.14 it ends saying this is a lamentation and has become a lamentation
 - That two part statement refers to the way this poetry is half history, half prophecy
 - And the second part of prophecy is describing Zedekiah’s end, when he was captured in the third and final invasion
 - He is hauled back to Babylon with the remaining Jews, resulting in the vine being uprooted

- The point of the lamentation is pretty clear: the exiles in Babylon were only fooling themselves if they believed that the Davidic line was going to rescue them
 - The final king of their age was already on the throne, Zedekiah
 - And the lamentation predicted he would end up in Babylon with them
 - And after him there would be no scepter in the land of Israel
 - And therefore, there was no chance of a future king rescuing them from Ezekiel's prophecies
 - Reading from Thomas Constable's commentary

It is appropriate that this last section in the part of the book that consists of Yahweh's reply to the invalid hopes of the Israelites (chs. 12—19) should be a lament. Judah's doom was certain, so a funeral dirge was fitting. All the exiles could do was mourn the divine judgment on their nation that was to reach its climax very soon.

Not until Jesus Christ returns to the earth to reign will a strong branch and the ruler's scepter arise in the line of David again.

- We have just one section of prophecy remaining regarding Jerusalem's fall
 - It consists of the next four chapters
 - It consists of a review of Israel's rebellious history, including the history of its leaders
 - And it includes some graphic descriptions of the nation's perversions and sins under these leaders
 - It uses colorful parables and allegories
 - And it ends with one of the most bizarre series of events in all scripture

- Tonight we transition into a new section of Ezekiel's book, so it's appropriate to begin with a review of the structure of the book
 - We can divide the book into two halves
 - Chapters 1-23 are four long prophecies dealing with the coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem
 - These prophecies are all doom and gloom, for the most part, because they deal with a very serious judgment
 - The section we start tonight in Chapters 20-23 is the fourth and final set of prophecies concerning that destruction
 - Then in Chapter 24 until the end of the book in Chapter 48, we begin the second half of the book
 - The second half of the book consists of 10 prophecies related to the end times and to the coming Kingdom promised to Israel
 - Obviously, you can tell from that topic that the second half of the book is considerably more upbeat
 - More importantly for us, it's the part of Ezekiel that is still future state
 - And for that reason alone, it's really the most fascinating part of the book
 - It includes a look at how God handles Israel's historical enemies in the Kingdom and the future blessings for the nation
 - It especially emphasizes the return of Israel to the land and the return of God's glory to a temple during this period
 - Finally, we get a tour of some of the land featured in the Kingdom
- That's what we have to look forward to in our study of Ezekiel, but first we need to finish the first half of the book in Chapters 20-23
 - So tonight we move into Chapter 20 to begin the final prophecy concerning Jerusalem
 - This section offers additional clarification for why the Lord brings this destruction against Israel
 - And it begins with a history lesson of sorts, centered on Israel's evil tendencies and the Lord's righteous response
 - The story centers on the wilderness experience of Israel
 - And it draws a comparison to what the people will soon experience in Babylon
 - But we also find a couple of interesting sub themes
 - First, there is a section anticipating the coming Tribulation on earth for Israel
 - And a promise to bring Israel into the Kingdom that follows immediately afterward
- So let's begin by briefly setting the scene

Ezek. 20:1 Now in the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth of the month,

certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the LORD, and sat before me.

Ezek. 20:2 And the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 20:3 “Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Do you come to inquire of Me? As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “I will not be inquired of by you.”’

- As I taught on the very first lesson in Ezekiel, the prophet is known for the precise dating of his prophecies
 - These dates are critical in Ezekiel’s case, because they prove that He was a trustworthy prophet
 - He speaks about events that were both very near term and very far in the future
 - Therefore, he dates his prophecies precisely to ensure that as the near term events come to pass exactly as predicted, his prophecies will be validated
 - And as the near term prophecies are validated, we will have good reason to trust his long term predictions too
 - In the case of this fourth prophecy, Ezekiel dates his revelation to the summer of 591 BC, which was the seventh year of Zedekiah’s reign
 - The man reigned for a total of 11 years, so there are still a few years before the city is destroyed
 - It’s been eleven months since Ezekiel received his third prophecy, which we began back in Chapter 8
 - And like that third prophecy, Ezekiel’s fourth prophecy comes as a result of an inquisition of the elders of Israel
 - You may remember that as Israel sat in exile in Babylon, the people remain segregated from the Babylonians
 - They lived in a settlement that they named Tel Aviv
 - They maintained for the most part their lifestyle, including establishing new leaders or elders who ruled the Jewish people
- Periodically, these elders have come to meet with Ezekiel to complain about his prophecies and dispute his predictions
 - Here we see them doing that again
 - In v.1 certain elders of Israel came to *inquire* of the Lord, the text says
 - That makes these men sound very sincere, as if they were just seeking clarity or explanation
 - But the Lord’s response tells us that they did not come with honest intentions
 - The Lord tells Ezekiel in vs.2-3 to tell these men they have no right to inquire of Him
 - And based on the context and wording of those verses, it’s evident that the Lord is saying that the elders ought not judge Him
 - They have made judgments about God concluding that His ways were wrong or

that His plans were evil

- So in that sense they were inquiring of the Lord
- So in v.4 and onward, the Lord tells Ezekiel how to respond to the elders' presumptuous judgment, reminding them of their own history

Ezek. 20:4 “Will you judge them, will you judge them, son of man? Make them know the abominations of their fathers;

Ezek. 20:5 and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “On the day when I chose Israel and swore to the descendants of the house of Jacob and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, when I swore to them, saying, I am the LORD your God,

Ezek. 20:6 on that day I swore to them, to bring them out from the land of Egypt into a land that I had selected for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands.

Ezek. 20:7 “I said to them, ‘Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.’

Ezek. 20:8 “But they rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.

Ezek. 20:9 “But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made Myself known to them by bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

Ezek. 20:10 “So I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.

Ezek. 20:11 “I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live.

Ezek. 20:12 “Also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.

Ezek. 20:13 “But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes and they rejected My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; and My sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to annihilate them.

Ezek. 20:14 “But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, before whose sight I had brought them out.

Ezek. 20:15 “Also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands,

Ezek. 20:16 because they rejected My ordinances, and as for My statutes, they did not walk in them; they even profaned My sabbaths, for their heart continually went after their idols.

Ezek. 20:17 “Yet My eye spared them rather than destroying them, and I did not cause their annihilation in the wilderness.

- The Lord’s response is a story of the history of the abominations of the fathers
 - So in other words, the Lord will vindicate Himself before His people by reminding them how they got here
 - And that story begins with how their prior generations of leaders systematically weakened the people of God
 - And that story begins in a very familiar place: the story of the Exodus
 - But we get some interesting details about that story that you don’t find in Exodus
 - First, the Lord briefly recaps how He established Israel and brought them down to Egypt
 - How He kept His promise to bring them back to a good land
 - But then Israel’s leaders caused the people to rebel
 - So He responded by barring that first generation from entering the Promised Land
 - Nevertheless, that punishment didn’t bring Israel to an end
 - They continued on in a new generation
- We all know that story well (or at least we saw the movie with Charlton Heston) but let’s take a second look at a few key details
 - First, notice how the Lord reminds them He initiated the relationship
 - He chose Israel, they didn’t choose Him
 - And God extended promises to Israel giving opportunity for them to receive blessing in that relationship
 - So God has dealt graciously with Israel from the start
 - Secondly, the Lord did these things as a matter of His word
 - Notice in v.5, again in v.6 and again in v.15 that the Lord says He swore to Israel
 - That repetition emphasizes that the Lord’s decrees were certain and sure, as trustworthy as the word of the Lord
 - No one can indict the Lord’s faithfulness to do as He says
 - In fact, He swore to bring them blessings but to also bring judgment for their offenses against Him
 - Still, the Lord didn’t override His promises of blessing
 - In the end God preserved His people against annihilation in that judgment, therefore God was faithful to His word
- Thirdly, Israel has done nothing but rebel against the Lord’s care and instruction
 - And the Lord says that rebellion began even while they were in Egypt

- Notice in vs.6-8 the Lord recounts how He warned the people not to chase after Egyptian gods while they were staying in that land
- He's referring to the time they spent under Joseph while living as free people in Goshen
- During that time, they were warned by God not to be tempted into idol worship
- But notice in v.8 the Lord says they would not listen to the word of the Lord
 - They didn't forsake Egypt's idols
 - So the Lord poured out His wrath on the people of Israel while they were still in Egypt
- Now if we go back to the Exodus story, we don't find a specific mention of God judging His people for idolatry while in Egypt
 - Or do we?

Ex. 1:6 Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation.

Ex. 1:7 But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.

Ex. 1:8 Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

Ex. 1:9 He said to his people, "Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we.

Ex. 1:10 "Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land."

Ex. 1:11 So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses.

- Israel prospered for years in Egypt under Joseph
 - But when Joseph died, a new Pharaoh arose who became jealous of the power of the Jewish people
 - So he enslaved them, which began their time in captivity in Egypt
- So what we're learning now from Ezekiel is that this enslavement was not merely the result of changing political winds in Egypt
 - In fact, the Lord testifies here in Ezekiel that He was at work behind the scenes bringing His people into slavery
 - And why did the Lord inflict slavery on His people?
 - First, as an outpouring of His wrath against their sin of idolatry in direct defiance of His word which He gave them
 - But secondly, Israel's captivity had the effect of isolating them from the rest of the Egyptians, causing them to turn away from idolatry
 - So captivity served both as a punishment and as a corrective action to stop Israel from chasing after false gods

- Which leads us to the final point of observation: in v.9 the Lord says He took this action for the sake of His name among the nations
 - The Lord said He made Himself known to the world through His relationship with Israel
 - The nations of the world came to know of God by observing what He said to Israel and how He dealt with His people
- So when Israel turned its back on the living God after He had graciously revealed Himself to them and blessed them, God had to act
 - He couldn't let idolatry stand unchallenged, for not only would it destroy His people through whom He intended to bring Messiah
 - But it also profaned the name and reputation of God before the other nations who observed this idolatry
 - What would that say about God to the nations watching if He stood by and did nothing to stop Israel's disobedience?
 - What do you conclude about a parent who stands idly by while his or her toddler destroys things in a department store?
- So now we have the pattern for this history lesson
 - First, the Lord extends His grace to Israel
 - He established His people out of nothing, out of a man and woman who were barren
 - Then He makes covenants with His people, extending promises of great blessing
 - The Lord initiates and sets the terms of every human relationship
 - Secondly, He gives His people His word, which includes warnings against them going after other gods
 - Idolatry is always the Lord's preeminent concern for His people
 - Because the very purpose for Israel's existence was that they might testify to Who is the Lord
 - Notice at the end of v.7 the Lord says I am the Lord your God, to emphasize that this is His first concern in this relationship
 - But if Israel were allowed to go after other gods, then they would cease being Israel
 - They would become like all other pagan nations...Israel's relationship with Yahweh was their defining characteristic
 - And if Israel disappeared from among the nations, then the Messiah could not come through them as promised
 - And if the Seed didn't come through Abraham's line, then God would be shown to be unfaithful to His word
 - So God's chief concern for His people – His very first command to them – was that they not chase after false gods
- Which leads to point 3: if they rebelled and went after false gods, then He would take

harsh action against them

- The Lord's response would be to set them outside the land for a time
 - Specifically, they would see a penalty outside the land to the 3rd and fourth generations
 - Not only would the current generation find itself outside the blessings God extended to His people
 - But their offspring would also be outside the land
- Then fourthly, this penalty would always accomplish two things: bringing wrath against sin and purging idolatry from the people
 - Each time the nation sinned in idolatry, the Lord would set them outside the land for a time
 - The expelling of God's people always involved an outpouring of wrath such that many Jews died
 - But a remnant survived and it eventually returned to the land free of idolatry – at least for a time
 - So that the cycle is complete...what started with God extending His grace to His people ends with more of the same
 - In mercy the Lord brings His people back after having removed the cancer of idolatry
- Finally, the Lord does these things for the sake of His name, which means He must act in these ways
 - Therefore He cannot be persuaded otherwise
 - The exiles in Babylon should be assured that this pattern would repeat itself in their day just as it happened in prior generations
 - They could not reason nor argue their way out of what was coming
- So that's the pattern, and the Lord has already given one example in the experience of Israel in Egypt
 - But now He gives us a second example of this same pattern

Ezek. 20:18 “I said to their children in the wilderness, ‘Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers or keep their ordinances or defile yourselves with their idols.

Ezek. 20:19 ‘I am the LORD your God; walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and observe them.

Ezek. 20:20 ‘Sanctify My sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.’

Ezek. 20:21 “But the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to observe My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; they profaned My sabbaths. So I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness.

Ezek. 20:22 “But I withdrew My hand and acted for the sake of My name, that it

should not be profaned in the sight of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out.

- In v.18 the Lord mentions the children in the wilderness
 - That may lead you to think of the second generation of Israel that wandered in the desert, the generation of Joshua and Caleb
- But actually, this refers to the generation of Israel that left Egypt and rebelled in the desert
 - They were the children of those who first rebelled while in Goshen in Egypt
 - So when you read the Exodus story and hear about the rebellion of the children of Israel, remember that their fathers did the same
- And so here we have the same pattern, beginning with the Lord extending His grace to Israel
 - Despite their father's engaging in idolatry while in Egypt, nevertheless the Lord was faithful to bring Israel out of Egypt
 - And He gave them His word again in v.18 warning against idolatry
- And in this case, He goes a step further establishing another covenant with Israel, the Mosaic Covenant
 - In that covenant, the Lord established a sign, the Sabbath day, so that the people might remember they were in covenant with the Living God
 - That covenant gave the nation specific laws and statutes so they could know explicitly how to obey the Lord
 - Their forefathers lacked this specific set of instructions, though they did know not to follow after false gods
 - Still, this was another indication of the Lord's grace for Israel that He gave them His law to follow
 - But the patterns continues, so we move to step 3 and the children of Israel rebelled also
 - In Exodus and Numbers you'll find a total of ten times that Israel tested the Lord by rebelling against Him while in the wilderness
 - After the tenth time, the Lord's patience was done, and He said He would bring wrath against Israel for idolatry
 - Moses interceded for his people
 - So rather than destroy Israel in the wilderness, the Lord said He acted for the sake of His name by refraining
- Instead, the Lord set a longer plan in motion

Ezek. 20:23 “Also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them among the lands,

Ezek. 20:24 because they had not observed My ordinances, but had rejected My statutes and had profaned My sabbaths, and their eyes were on the idols of their fathers.

Ezek. 20:25 “I also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live;

Ezek. 20:26 and I pronounced them unclean because of their gifts, in that they caused all their firstborn to pass through the fire so that I might make them desolate, in order that they might know that I am the LORD.”

- Step 4, the Lord determines to judge His people
 - We know from Exodus the Lord barred this generation from entering the Promised Land
 - After the rebels died in the wilderness, then God’s wrath was spent and restoration could begin
- But that judgment continued on for generations to come
 - He says He gave Israel statutes that were not good
 - In other words, the Lord allowed Israel to fall prey to the world’s statutes as they engaged in pagan idolatry
 - Just as the Lord allowed a Pharaoh to imprison His people in Egypt, so the Lord used the Canaanites to discipline His people
- Their statutes were not good and did not allow Israel to live, He says, in contrast to God’s law which would have made Israel to prosper
 - Among the pagans practices Israel adopted was child sacrifice and sorcery
 - Practices like these caused death, not life
 - So the Lord allowed the worst of these cultures to come upon Israel as a measure of discipline against them
- So here’s the pattern again: God’s grace, His revelation, Israel’s disobedience, God’s judgment, and God’s restoration...all for the sake of the name of the Lord
 - Israel has already experienced two circumstances where the nation went through this entire pattern from start to finish
 - But because those prior experiences didn’t purge idolatry from the people, they must experience the pattern a third time
 - And now Ezekiel and the exiles were in the middle of that pattern, experiencing judgment for the third time
 - And they were questioning God over why things must be
 - But the Lord points the elders to the history of these prior two examples of this pattern
 - They should have clearly seen the parallels to their own generation as they repeated their fathers’ sin of idolatry

- They should have recognized the pattern for themselves, because it was plain as day
 - And they certainly should have appreciated how their own sin contributed to their situation
 - So the elders had no reason to inquire of God or challenge Him
- But the judgment for this third turn of the wheel would be much more severe
 - And it was lasting much longer than the previous two occasions
 - It started even before the nation entered into the land under Joshua
 - And it was continuing now with the Babylonian captivity
- But eventually it must come to its end and lead to restoration in the land
 - So where is step 5 in this pattern for our Babylonian exiles? When do they experience restoration and a return of God's grace?
 - We might assume that their restoration occurred when the exiles were allowed to return to Israel after 70 years in Babylon
 - And certainly, that return was a kind of restoration
 - But it was not the full and complete restoration to finish the pattern
 - In fact, we're still waiting for the end of this third pattern today, for Israel's complete restoration from judgment
 - How do we know that her restoration has not yet come?
 - How do we know that the return of the exiles or even the return of Jews in 1948 isn't that restoration?
- First, Israel's presence in her land has waxed and waned over the centuries and millennia since Ezekiel's prophecies
 - But these partial and temporary occupations of the land don't qualify as the restoration required by our pattern
 - Remember, this third cycle must mirror the details of the prior two examples to fit the pattern that God outlined in this chapter
 - And in the earlier examples, Israel has always seen two things accompany their full restoration from judgment during this cycle
 - First, they were always restored as a complete people, as a whole nation with no one missing
 - Remnants didn't return; only the entire nation returned
 - For example, in the first example the entire nation that left Egypt entered into the wilderness together...no one stayed in Egypt
 - And the generation that left the wilderness all entered into the Promised Land together (to include the tribes that chose to settle on the east side of the Jordan)
 - No one remained wandering in the desert
 - So full restoration depends on all Israel being restored together

- Secondly, the people of Israel were always accompanied by the glory of the Lord, Who tabernacled among the people
 - For example, when the generation that departed Egypt and entered the wilderness were accompanied by the glory of the Lord as a pillar of fire and cloud
 - And the generation of Israel that left the wilderness and entered the Promised Land was accompanied by the glory of the Lord in the tabernacle
 - So full restoration must include the glory of the Lord dwelling among His people Israel
- So where does Israel stand on these two measures for our third turn of the wheel of judgment?
 - First, the whole of Israel has yet to return to her land
 - When the exiles returned from Babylon, only a small remnant accompanied Zerubbabel and Ezra to the land
 - And over the centuries that followed, a majority of Jews have remained outside the land
 - Even today as the modern state of Israel has re-emerged on the world scene, only about half of all living Jews live in the land
 - So even after 2,500 years, we're still waiting for the full restoration of Israel that's required
 - That gives us a sense of how long this judgment was intended to last
 - Secondly, the glory of the Lord has never returned to dwell among His people Israel
 - The glory of the Lord first departed from the temple shortly before the Babylonians conquered the city
 - That departure was a sign to the people that the judgment was coming, as Ezekiel explained
 - Following the exiles return to the land, the glory of the Lord never resided in Zerubbabel's temple nor even in Herod's temple
 - Nor has it ever appeared in Israel since
 - And until it returns, full restoration hasn't happened and the third turn of this pattern is still underway
- So when does this final example of the pattern come to a complete end?
 - Daniel, who was a contemporary of Ezekiel, told Israel that this judgment would last many, many generations
 - In fact, Daniel said it wouldn't complete until the Messiah came to set up His Kingdom on earth
 - So the restoration that will finish this third cycle is the ultimate restoration of Israel in the Kingdom
 - So while the first two examples lasted only 3-4 generations, the third example is lasting thousands of years

- And just as the judgment began with far greater devastation as the Babylonian army conquers Judah three times...
- So will it also end in a far more dramatic fashion as well...

Ezek. 20:27 “Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed Me by acting treacherously against Me.

Ezek. 20:28 “When I had brought them into the land which I swore to give to them, then they saw every high hill and every leafy tree, and they offered there their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering. There also they made their soothing aroma and there they poured out their drink offerings.

Ezek. 20:29 “Then I said to them, ‘What is the high place to which you go?’ So its name is called Bamah to this day.”

Ezek. 20:30 “Therefore, say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and play the harlot after their detestable things?

Ezek. 20:31 “When you offer your gifts, when you cause your sons to pass through the fire, you are defiling yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “I will not be inquired of by you.

Ezek. 20:32 “What comes into your mind will not come about, when you say: ‘We will be like the nations, like the tribes of the lands, serving wood and stone.’

Ezek. 20:33 “As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you.

Ezek. 20:34 “I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out;

Ezek. 20:35 and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face.

Ezek. 20:36 “As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 20:37 “I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant;

Ezek. 20:38 and I will purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the LORD.

- Now Ezekiel reveals how the story ends for our third example
 - And the Lord begins by reminding the exiles how their forefathers also began by receiving the Lord’s grace

- He brought them into the land and gave them the best of it
- But as they looked around, all they saw were high places to begin building altars to false gods
- They commenced worshipping the Canaanite gods, offering sacrifices and offerings on these high places
- The Lord says He confronted the people through the prophets, accusing them of worshipping at Bamah in v.29
 - The Lord is making a pun to mock the people
 - The word Bamah means high place but it also means literally “go where”
 - So as the people said to themselves let’s go worship at Bamah, the Lord was asking where are you going?
 - The answer was they were going nowhere...nowhere of any spiritual meaning or value
- In vs.30-31 He reminds them of their worst behaviors, including child sacrifice
 - And then He says He will not be inquired or found by Israel’s efforts to seek Him in idolatry
 - Instead, He will find them in His own way
 - And that turn toward restoration begins in v.32
- There will come a day in the future when Israel’s mind will no longer desire to be like all the other nations
 - That was the heart of their problem
 - They desired to follow after what they saw around them in the world rather than be guided by God’s word
 - They wanted kings, not a theocracy
 - They wanted high places dotting the landscape, not one meager tabernacle in the desert
 - They desired to worship the idols of the nations around them because they liked the way idol worship was done
 - Musical merriment, decadent feasts, dangerous rituals, and sexual orgies were a lot more exciting than prayer and sacrifice in a temple
 - But in a future day, they won’t have those desires anymore the Lord says
 - And paradoxically, the nation’s final restoration will begin with a period of great wrath
 - In v.34 the Lord promises to regather the nation into her land
 - This is the restoration we’re waiting for, a complete gathering of all Jews worldwide
 - Once again, it’s not a partial gathering...this prophecy will only be true once all Israel is present in the land
 - Certainly, we could say that regathering has begun

- But it's still ongoing so we're fast approaching the end of these things
- After 2,500 years, we're now seeing these things beginning to come to pass
- But this regathering is initially for a period of judgment to complete the process of purging Israel of rebellion and idolatry
 - They are gathered by the mighty arm of God but with wrath poured out, He says in v.34
 - And once they have entered back into their land, the Lord will enter into the final judgment for His people "face to face"
 - That phrase indicates a very personal reckoning, a dispute that is between Israel and God, which refers to the their violations of the covenant
 - In fact, in vs.36-37 the Lord says this is a personal accounting similar to what the prior generation in the desert faced
 - Here's further evidence that what's coming in this worldwide gathering is part of the earlier pattern
 - It will be like God gathering His people in the wilderness for judgment
 - In the case of the wilderness wanderings, the Lord poured out judgment in the form of a 40-year sentence of death for that generation
 - But the result of that judgment was that a new generation would enter the Promised Land
 - Well, in a similar sense, that's what God intends to do again in this future judgment
 - He promises to enter into judgment with a regathered Israel for the purpose of bringing them back into the bond of the covenant (v.37)
 - That covenant is the covenant of Law, the Old Covenant, which is the agreement that brought about the judgment in the first place
 - Because Israel violated that covenant, they are now suffering judgment
 - Yet because of this encounter in the wilderness, they will return to obedience
- How will this happen? The same way it happened before according to the pattern
 - In past examples, the rebels perished and a restored generation moved ahead without idols
 - Similarly, the Lord says in v.38 that He will purge the rebels, those who are idolators and those who disobey the covenant of Law
 - He will bring them out of their land where they reside today, but they will not enter into the land of Israel
 - Take note of that detail...remember, we said that a true restoration according to the pattern must mean that all Israel is in their land
 - But the Lord says no rebels will be allowed into the land
 - So how can we have all Israel in the land for a restoration if rebels aren't allowed to enter?
 - Once again, the answer is found in the pattern: the rebels always perish outside

- And in this case, the rebels of Israel are removed from the lands where they are scattered but they cease to exist since they don't go into the Kingdom
 - Thus, the Lord says, Israel will know that I am the Lord
 - When all Israel is in the land and no rebels exist among Israel, then we can truly say that Israel will know the Lord
 - That will be the outcome of this final pattern of judgment and restoration
- Finally, we end with a scene of that coming restoration...a taste of what we will learn much more about in coming chapters

Ezek. 20:39 “As for you, O house of Israel,” thus says the Lord GOD, “Go, serve everyone his idols; but later you will surely listen to Me, and My holy name you will profane no longer with your gifts and with your idols.

Ezek. 20:40 “For on My holy mountain, on the high mountain of Israel,” declares the Lord GOD, “there the whole house of Israel, all of them, will serve Me in the land; there I will accept them and there I will seek your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy things.

Ezek. 20:41 “As a soothing aroma I will accept you when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered; and I will prove Myself holy among you in the sight of the nations.

Ezek. 20:42 “And you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers.

Ezek. 20:43 “There you will remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done.

Ezek. 20:44 “Then you will know that I am the LORD when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your evil ways or according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel,” declares the Lord GOD.”

- Dismissively, the Lord says O Israel go serve your idols for now because it won't last forever
 - In that time of future restoration when all Israel enters the Kingdom free of rebels and idolators, they will no longer give idols gifts
 - Never again will the nation profane the land in that way
 - Instead, in the Kingdom that is coming for Israel, a high mountain will dominate the landscape of the land
 - No more high places dotted with false altars...just one giant mountain with the temple of God on top
 - And in that day, the whole house of Israel – every man, woman and child – will worship the true God in one voice
 - They will all serve the Lord and will devote all the best they have to Him in thanks

- An Israel gathered and worshipping in this way, in the land they were promised in the sight of other nations, will be for the sake of the Lord's name
- Remember, in past generations Israel behavior put the Lord's name to shame before other nations
- But in the Kingdom, their unified worship and the fulfillment of all that God has promised will testify to the glory of the Lord's name
- But interestingly, the Lord adds that the people of Israel will have a lasting memory of how they disobeyed and dishonored the Lord in prior generations
 - They will loathe themselves in their own sight He says
 - The phrase indicates that memories of some kind persist into eternity to help give us perspective and appreciation of God's grace
 - And this makes sense, for how much more would the Kingdom Israel praise the Lord for His mercy and grace and love knowing their past history
 - But for the same reason, they loathe their past
- Notice the final verse, v.44, the Lord adds that the people of Israel will finally know He is the Lord
 - The judgment that began in the wilderness, continues into the Babylonian captivity, and peaks in a coming time of intense judgment, has a good outcome
 - It causes Israel to come to saving faith and a recognition of the Lord's goodness and grace, that He didn't deal with them according to their evil ways
 - Oh that He would do the same for all of us

- Ralph Waldo Emerson once said:

We are a puny and fickle folk. Avarice, hesitation, and following are our diseases.

- The Israel of Ezekiel's day certainly fit that description
 - They were miserable in their captivity, puny in their power, voracious in their appetites for sin and hesitant to hear the word of the Lord
 - And most of all they were following...following corrupt leaders as they had for centuries
 - These leaders were godless men intent only on saving themselves and their place of prominence among the people
 - And their corruption brought the people of Israel down with them
- So as the Lord concludes His declarations of judgment upon Jerusalem, He takes aim at the root cause of it all: Israel's corrupt leaders
 - Last week we studied through most of Chapter 20 where the Lord explained the pattern of judgment that accompanies idolatry
 - The generation of Israel that lived in Egypt and the generation that wandered in the desert both ran afoul of the first commandment
 - As a result they each suffered exile of a sort, and the Lord uses their examples to convince this generation they face a similar fate
- And that fate came largely as a result of evil men who led the people astray
 - That too had parallels to earlier generations
 - As we remember that Aaron enabled the generation in the Exodus to sin at the mountain
 - So the Lord now turns His words of wrath against the leaders

Ezek. 20:45 Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezek. 20:46 “Son of man, set your face toward Teman, and speak out against the south and prophesy against the forest land of the Negev,

Ezek. 20:47 and say to the forest of the Negev, ‘Hear the word of the LORD: thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am about to kindle a fire in you, and it will consume every green tree in you, as well as every dry tree; the blazing flame will not be quenched and the whole surface from south to north will be burned by it.

Ezek. 20:48 “All flesh will see that I, the LORD, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.””

Ezek. 20:49 Then I said, “Ah Lord GOD! They are saying of me, ‘Is he not just speaking parables?’”

- In the Hebrew Bible this final section of Chapter 20 is considered part of Chapter 21, because it leads directly into where we're going
 - The Lord tells Ezekiel to set his face toward three places
 - First, toward Teman then the south and finally the Negev
 - All three of these Hebrew words were general references to the southern kingdom of Judah
 - The word *temanah* (Teman) means “right”, as in the direction of south when facing the rising sun in the east
 - And the Negev was the desert south of Jerusalem
 - So this is a prophecy concerning the south, and as we move into Chapter 21 we soon see that the “south” refers to Judah in general
 - To the southern kingdom the Lord says He will soon kindle a fire in that kingdom
 - That fire will consume every green tree and dry tree, the whole area from south to north
 - Green trees represent the good within Israel, while the dry tree represents the spiritual dead Jews in the land
 - This was to be a judgment that wouldn't distinguish between the good and bad, at least not in the sense that anyone could expect to escape
 - The only difference would be that the good within Israel would be preserved in captivity while the bad would not
 - But this flame could not be quenched, and all flesh would know the Lord Himself was responsible for bringing the calamity
- From all our study up to this point, we can see that this parable describes the coming third invasion of Nebuchadnezzar's army
 - As the army moved in from the north and went through Judah, they followed a scorched earth policy
 - They left few survivors, they left no cities standing, and they showed no mercy to anyone
 - They literally wiped Israel off the map...it was an unprecedented degree of destruction, even for the Babylonians
 - But as Ezekiel relates this latest warning to the people, he hears the exiles complaining that the prophet is speaking in parables
 - That's not a compliment...they are suggesting he's not making sense
 - And so they aren't responsible for listening much less heeding his words
 - And so Ezekiel complains back to the Lord asking for defense
- Which leads us into Chapter 21...

Ezek. 21:1 And the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 21:2 “Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, and speak against the sanctuaries and prophesy against the land of Israel;

Ezek. 21:3 and say to the land of Israel, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Behold, I am against you; and I will draw My sword out of its sheath and cut off from you the righteous and the wicked.

Ezek. 21:4 “Because I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked, therefore My sword will go forth from its sheath against all flesh from south to north.

Ezek. 21:5 “Thus all flesh will know that I, the LORD, have drawn My sword out of its sheath. It will not return to its sheath again.”

Ezek. 21:6 “As for you, son of man, groan with breaking heart and bitter grief, groan in their sight.

Ezek. 21:7 “And when they say to you, ‘Why do you groan?’ you shall say, ‘Because of the news that is coming; and every heart will melt, all hands will be feeble, every spirit will faint and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it comes and it will happen,’ declares the Lord GOD.”

- This chapter opens with the Lord making plain what the exiles complained was too hard to understand
 - In short, a judgment is coming against Jerusalem and all the southern kingdom
 - In v.2 the Lord explains that the judgment would impact the city, the temple and the land overall...nothing would be overlooked
 - More importantly, the Lord takes full credit for that destruction
 - The Lord wants the people to know that He was the one swinging this judgment sword
 - Moreover He has designed this judgment to remove all Jews from the land, both the righteous and the wicked and from south to north
 - There will be no exceptions
 - And the sword won't be placed in the sheath, He says
 - Which means the Lord won't stop short of completing the total judgment He's promised
- Now we've heard similar things in this book before, yet some may still wrestle with what's happening here
 - Some question whether the Lord could truly be the Author of destruction, death and mayhem in this way
 - They prefer to think that the Lord isn't involved in such things...that such events are the result of Satan's mischief
 - And the Lord desires for better things to come to pass
 - For that group, let me remind you of the Lord's own words

Is. 45:5 “I am the LORD, and there is no other;

Besides Me there is no God.

I will gird you, though you have not known Me;

Is. 45:6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun

That there is no one besides Me.

I am the LORD, and there is no other,

Is. 45:7 The One forming light and creating darkness,

Causing well-being and creating calamity;

I am the LORD who does all these.

- The Lord says plainly to Israel that there is no source of power and authority for what happens on earth besides Him
 - All that happens is according to the Lord's power and intentions
 - He is the one who created both light and darkness in the beginning, symbolizing good and bad
 - And He says He is the One who causes well-being and also creates calamity
- Yes, the devil is real and he has power of his own as a created being
 - But the Lord harnesses Satan's power as part of His plan for Creation
 - Remember, it was Jesus Who released Judas from the meal and instructed him to accomplish his plan of betrayal quickly
 - That's one of the clearest examples of God's permissive will incorporating Satan's evil desires into God's plan
 - While we credit Satan with leading Judas to betray Jesus, we also acknowledge that Satan acted by and according to God's will
 - Likewise we're told that the Lord used a demon to torment King Saul

1Sam. 18:10 Now it came about on the next day that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house, while David was playing the harp with his hand, as usual; and a spear was in Saul's hand.

- So the Lord has always used evil to further His plan
- And creating calamity in this way isn't sin when it's a righteous judgment in response to sin
- That's the situation we have at present in Israel
 - These people have sinned for generations
 - So the Lord is perfectly right to bring judgment
- Nevertheless, that raises a second concern for some: the indiscriminate nature of this judgment
 - Peter tells us the Lord distinguishes between the righteous and the unrighteous in His judgments

- Yet in this case, the Lord says His judgment will impact both the righteous and the wicked (i.e., the green tree vs. dry tree)
- Still, no one escapes untouched, and so we should ask why is the Lord willing to allow the righteous to suffer at all?
- The answer is the Old Covenant
 - That covenant, as we've discussed, bound the entire population of the nation to God under certain terms
 - And as part of the terms of that covenant, the nation was required to refrain from idolatry
 - If they violated those terms, then the Lord committed to placing the entire nation into exile
- So in this unique case, the Lord must bring the entire nation into exile
 - Because the terms of the covenant require the nation be treated uniformly
 - Nevertheless, there is a measure of distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous in the events of the judgment
 - The righteous will escape death if they obey the voice of the Lord and surrender to the Babylonians
 - While the unrighteous who resist the invasion because they don't heed the word of God will die in the fight
 - So even as the Lord is bringing the entire nation into the judgment as the covenant requires, He is still just to all
 - The Lord's purpose in bringing such a sweeping judgment was that there would be no question in anyone's mind Who the true Lord is
 - Notice in v.5 He says all flesh would know that it was the Lord Who acted
 - And in knowing the Lord acted, all people would also know that He was real, He alone is God and He is faithful to His covenant
 - Nevertheless, the judgment would be terrible to behold, even for the righteous, the Lord says
 - So he asks Ezekiel to begin his mourning process now
 - Ezekiel is told to groan publicly as one would do when in mourning
 - Obviously, this would gain Ezekiel a lot of attention from the exiles who would come to him asking what's wrong
 - And to that question, the Lord says in v.7 that Ezekiel is to tell them that this is what everyone in Israel will be doing soon
- Which leads to the next part of this prophecy

Ezek. 21:8 Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezek. 21:9 "Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the LORD.' Say, 'A sword, a sword sharpened

And also polished!

Ezek. 21:10 ‘Sharpened to make a slaughter,

Polished to flash like lightning!’

Or shall we rejoice, the rod of My son despising every tree?

Ezek. 21:11 “It is given to be polished, that it may be handled; the sword is sharpened and polished, to give it into the hand of the slayer.

Ezek. 21:12 “Cry out and wail, son of man; for it is against My people, it is against all the officials of Israel. They are delivered over to the sword with My people, therefore strike your thigh.

Ezek. 21:13 “For there is a testing; and what if even the rod which despises will be no more?” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 21:14 “You therefore, son of man, prophesy and clap your hands together; and let the sword be doubled the third time, the sword for the slain. It is the sword for the great one slain, which surrounds them,

Ezek. 21:15 that their hearts may melt, and many fall at all their gates. I have given the glittering sword. Ah! It is made for striking like lightning, it is wrapped up in readiness for slaughter.

Ezek. 21:16 “Show yourself sharp, go to the right; set yourself; go to the left, wherever your edge is appointed.

Ezek. 21:17 “I will also clap My hands together, and I will appease My wrath; I, the LORD, have spoken.”

- This prophecy is written in a poetic form at least in parts, so it’s become known as the song of the sword
 - The poem describes a spectacularly dangerous sword, an “Excalibur” of a weapon that strikes terror
 - It’s been specially prepared for God’s people
 - And the Lord will bring it upon everyone
 - The poem is arranged as a chiasm
 - Notice it starts in vs.9-10 with descriptions of the sword’s sharpness and reflections
 - And then in vs.15-16 those same features are repeated in a reverse, chiastic order
 - Next we have descriptions of the slaughter and the slayer in vs.11-12
 - And that thought is repeated on the opposite end again vs.14-15
 - Which places the center of the chiasm on v.13, which is the “point” of the chiasm
 - The point of the chiasm is the point of the story
 - And in this case that point is this judgment is a test for the people of Israel
 - The test is how will they live in exile without any leaders to guide them

- Because the Lord is going to remove all officials from among them
- Backing up for a moment, we need to understand why the Lord keeps emphasizing the point of a coming judgment over and over again
 - The Jews held stubbornly to their assumptions of rescue
 - As long as the city of Jerusalem still stood, the people continued to believe that they had a home to return to one day
 - As long as the temple still stood and the walls of the city were still standing (mostly), and priest and kings ruled, they clung to hope
 - They simply wouldn't believe that they weren't going to return home soon
 - But the Lord says over and over again through Ezekiel and Jeremiah that they won't be returning anytime soon
 - And many of them would never return
 - The cities would be empty and wiped away
 - The temple would be razed to the foundations and the walls would be gone too
 - There simply would be no Israel on earth for a time
 - And when that reality hit home at a certain point, the people came face to face with the reality of this judgment
 - They aren't there yet, but the Lord is giving them these prophecies now in preparation for that moment
 - So that when the events come to pass, Israel will have reason to pause and consider what they heard and recognize the Lord acted
- So in v.11 the Lord says He hands His sword of judgment to an unnamed executioner, who would be Nebuchadnezzar
 - And in v.12 the Lord says that man's attack would be directed specifically at the officials of Israel
 - Here we reach the point where the Lord calls out the leaders of Israel for their part in the tragedy
 - The leaders of Israel would be sure to die in this attack, which means they would not have the option to live as others might
 - But though we understand the leaders to be bad and to be worthy of this end, it was still a particularly sad outcome for the people
 - The people of Israel would be rocked by the complete loss of their leaders
 - Traditionally, the people have known three types of leaders: judges, priests and kings
 - We could also include prophets in that list, though prophets typically didn't hold authority over people in the same way
 - But after this judgment, the nation would lose access to priests, judges, kings and the like
 - There would be no officials in Israel at the start of the exile

- The people would be leaderless for a time, and that would prove to be a great humiliation to them
- And it would provoke great fear among the people
- Because even though their past officials were evil, nevertheless they offered Israel an identity and a degree of security
 - Because it's bad enough to be held in captivity away from your country
 - But it's a far worse thing to be held in captivity away from your country *and* your country doesn't exist any longer *and* your leaders are wiped out
- In vs.12-13 the Lord says this will be an occasion for great mourning such that Ezekiel and the people will strike their thighs in despair
 - And the Lord says this will be a severe testing for the people
 - The Lord calls His choice to remove all leaders a "rod" as in a stick used to discipline disobedience
 - Specifically, Nebuchadnezzar is that rod of discipline
 - Having no officials while in exile leads the people to search for authority and guidance
 - And in their searching they will rediscover the Lord and His law
 - So the Lord then asks what will they do if even that rod is no more?
 - He's alluding to the day when Babylon gave way to Persia and this stage of discipline ended for the people
 - In other words, He's saying that even though the rod doesn't last forever, still it will have its desired effect
- So then the Lord tells Ezekiel clap your hands as you announce this double of the sword on the third time
 - The third time is the attack on the city which was coming
 - And in that third attack, the battle would be twice as bad as anything that had come to the city so far
 - And Ezekiel was to clap as if applauding the Lord's judgment and apprising of His judgment
 - Finally in v.17, the Lord says He will "clap His hands too" in approval of this judgment on His people
 - It will appease His wrath and He has spoken so it will come to pass
 - Remember, the Lord instinctively experiences wrath in the face of sin
 - And His wrath cannot dissipate absent something to remove it, something to appease it
 - If the Lord's wrath for sin were to dissipate without cause, it would be an injustice
 - So this severe judgment is the means by which the Lord appeases His wrath under the terms of the Old Covenant

- The people have violated the agreements prohibiting idolatry
- And He is now acting to bring wrath and once it is spent, He approves since it has appeased Him
- Now it's time for Ezekiel to return for a moment to his prior role as a street artist, giving Israel prophecies by mime

Ezek. 21:18 The word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 21:19 “As for you, son of man, make two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to come; both of them will go out of one land. And make a signpost; make it at the head of the way to the city.

Ezek. 21:20 “You shall mark a way for the sword to come to Rabbah of the sons of Ammon, and to Judah into fortified Jerusalem.

Ezek. 21:21 “For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination; he shakes the arrows, he consults the household idols, he looks at the liver.

Ezek. 21:22 “Into his right hand came the divination, ‘Jerusalem,’ to set battering rams, to open the mouth for slaughter, to lift up the voice with a battle cry, to set battering rams against the gates, to cast up ramps, to build a siege wall.

Ezek. 21:23 “And it will be to them like a false divination in their eyes; they have sworn solemn oaths. But he brings iniquity to remembrance, that they may be seized.

Ezek. 21:24 “Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your deeds your sins appear — because you have come to remembrance, you will be seized with the hand.

Ezek. 21:25 ‘And you, O slain, wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come, in the time of the punishment of the end,’

Ezek. 21:26 thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Remove the turban and take off the crown; this will no longer be the same. Exalt that which is low and abase that which is high.

Ezek. 21:27 ‘A ruin, a ruin, a ruin, I will make it. This also will be no more until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him.’

- The Lord tells Ezekiel to make a map, probably by drawing in the dirt or on a tablet
 - The map traces the major road that connects Babylon to Jerusalem
 - That road diverged at a point in Damascus
 - The east fork of the road went to Rabbah, the capital city of the Ammonites that settled east of Judah
 - The other side of the fork went to Jerusalem
 - Now in that day, these roads were little more than worn paths used by traders

- Generally, maps didn't exist and roads didn't have signposts
- So as Nebuchadnezzar's army marched, they relied on local knowledge and divination to find their way to their desired destination
- In this prophecy, the Lord tells Ezekiel to explain to the exiles how Babylon would find its way to Jerusalem for this devastating attack
 - Using the map, the Lord says He brings the sword upon Jerusalem by guiding it to them
 - In v.20 the Lord tells Ezekiel to mark the left route toward Ammon and the right path to Jerusalem
 - And then the king will stop at the fork not knowing which way to go, so he will resort to divination
- Divination is ritual that taps into demonic power for insight and guidance
 - In this case, demons certainly know the right way to go, so they can provide that knowledge to those they wish
 - There were standard methods diviners used to learn the knowledge of the demons
 - And the Lord mentions three of them here:
 - Belomancy involved writing possible answers on arrows, mixing them up, replacing them in a quiver and drawing one
 - Necromancy was a process of consulting idols that could communicate with dead ancestors
 - And hepatoscopy involved inspecting the liver of dead animals to discern an answer from the markings or shape of the organ
 - In all cases, we're talking about methods that opened the person up to hearing from demons
 - And the Lord says in v.21 that the king of Babylon will use these methods to learn how to find Jerusalem for his attack
 - And in v.22 the Lord says the king's divination efforts will lead him to the road headed to Jerusalem
 - In other words, the Lord will ensure that Nebuchadnezzar gets the right answer
 - And as a result, their battle cry, battering rams and siege ramps will appear at the city walls
- But the people of the city will see Babylon's arrival as some kind of colossal mistake on God's part
 - They expected God to thwart the king's efforts and to lead the army toward Ammon
 - After all, Ammon was the enemy of God
 - Ammon deserved God's wrath, Israel thought
 - And in v.23 they say to themselves we have sworn oaths to the Lord and He to us, so that should ensure Israel's safety

- But the problem is those oaths committed Israel to remaining faithful to Yahweh, which they didn't do
- They want it both ways...they want God to be faithful to them even as they weren't faithful to Him
- We've already learned that Israel was committing worse sin than her neighbors
- So in reality Ammon was less deserving than Israel
- In v.23 the Lord says He is using this judgment to bring Israel's sin back to mind
 - That's the fundamental disconnect driving Israel's misconceptions
 - They fail to remember or appreciate their own sin
 - And if you don't recognize your sin before God, you'll never understand His discipline or judgment
 - And even when judgment comes, you won't get the point
- But in this case, the Lord is working to ensure they get the point
 - In v.24 He says their sinful deeds have been exposed to all and so will their judgment be
 - Furthermore, the current king, Zedekiah, would also see his time come
 - He would have his crown removed, and he would receive his own punishment
 - Everything that was exalted by this people would be made low and that which was low will be exalted by the Lord
- Notice v.27...the disposing of Zedekiah marks a fundamental shift in ruling in Israel
 - Where before in Israel there was a steady succession of kings who ruled uninterrupted, that was changing now
 - The Lord would bring the Davidic dynasty to ruin
 - And it would be no more until "He" comes whose right it is to rule Israel
 - Obviously, that's a reference to Jesus ruling Israel
 - So another consequence of this judgment is the elimination of legitimate kings ruling Israel
 - Even those who tried to assume the throne after the Maccabean rulers, or Herod's family, were not from David's line
 - In fact, Herod's family were not even Jewish
 - So the nation will have to wait for the Kingdom before they see a king again
 - Which is in keeping with the pattern of restoration we saw last week
- Now we have one last section of the chapter to complete, and it's a bit of foreshadowing
 - The second half of this book starts in Chapter 25
 - In the first part of that second half, Ezekiel will issue a series of prophecies concerning Israel's enemies
 - One at a time, the Lord explains how in the future He will judge the nations that

have historically opposed Israel

- These prophecies come true when the Kingdom comes to earth, so they are part of the section looking forward to that time
- One of those enemies are the Ammonites, which the Lord just mentioned in this prophecy to Israel
 - But rather than wait for that coming section to pronounce judgment on Ammon, the Lord chooses to mention it here
 - So this is a bit of a preview of what we will be studying soon as we enter the second half of the book

Ezek. 21:28 “And you, son of man, prophesy and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the sons of Ammon and concerning their reproach,’ and say: ‘A sword, a sword is drawn, polished for the slaughter, to cause it to consume, that it may be like lightning —

Ezek. 21:29 while they see for you false visions, while they divine lies for you — to place you on the necks of the wicked who are slain, whose day has come, in the time of the punishment of the end.

Ezek. 21:30 ‘Return it to its sheath. In the place where you were created, in the land of your origin, I will judge you.

Ezek. 21:31 ‘I will pour out My indignation on you; I will blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and I will give you into the hand of brutal men, skilled in destruction.

Ezek. 21:32 ‘You will be fuel for the fire; your blood will be in the midst of the land. You will not be remembered, for I, the LORD, have spoken.’”

- The Ammonites were the descendants of the incestuous relationships between Lot and his daughters
 - They were always enemies of the Jewish people
 - And in this situation particularly, they did Israel a disservice
 - The Lord had just mentioned that He would send the Babylonians to Jerusalem rather than to Ammon
 - And of course, this would confuse the people of Israel at first, because they understood that the Ammonites were people deserving God’s judgment
 - Furthermore, after the Babylonians removed Israel from the land and destroyed Jerusalem, the Ammonites entered the land
 - They ransacked what little was left of Jerusalem
 - They attacked the few remaining Jews that had managed to escape the army of the Babylonians
 - So naturally, the people of Israel were expecting the Lord to bring vengeance on that people
- So the Lord connects Israel’s judgment to Ammon’s fate

- He says the same sword that conquers Israel will be drawn against the Ammonites too
 - They will suffer reproach for their acts against the Lord and His people
 - And even though the Lord chose to bring judgment to Israel over Ammon in the case of Babylon's third attack
 - That doesn't mean that Ammon didn't have their own judgment coming
- So the Lord reminds them not to be self-satisfied
 - The sons of Ammon will see false visions and lies in their divination that cause them to be on the necks of Israel (v.29)
 - This is a reference to the way Ammon piled on to Israel's troubles during Babylon's attacks
- But in v.30 the Lord says when Ammon returns to its land, they will face judgment
 - Sure enough, the land of Ammon was attacked not long afterward by Persia
 - The Persian army was even more brutal than the Babylonian army, men skilled in destruction the Lord says
 - The Ammonites would be fuel for the fire and their blood would be in the midst of the land
- After the Persians attacked the region and subdued the Ammonites, history mostly forgot about that people
 - There are isolated mentions of Ammonites up to about the second century
 - But they were never again a powerful people much less a threat to Israel
 - And in Jeremiah, the Lord also tells Israel that in the Kingdom the land of Ammon would become Israel's possession
 - So the example of Ammon reminds us that the Lord can harness evil to do His bidding and then turn around and judge that vessel for that evil
 - God can allow Satan to use Judas to betray Christ
 - And then He can turn around and judge both Satan and Judas for that sin
 - That's the sovereignty of God to use evil without forfeiting His right to judge evil for what it does
 - That's why the Bible asks us to leave room for the vengeance of God
 - When evil comes against you, the Lord allowed it for some good purpose
 - But that doesn't mean the Lord doesn't have a plan to ultimately judge that evil for what it did
 - So He can use evil to accomplish good and then do good Himself by judging that same evil
 - That's how He has dealt with Israel through all her enemies, and in weeks to come we will examine how God does this in each case

- Throughout this first half of Ezekiel, the Lord has spoken repeatedly to the exiles about their sins
 - Much of that time, the Lord has defended the need to bring judgment against a people that were in denial
 - So the Lord's patiently reminded them of Israel's history of idolatry and depravity
 - And at other times He's reviewed the offenses of their past leaders who dragged the people into their sin
 - Still, the people seem to believe that they are being treated unfairly by God
 - So as we approach the end of the first half of the book, the Lord begins to increase the pressure on this generation
 - He gets more specific and more graphic in describing their sin
 - Because as He recounts their sins in increasing detail, He also gives added justification for the radical and dramatic judgment that is coming
- So tonight, Chapter 22, the Lord returns to a focus on the nation's leaders as He did last week in Chapter 21
 - This chapter looks again at the culpability of the current leaders
 - In the next chapter, the Lord uses another allegory to explain Israel's sins
 - And in the final chapter of this section the Lord pronounces a final devastating judgment on the people using a parable
 - We will do Chapter 22 this week, and we will move rapidly through Chapters 23-24 next week to conclude part 1
 - So let's look at the bloody guilt of the present generation of Israel

Ezek. 22:1 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezek. 22:2 “And you, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Then cause her to know all her abominations.

Ezek. 22:3 “You shall say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “A city shedding blood in her midst, so that her time will come, and that makes idols, contrary to her interest, for defilement!

Ezek. 22:4 “You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and defiled by your idols which you have made. Thus you have brought your day near and have come to your years; therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations and a mocking to all the lands.

Ezek. 22:5 “Those who are near and those who are far from you will mock you, you of ill repute, full of turmoil.

Ezek. 22:6 “Behold, the rulers of Israel, each according to his power, have been in you for the purpose of shedding blood.

Ezek. 22:7 “They have treated father and mother lightly within you. The alien they have oppressed in your midst; the fatherless and the widow they have wronged

in you.

Ezek. 22:8 “You have despised My holy things and profaned My sabbaths.

Ezek. 22:9 “Slandorous men have been in you for the purpose of shedding blood, and in you they have eaten at the mountain shrines. In your midst they have committed acts of lewdness.

Ezek. 22:10 “In you they have uncovered their fathers’ nakedness; in you they have humbled her who was unclean in her menstrual impurity.

Ezek. 22:11 “One has committed abomination with his neighbor’s wife and another has lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law. And another in you has humbled his sister, his father’s daughter.

Ezek. 22:12 “In you they have taken bribes to shed blood; you have taken interest and profits, and you have injured your neighbors for gain by oppression, and you have forgotten Me,” declares the Lord GOD.

- The Lord repeatedly describes the various abominations of Israel as bloody
 - The Hebrew word is literal “blood” but the meaning is idiomatic
 - It doesn’t necessarily mean that a person was harmed in every case, though certainly at times that was the case
 - Child sacrifice was a part of their practices and they also shed the blood of prophets and others who tried to bring Israel back to the Lord
 - Nevertheless, the word blood in Hebrew can be used euphemistically to mean acting in a vile or violent way to oppress the truth and harm well-being
 - That was Israel’s pattern for centuries and it was true of this generation
 - The people shed blood in the midst of the Lord’s city and made idols in the city against their own interests, the Lord says in v.3
 - These acts brought the day of judgment nearer and brought judgment to Israel in their time, in their years
 - That’s a useful way to conceive of God’s judgment, and it also applies to His discipline for the believer
 - With each decision to sin, each step away from the Lord and His word, we are “pulling” His judgement closer
 - It’s as if it’s a train headed our way and it moves in concert with our decisions
 - As we choose to sin against the Lord, we accelerate that train of discipline toward us
 - But as we repent and move away from sin, the train stops and retreats
 - Israel kept pulling that train toward itself and so the time had come for Israel to get run over, so to speak
 - The Lord would make the city know of her abominations through this judgment
 - The blood they shed and the idols they built convicted them

- We're not talking about their fathers' sins...this is about the sin of this very generation now
- They would become a mocking and reproach to neighbors, He says in v.4
 - That's a significant statement, because Israel's neighbors hated God's people
 - They would love nothing more than to see Israel brought low
 - But the Lord says Israel will become a reproach before her neighbors
 - They will look at Israel with contempt because of this outcome...almost as if they feel sympathy for God's people
 - That tells you how devastating the coming attack will be
 - And the nations will mock Israel for its downfall
 - Their mocking will go this way...here's Israel, the nation that claims to be God's people and expected to always be protected by God
 - And yet look who's now been devastated by that very God
 - So they laugh at the Israel who thinks they were better than everyone else and yet now is worse
 - That's also a reminder of what happens when we enter into a relationship with the living God
 - Our future hope is better than the world, because our relationship with God has rescued us from the world's future fate
 - But that same relationship also places significant expectations on us for obedience
 - And when we suffer the consequences of a lack of obedience, we risk becoming a laughing stock to the world
 - Our faith ensures we will be victorious in the end, but in the short term we may be exhibited as an example
- Then in v.6 the Lord turns to the leaders and recites an inventory of all that the current rulers of Israel have done to further Israel's fall
 - He says they each contributed to the bloodshed and violence according to his power
 - So individuals did evil in their own power
 - Judges and priests presided over evil in their jurisdictions
 - And kings spread evil throughout their kingdoms
 - In v.7 the Lord begins to list their specific offenses
 - He begins the list with disrespect for parents
 - The leaders treated the authority of parents lightly within Israel He says
 - Now with all that we've heard about going on in Israel in this book, this offense may seem out of place
 - It's not very serious compared to child sacrifice, yet it's the first one on God's list
 - But that's where it should be, because it's probably the root cause of much of

Israel's ills

- When children are brought up in families and in a culture where respect for parental authority is optional, it sows the seeds of greater problems
- Those children eventually become adults who will not respect authority in general
- And a lack of respect for authority takes the brakes off the depravity of the human heart
 - A child absent respect for parents experiences a way of life that teaches them that authority is a force to be fought and defeated
 - Rather than appreciating authority as a God-appointed force to be respected for the sake of good
 - These leaders didn't enforce the Law's requirements that disobedient children be disciplined
 - So disobedience became the norm
 - And as childhood rebellion became the norm, societal rebellion against Law and authority in general also became common
- And in a related trend, when a culture becomes engaged in fighting against the powers that be, it loses interest in the weak
 - So the fatherless, the widow and the like will be overlooked and abandoned and abused
 - The alien who has little or no right in the culture will be oppressed
 - When society only desires power and rebellion, it loses all respect for those who offer neither
- Third, the Lord says that Israel despised the holy things of God, including the Sabbath
 - This is the next step of progression for those who have learned to fight against authority
 - There is no authority greater than God, so for a heart determined to fight back against authority God makes the perfect target
 - Israel was a culture saturated with the symbols and rituals of God
 - And each week a day was set aside to cease in everything and remember God
 - So if you were a Jew with a heart set against obeying authority, then profaning the Lord's rituals and sabbath was an obvious choice
 - You had a daily opportunity to flex your muscles against the Lord
 - And once a heart gets a taste of rebellion, it's hard to cut it off
 - So disobedience to parents led to disobedience against Law and authority as an adult
 - And a rebellious and disobedient adult heart soon turned to rebelling against the ultimate authority in Israel, which was God Himself
 - And once the heart is freed from the constraints of law and God's authority,

there is nothing to restrain its depravity

- So the next offense in this chain in v.9 is slandering, murder, engaging in idol worship, which and sexual depravity
 - This slippery slope follows Paul's wise words in Romans

Rom. 1:21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Rom. 1:22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

Rom. 1:23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Rom. 1:24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

- Turning from the true authority led to establishing authorities of their own making, which is merely license to do as they wish
- They saw themselves as wise and sophisticated, but in reality they were foolish
- And that so-called wisdom led them to worship the silliest of things, which then led to a profaning of their own bodies
- Ritual sex was the height of Canaanite worship practices, and naturally it was a great attraction to Israel
 - Surely the enemy anticipated that effect and so he used sex to entice the Israelites into pagan idolatry
 - Douglas Stuart said this about Canaanite worship practices:

Ritual sex was another great attraction of idolatry. Most of the ancient Near Easterners believed that all things that came into being were born into being. This was a major tenet of their belief system. They believed that not only animals were born, but also plants. What was born into being started, they believed, with sex on the part of the gods—specifically Baal and Asherah, the god and goddess of fertility according to the Canaanites. They also thought that if a person bringing an offering to Baal and/or Asherah would have ritual sex with a prostitute at the shrine as part of worship this would help stimulate the divine powers of nature to have sex, and thus more animals and crops would be born, and the agriculture would flourish. Outlandish as this sounds to us, it was the pinnacle of theology among the Canaanites—and was what the Israelites readily accepted at Baal-Peor.

- Naturally, as sexual practices degenerated within the culture, it became a free-for-all of sexual lust

- They uncovered their father's nakedness, which indicates that fathers were engaged in ritual sexual activity side by side with their family members
- Women were put in service to men even while in mensuration, which was against the law and considered abhorrent
- Adultery and incest followed as well
- These practices weren't simply happening in dark corners of the culture
 - They had become common place and were accepted and even encouraged by Israel's leadership
 - Can you imagine such a place? We know our current culture is bad too, and in some ways, it's worse
 - But generally, society frowns on such things at least for now
 - But imagine a place where these behaviors were as common as kids's soccer games and walking your dog in the park
 - And just as acceptable
- Finally, the culture saw men taking brides as a contract to put other men to death, according to v.12
 - The people are charging interest on debt, which was prohibited by the Law
 - And they willingly injure their neighbor for financial gain
 - In short, the people have forgotten their Lord
- Knowing how bad things had become in Israel, is it any surprise that they can't accept Ezekiel's warnings?
 - They could scarcely remember the God Who called them into being and set them in the land
 - It's been generations since the people have truly experienced His presence
 - And meanwhile as His glory resided in the temple, they were a short distance away engaging in ritual sex and idol sacrifice
 - It's a wonder that the Lord didn't strike the entire nation down long ago
 - So now as He speaks to them, the Lord's words hardly make a dent in their hard heads and harder hearts
 - But the grace of God is evident in the fact that He keeps trying
 - The Lord pursues His people despite their disinterest in Him
 - And getting their attention for His words begins with stripping them of the unholy gain of their depraved practices
 - And then it moves to applying such intense heat and pressure that their hard hearts melt and soften

Ezek. 22:13 “Behold, then, I smite My hand at your dishonest gain which you have acquired and at the bloodshed which is among you.

Ezek. 22:14 “Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong in the days that I will deal with you? I, the LORD, have spoken and will act.

Ezek. 22:15 “I will scatter you among the nations and I will disperse you through the lands, and I will consume your uncleanness from you.

Ezek. 22:16 “You will profane yourself in the sight of the nations, and you will know that I am the LORD.””

- The Lord promises the leadership, which found ways to profit from Israel’s lawlessness, will see their dishonest gain stripped away
 - Practically, we know that this stripping process came in a big, dramatic way
 - The entire city is wiped out
 - The people are either killed or hauled off into captivity with nothing
 - The land is left fallow for 70 years so that when they eventually return it’s a serious fixer-upper project
 - So the glory of the nation is stripped away and the evil hearts of the people are humbled
 - Which leads the Lord to ask if they think their proud, hard hearts can endure what the Lord is bringing against them?
 - The answer is obvious, or should be obvious to everyone who entertains it
 - Can you withstand what the Lord is prepared to bring against you to get your attention?
 - To soften your disobedient heart and bring you into submission?
 - It’s worth remembering that should we entertain a season of disobedience in our lives, we can’t beat the Lord
 - In His patience and long suffering nature, He may give us plenty of rope to hang ourselves, as He did Israel
 - But eventually, the Lord will bring us under the rod
 - And when that time comes, can your heart endure?
 - Do you think you will be strong in that day?
 - The foolish think they either won’t be held to account or can stand up to God
 - The same foolishness that caused them to rebel against God’s authority in the first place also deceives them into thinking there will be no consequences
 - But when they inevitably do come, it’s impossible to stand against God
- So the Lord, once again, promises to disperse the people out of their land so that He might consume their uncleanness
 - Consuming their uncleanness refers to the way the Lord used these events to eliminate idolatry in the nation
 - Yet in their desperate circumstances, Israel would profane themselves He says

- In other words, as they turn back from idolatry while in captivity, they will be unable to abide by the ritual requirements of the law
- Likely, the people ate pork and other unclean things at times
 - We see Daniel refusing to eat such things in captivity, though it's unlikely that all Jews were equally scrupulous
 - The people would be stripped of everything to the point all they had left was their identity in God
 - And in that way, they rediscovered a respect for His authority
- This process of stripping away the sin and depravity and hard heartedness can be compared to the way metal is refined
 - And that's the process the Lord uses next to explain what was coming for His people

Ezek. 22:17 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezek. 22:18 “Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are the dross of silver.

Ezek. 22:19 “Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Because all of you have become dross, therefore, behold, I am going to gather you into the midst of Jerusalem.

Ezek. 22:20 ‘As they gather silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the furnace to blow fire on it in order to melt it, so I will gather you in My anger and in My wrath and I will lay you there and melt you.

Ezek. 22:21 ‘I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you will be melted in the midst of it.

Ezek. 22:22 ‘As silver is melted in the furnace, so you will be melted in the midst of it; and you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out My wrath on you.’”

- The Lord begins the analogy by referring to Israel's sin as dross
 - Dross are the impurities in ore mined from the ground
 - The desired metals of silver, gold, lead and the like must be freed from other impurities like sulphur and the like
 - In the smelting process, the ore is heated to a temperature that melts all the metals in the soil
 - The desirable metals are heavier, so they sink in the hot vessel
 - Those parts of the ore that are not heavy, float to the surface
 - Then a blacksmith will take a tool to scrape the impurities off the surface of the molten metal
 - Those impurities are the dross
- So the removal of the impurities involves a two step process of heating and separation
 - Likewise, the stripping of Israel's impurities involved both steps

- First in v.19 the Lord says they will be put in the middle of the city of Jerusalem
- He's talking about Jerusalem like it's a pot
- Historically, the people were contained in the city like in a pot over fire, because the city was blockaded by the Babylonians
- Secondly, the Lord has gathered the previous metals in the city, referring to the people themselves
 - Israel's sins were numerous, but the people themselves were precious to the Lord
 - So the Lord need a stripping process to remove the people from their sins so that the precious things of Israel could continue
- So the people in the city are heated up like metal in a pot
 - The Lord will blow His wrath on them like a blacksmith blowing on a hot fire to increase the heat
 - The Lord will melt the people so to speak
 - The heat refers to the difficulties of the coming siege and destruction of the city followed by their years of trial in captivity
 - This trial was severe indeed, but it caused the people to soften their hearts
- After the softening, the Lord scraped these desires away
 - First, He moved them away from the people's sight by removing them from the land
 - Then He removed the evil leaders who were encouraging the people to do the wrong thing
 - And finally, he stripped the people from the ability to do what they desired by limiting them in captivity
 - As desperation takes hold, the people naturally seek for relief and turn to God again in repentance
 - And what was left was something pure, something holy and obedient to God
- That's what the Bible means when it says the kindness of God leads a person to repentance
 - It means that as the Lord allows us to experience the desperation created by our rebellion, it produces a desire for relief from the effects of sin
 - And in that process, our heart will come to see obedience to God as the better path
 - Where before God's holiness and law seems like something to fight, we now see it as blessing
 - But getting to that point requires heat and separation
 - Like the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, the son's trial in the pigs' mud led him to see the father's kindness

Luke 15:17 “But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!

Luke 15:18 ‘I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight;

Luke 15:19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.’”

- His poverty and loneliness was his heat
- And his desperate circumstances stripped him of his pride and arrogance and defiance
- And at that point, the son was ready to return a new man, precious and pure again
 - Where before the father’s authority and provision was something to be resisted and rejected
 - Now the son, who was desperate in his situation, came to appreciate the father’s authority as a comfort to be respected
 - That’s how the Lord brings a heart into repentance
- So now to end this chapter, the Lord directs the blame squarely at the leaders, who have made it possible for the people to stray so far

Ezek. 22:23 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezek. 22:24 “Son of man, say to her, ‘You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.’

Ezek. 22:25 “There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst like a roaring lion tearing the prey. They have devoured lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in the midst of her.

Ezek. 22:26 “Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they hide their eyes from My sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.

Ezek. 22:27 “Her princes within her are like wolves tearing the prey, by shedding blood and destroying lives in order to get dishonest gain.

Ezek. 22:28 “Her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ when the LORD has not spoken.

Ezek. 22:29 “The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice.

Ezek. 22:30 “I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one.

Ezek. 22:31 “Thus I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads,”

declares the Lord GOD.

- First, to Israel the prophet says they are a land that is not cleansed or rained upon
 - The punishment for their sins began long before they went into captivity
 - It started as a drought that lasted for many years
 - The people were seeing the land drying up around them as a foreshadowing of the dry period of captivity that was coming
 - But in the Bible rain is also a picture of blessing from God, so the imagery was clear...the days of blessing from the Lord were over
 - The nation was about to experience a spiritual dryness
 - And that dryness was the result of corrupt leaders
 - And the Lord then lists four groups of leaders and presents how each played a part in Israel's downfall
 - Prophets, priests, kings and finally the people themselves
 - Interestingly, prophets get mentioned first and last in this list, which reflects the unique importance of those who claim to speak for God
 - Israel's problems all began and ended with God's word, or the lack thereof
- In the case of these prophets, they are not true prophets, of course
 - Ezekiel's speaking of false prophets and these prophets form a conspiracy
 - The false teaching of one prophet would be "confirmed" by another
 - And in that way, the people could be convinced that the false prophets were speaking for God
 - It's like the old saying that just because two people repeat the same rumor, that doesn't prove it's true
 - This is a typical tactic of false teachers generally
 - They tend to feed off one another
 - Today, you can see prosperity heretics, false healers and the like sharing each other's tricks and false interpretations
 - If one discovers something that works (i.e., raises money), the others soon copy it
 - And in that way, the false teaching seems to be confirmed
 - But the results are always the same
 - In v.25 we're told they devour lives, take treasure and make widows in their midst
 - The effects of false teaching is always to kill, steal and destroy because it's a tactic of the enemy
 - The testimony of these false prophets produced devastating results

- Many in Israel were robbed of their money, and many saw families and relationships broken
- Israel was unraveling from the lawlessness in families and in society in general
- Many even lost their lives
 - The prophets were telling Israel in Ezekiel's day that God said to fight the Babylonians when they returned and they would win
 - This was the opposite of what the Lord actually said through Jeremiah and Ezekiel
 - Their lies created many widows in Israel
- And false teaching is having a similar effect on the church today
 - Obviously, false teachers are constantly trying to fleece the flock of our money
 - And unfortunately, greedy Christians are willing to believe their lies in the hopes of riches from God
 - But false teaching also breaks relationships, causes suspicions, and destroy testimonies
- Moving to priests, the ones called to intercede for Israel with the Lord, we're told in v.26 they did violence to the Law and profaned holy things
 - The Lord had given Israel a Law and system of worship carefully designed to reveal Him to His people
 - And the priesthood was commissioned to guard these things for the people
 - They would guard the name and character and word of God so He could be clearly understood and appreciated in Israel
 - But instead, the priests became representatives of pagan gods and led the people away from the true God
 - They presided over profane practices in the temple
 - They set up idols and invited prostitutes to serve inside
 - So if the people managed to avoid the misleading testimony of false prophets, they would be sidetracked by a corrupt priesthood
 - They came looking for the true God, but the priests sent them in a different direction
 - That too was part of the conspiracy
 - We don't have priests today, as no man or woman intercedes to God on our behalf
 - We are all part of the priesthood of God, since we all have direct access to the Father through our High Priest
 - Nevertheless, we can still act in a similar way to mislead people when we mix the holy and the profane
 - We can't mix what Scripture calls us to do and say and believe with worldly notions
 - People come to a church presumably looking for the truth about God, and any

that would steer them away from God in that moment will be held accountable

- Thirdly, in v.27 the Lord says Israel's princes (kings) were like wolves tearing at a prey because they encouraged bloodshed and destroyed lives to gain riches
 - Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely
 - Israel's kings were men who should have put the needs of the people and the nation above their own needs
 - That's God's expectation for any person who has authority to lead over His people
 - But when someone holds power, they will always face temptation to use that power to their own advantage
 - In Israel, the corrupt kings were willing to condone or engage in murder to become richer
 - And then in v.28 we hear that those false prophets were lying in support of the king to share in their favor
 - Again, it all began and ended with false words from lying prophets
 - The enemy used these men to corrupt God's people
 - And as he did, Satan assumed he was working a plan to destroy God's Messiah even before He could come
 - For if Israel was absorbed in idol worship, then the Messiah would have no one to receive Him or even look for Him
 - But the Lord used Satan to work his own demise
 - Satan directed the hearts of Babylon to attack God's people
 - And in that attack, the Lord brought a refining process that ultimately led Israel away from idolatry
 - Much the same way as Satan's desire to kill Christ was used by God to accomplish the atonement
- Finally, the fourth group are the people themselves, and the Lord says in vs.29-30 that the fruit of these corrupt leaders is a people without mercy or love
 - They rob, oppress, and have no compassion on the needy or stranger
 - These are the traits common in any group of people who have taken their eye off the Lord
 - When we are not walking with the Lord, we will become untrustworthy, unloving, unkind people too
 - Our hearts will rebel in full force against God unless and until He brings us back by His kindness
 - In Ezekiel's day, the Lord says He looked for one person to take the place of these bad leaders, a man who could lead His people back to Him
 - And despite His search, He found none
 - That statement is hyperbole and it's spoken for effect

- Obviously, the Lord need not search for anyone, since He Himself knows all hearts
- Furthermore, He has raised up Daniel and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and certainly these men could stand in the gap
- The Lord's point is that the nation had strayed so far by this point that no man would have been able to tame the people's rebellious hearts
 - Simply put, this problem was too big to solve with a man
 - It required a God-sized solution
 - First, that refers to the Lord's solution of conquest and exile
 - That was literally the only way to solve this problem and no "good" king could come to power and solve this situation
- Notice, in v.31 the Lord promises to pour out His indignation and consume them, because there simply was no other solution
 - The people wouldn't have listened to David or Solomon
 - They wouldn't have repented even if Moses preached to them
 - The problem was too big, the evil was too entrenched and the rebellion too far gone
 - So destruction was all that was left
- There is a point when rebellion must be met with severe consequences
 - As Paul says about a particularly rebellious sinner in Corinth

1Cor. 5:3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

1Cor. 5:4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus,

1Cor. 5:5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

- This believer was to be handed over to the enemy to put an end to his life through some difficult series of circumstances
- And as hard as that judgment sounds, Paul reminds us that it was necessary to save the man's soul
- That's a reference to saving his testimony, saving his standing with the Lord, not allowing him to do any more damage to his reward
- But the real solution for rebellious hearts is found in another God-solution: Christ

- We now reach the final, climactic end to the first half of Ezekiel, the part of the book devoted to chastising Israel for their unfaithfulness
 - Over the past 22 chapters, the Lord has taken Israel to task for their centuries of extreme ungodliness
 - The nation has played the harlot with God, chasing after idols which the enemy used to entrap God's people
 - During that pursuit, the people fell prey to some of the most egregious behavior we've ever seen
 - Rampant immorality, sexual depravity, depraved indifference to human life, corrupt leadership and evil hearts
 - As a result, the people of Israel have already experienced severe retribution by the Lord, and the worst is yet to come
 - The Lord withheld rain for long periods leading to drought and starvation
 - He removed His protection of the nation from her enemies
 - Jerusalem and its kings have fallen repeatedly
 - And the Lord withdrew His Shechinah glory from the temple
 - Now the nation sits on the threshold of complete destruction
 - Ezekiel has spent the last several years warning the exiles that the Babylonians are coming back soon
 - And when they do, it will result in a devastation beyond anything the people could possibly imagine
 - Meanwhile, the people have dismissed Ezekiel's warnings, making excuses and choosing to cling to unrealistic hopes of rescue
- So as the Lord wraps up His words of warning through Ezekiel, He ratchets up His rhetoric to the nation using some of the most extreme language found anywhere in Scripture
 - The final two chapters of this first half of the book consist of an allegory and a parable
 - Together, these stories make abundantly clear how deserving Israel was of her judgment and explain what the consequences would be
 - So Chapter 23 uses an allegory of two sister harlots to explain Israel's history of idolatry
 - While Chapter 24 is a parable explaining the beginning of Babylon's third attack
 - The language in each chapter is rough, especially in Chapter 23, but the Lord's language is intended to reflect the extreme nature of Israel's sin
 - We will take each chapter in large chunks so we can hear the Lord telling this story the way Israel heard it from the prophet
 - But we begin with a short introduction

Ezek. 23:1 The word of the LORD came to me again, saying,

Ezek. 23:2 “Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother;

Ezek. 23:3 and they played the harlot in Egypt. They played the harlot in their youth; there their breasts were pressed and there their virgin bosom was handled.

Ezek. 23:4 “Their names were Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister. And they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. And as for their names, Samaria is Oholah and Jerusalem is Oholibah.

- In v.1 the prophet says he received this word from the Lord, so the rest of the chapter is written in the first person as from the Lord
 - That reminds us that the things said here are the word of God, and therefore are not “sin” even if they describe sinful things
 - And the prophet announces a story or allegory about two sisters of one mother
 - These two sisters engaged in harlotry in Egypt in their youth
 - Even as young women they allowed men to become intimate with them, violating their purity
 - The Lord makes clear right from the start that this allegory will be provocative, referencing the women’s breasts for example
 - The point in that was to gain attention for the prophet’s words and shock the conscience of the people of Israel
 - In other words, if the Lord was willing to resort to such language, then something serious was afoot
 - This is similar to the way a mother might call her child using his full name (e.g., Stephen Daniel Armstrong!) indicating she’s upset
 - The Lord is speaking through Ezekiel in a similar way to show just how far the people have pushed the Lord
 - The names of these sisters were Oholah and Oholibah, two girl names that have fallen out of favor ever since this chapter was written
 - Oholah means “she who has a tent”
 - Oholibah means “my tent is in her”
 - And then the Lord identifies each character specifically for us
 - Oholah represents Samaria, which was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel
 - Oholibah represents Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah
- So right away we begin to see where this allegory is taking us
 - First, we have a story about two sisters who collectively represent the division of Israel into two kingdoms following Solomon
 - These two kingdoms were sisters in the sense that they had a single “mother”

who is the Lord

- So the Lord gave birth to the nation of Israel, and in time the nation divided to become like sisters
- And the names of each sister point us to the spiritual heart of each
 - Samaria was the site of the false temple of the northern kingdom, which was Oholah's "tent"
 - And Jerusalem was the location for the Lord's true temple, which the Lord says was "my tent" in the name Oholibah
- Then we hear that these two sisters engaged in harlotry while the young nation was growing up in Egypt
 - Remember we learned in an earlier week that the nation of Israel engaged in idol worship while it was still in Egypt before the Exodus
 - As a result of that idolatry, the Lord put Israel in slavery under the Pharaoh after Joseph died
 - Then when the nation was freed from slavery in Egypt, they quickly returned to idolatry at the mountain of Moses
- So the nation showed an early interest in idolatry, and the Lord compares worshipping false gods to the sexual act of prostitution
 - It's a perfect comparison, because what prostitution is to the covenant of marriage so is idolatry to our covenant with the Lord
 - Prostitution is a counterfeit marriage of sorts
 - It gives the illusion of obtaining things that can only be found through a proper covenant marriage relationship
 - In the end, the illusion fails because harlotry results in great physical and emotional devastation for both parties
 - Rather than finding the love and fulfillment only possible in marriage, harlotry produces guilt, abuse, and physical harm
 - That makes harlotry a perfect picture of idolatry, because in a spiritual sense the same things happen in idolatry
 - Idolatry counterfeits a true spiritual relationship with the Lord, and the benefits it promises are merely illusion
 - Like harlotry, idolatry results in great spiritual devastation
 - Rather than obtaining a loving, peaceful relationship with the Lord, the idol worshipper becomes captive to a cruel, lying merciless master
 - Idolatry yields a corrupted heart, deceived mind and debased spirit
 - In time, the flesh and the enemy gain complete control of the person
 - And as Paul says in Romans, the idolator eventually receives the penalty of their sin in their own body
- The Lord now recaps how that process went in Israel's history of idolatry, beginning with the northern kingdom Oholah

Ezek. 23:5 “Oholah played the harlot while she was Mine; and she lusted after her lovers, after the Assyrians, her neighbors,

Ezek. 23:6 who were clothed in purple, governors and officials, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses.

Ezek. 23:7 “She bestowed her harlotries on them, all of whom were the choicest men of Assyria; and with all whom she lusted after, with all their idols she defiled herself.

Ezek. 23:8 “She did not forsake her harlotries from the time in Egypt; for in her youth men had lain with her, and they handled her virgin bosom and poured out their lust on her.

Ezek. 23:9 “Therefore, I gave her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, after whom she lusted.

Ezek. 23:10 “They uncovered her nakedness; they took her sons and her daughters, but they slew her with the sword. Thus she became a byword among women, and they executed judgments on her.

- The northern kingdom became enamored with the gods of Assyria, which the Lord compares to a lustful young woman eyeing attractive men
 - Historically, the Lord is referring to the northern kingdom’s political and military alliance with their northern enemy, Assyria
 - The kings of the northern kingdom sought an alliance with Assyria as a “lessor of two evils” strategy
 - The northern kingdom was in conflict with their sister, Judah, so they wanted an ally in that fight
 - But in order to gain the trust and allegiance of Assyria, the king of Israel had to pledge loyalty to the Assyrian gods and king
 - An ancient archeological artifact called the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser depicts the moment that King Jehu met with King Shalmaneser III of Assyria
 - The obelisk shows Jehu bowing before Shalmaneser and paying a tribute of money
 - So as the Lord says in v.8, the people of the northern kingdom didn’t learn the lesson of Egypt and continued in their harlotries
 - Eventually this caught up with them, as the Lord describes in vs.9-10
 - The Lord called Assyria to attack and conquer the northern kingdom in 722 BC
 - Metaphorically, Assyria exposed Oholah’s nakedness in that the Lord withdrew His protection exposing His people to harm
 - They fell into the angry hand of their lover, and many died by the sword
 - Finally, the Lord says they became a byword
 - The Hebrew word there is *shem*, which simply is the word for name
 - The northern kingdom became known by a name, and that name was Jezebel

- The name of the infamous queen came to represent the entire people... treacherous, evil and ultimately vanquished
- Now Part II, the harlotry of the younger sister, Oholibah

Ezek. 23:11 “Now her sister Oholibah saw this, yet she was more corrupt in her lust than she, and her harlotries were more than the harlotries of her sister.

Ezek. 23:12 “She lusted after the Assyrians, governors and officials, the ones near, magnificently dressed, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men.

Ezek. 23:13 “I saw that she had defiled herself; they both took the same way.

Ezek. 23:14 “So she increased her harlotries. And she saw men portrayed on the wall, images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermillion,

Ezek. 23:15 girded with belts on their loins, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them looking like officers, like the Babylonians in Chaldea, the land of their birth.

Ezek. 23:16 “When she saw them she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea.

Ezek. 23:17 “The Babylonians came to her to the bed of love and defiled her with their harlotry. And when she had been defiled by them, she became disgusted with them.

Ezek. 23:18 “She uncovered her harlotries and uncovered her nakedness; then I became disgusted with her, as I had become disgusted with her sister.

Ezek. 23:19 “Yet she multiplied her harlotries, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the harlot in the land of Egypt.

Ezek. 23:20 “She lusted after their paramours, whose flesh is like the flesh of donkeys and whose issue is like the issue of horses.

Ezek. 23:21 “Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians handled your bosom because of the breasts of your youth.

- Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Judah may have been late to this party, but in the end they did even worse than their northern sibling
 - She saw what the northern kingdom did and how it was judged and yet persisted in following after the same things
 - Like the northern kingdom, the southern kingdom eventually tried to enter into an alliance with Assyria to battle a common enemy, Egypt
 - That alliance resulted in King Josiah dying in battle against Egypt at Megiddo
 - But as Judah became more familiar with the Assyrian military culture, and later Babylonian culture, they fell in love with its power
 - In vs.14-15 the Lord describes how some in Israel saw murals in Babylon and Assyria depicting military might in all their regalia
 - The imperial splendor of the Chaldeans was unequalled in the world

- Babylon's hanging gardens are one of the seven wonders of the ancient world
- And Israel lusted after it all
 - Their fascination led Judah's final set of evil kings to become entangled with the idolatry of Chaldean culture
 - The Lord says the harlot Oholibah allowed the Babylonians to take her in prostitution
 - By worshipping the idols of Babylon, the people of Judah put themselves in bed with the Babylonians
- But like all adulterous relationships, eventually it goes badly
 - After a time Israel decides that Babylon wasn't the lover they wanted, we're told in v.17
 - So the nation rebelled against this suitor
 - The Lord is describing the king of Judah rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar
 - Seeking to throw off the rule of Babylon, the king of Judah tried establishing a new alliance with Egypt, Babylon's enemy
 - We studied that moment earlier in this study, when the king installed by Nebuchadnezzar rebelled and asked Egypt for help
 - That went poorly for the nation as Babylon's army returned and easily defeated Jerusalem a second time
 - In vs.18-21 the Lord describes that episode as an insatiably lustful woman seeking sex with any man she can find...
 - The stronger and more virulent the man, the better
 - Originally, she went to Babylon because that nation's strength attracted her
 - But now after having exhausted her interest in that man, the Lord says she seeks an even stronger man to take her
 - And she remembers her youthful love for Egypt and returns to that nation because of its strength
- Then in vs.20-21 the Lord describes this relationship in especially strong and graphic language
 - In ancient culture, donkeys and horses were renown for their sex drive in heat and as a result they were metaphors for a hyperactive sexual lust
 - In fact, the Egyptian hieroglyphic for a lustful person is a picture of a horse
 - So the Lord uses that association here to condemn Judah's out-of-control appetite for idolatry
 - He says Judah pursued Egypt's idols with as much zeal as a donkey pursues a mate
 - And they lusted after Egypt's idols like following a horse's "issue"
 - The Hebrew word used for "issue" is the feminine word for bodily fluid, referring to her discharge while in heat
 - So the Lord is describing Israel calling the Egyptian gods to come to her, the

way a mare in heat attracts a stud horse

- All the while the nation thought back to the good ol' days when they were in bed with Egypt in their youth
- So now the Lord moves to the judgment that was coming for Oholibah

Ezek. 23:22 “Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold I will arouse your lovers against you, from whom you were alienated, and I will bring them against you from every side:

Ezek. 23:23 the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them; desirable young men, governors and officials all of them, officers and men of renown, all of them riding on horses.

Ezek. 23:24 ‘They will come against you with weapons, chariots and wagons, and with a company of peoples. They will set themselves against you on every side with buckler and shield and helmet; and I will commit the judgment to them, and they will judge you according to their customs.

Ezek. 23:25 ‘I will set My jealousy against you, that they may deal with you in wrath. They will remove your nose and your ears; and your survivors will fall by the sword. They will take your sons and your daughters; and your survivors will be consumed by the fire.

Ezek. 23:26 ‘They will also strip you of your clothes and take away your beautiful jewels.

Ezek. 23:27 ‘Thus I will make your lewdness and your harlotry brought from the land of Egypt to cease from you, so that you will not lift up your eyes to them or remember Egypt anymore.’

Ezek. 23:28 “For thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I will give you into the hand of those whom you hate, into the hand of those from whom you were alienated.

Ezek. 23:29 ‘They will deal with you in hatred, take all your property, and leave you naked and bare. And the nakedness of your harlotries will be uncovered, both your lewdness and your harlotries.

Ezek. 23:30 ‘These things will be done to you because you have played the harlot with the nations, because you have defiled yourself with their idols.

Ezek. 23:31 ‘You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand.’

Ezek. 23:32 “Thus says the Lord GOD,
‘You will drink your sister’s cup,
Which is deep and wide.
You will be laughed at and held in derision;
It contains much.

Ezek. 23:33 ‘You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow,
The cup of horror and desolation,
The cup of your sister Samaria.

Ezek. 23:34 ‘You will drink it and drain it.

**Then you will gnaw its fragments
And tear your breasts;
for I have spoken,' declares the Lord GOD.**

Ezek. 23:35 “Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, bear now the punishment of your lewdness and your harlotries.’”

- This section of judgment begins with the Lord explaining what Judah’s suitor-turned-enemy, Babylon, would do to them
 - It starts with the Babylonian empire coming against Judah in a third and final attack
 - The various names you see listed in v.23 are the tribes who, along with the Chaldeans, made up the Babylonian empire
 - His point is that the culture that Oholibah found so attractive in the beginning would now be set against Judah
 - And to mock Judah’s love for this culture, notice the Lord’s description of the army in vs.23-24
 - The Lord describes the appearance of the soldiers and their company of equipment as they march on the land
 - It would be like a harlot falling in love with a certain man, admiring his piercing eyes and impressive muscles and strong hands
 - And then that same man turns on the harlot and looks upon her with hatred in his eyes
 - He seizes her with his strong muscles and beats her with those strong hands
 - So the things that Judah admired about Babylon in the beginning will be used by God in judgment against her
 - And the physical harm will be significant
 - Many will lose their lives, but even the survivors will suffer greatly – losing their noses and ears
 - In the ancient Near East, adulteresses were often punished by having their ears and noses cut off
 - Women often wore rings in their noses or ears to attract men
 - So by removing these parts of the body the woman would never again be attractive to a man
 - But apparently, the Babylonians had taken to mutilating prisoners of war in the same way to punish rebellion
- In vs.28-29 the Lord says He will turn Jerusalem over to those Judah has come to hate
 - And like it was with her sister, Oholah, Oholibah’s nakedness will be revealed, meaning the Lord will leave her vulnerable too
 - In v.31 the Lord says all of this is the result of Judah’s willingness to follow her sister’s example of idolatry

- So she will share in her sister's cup of judgment
- In vs.32-34, the Lord uses the metaphor of a drinking cup to represent Judah receiving the wrath of the Lord for her sins
 - This cup is the same one that Judah's sister drank
 - When the Assyrians conquered Israel in the north, the southern kingdom of Judah celebrated their defeat
 - Though they were fellow Jews, Judah saw the northern kingdom as adversaries
 - So their disappearance was a relief for the most part
- Now the Lord is saying they celebrated too soon, because they repeated Israel's sins and so must drink the same cup
 - That cup was deep and wide, indicating it was full of so much wrath they could scarcely consume it all
 - Nevertheless, Oholibah would drain that cup
 - And it would cause people to laugh at her as if she was drunk on God's wrath
 - Imagine a child forced to drink medicine, and it tastes terrible
 - Even worse, the dosage is huge, appearing to be more than the child can consume, yet the child will be required to drink it all
 - And after that, Oholibah will gnaw (or break) the cup into fragments and tear at her breasts
 - The consequences of God's judgment will go beyond the moment and bring tragedy upon tragedy for years to come
 - I remember the feeling the first time I had a colonoscopy and had to drink that prep formula the night before
 - My first thought looking at the large beaker of fluid you have to drink was this is a deep and wide cup
 - I don't have to drink all this, do I?
 - But then the instructions say I needed to drain that cup
 - And the consequences of that cup continued on for some time
- But my experience was a walk in the park compared to the cup Judah was made to drink
 - In v.35 the Lord says they will bear this severe punishment because of their lewdness and harlotry
 - He's speaking about idolatry, of course
 - And it's probably worth remembering the warning the nation received about idolatry in the beginning

Ex. 20:2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Ex. 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

Ex. 20:4 “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

Ex. 20:5 “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Ex. 20:6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

- The Lord made clear that He would respond in jealousy and now we’re seeing just what a jealous God looks like
 - Now if the judgment the Lord is bringing bothers you, then consider the alternative
 - What if God didn’t respond in jealousy to our idolatry?
 - What if He acted ambivalent? What if He just let His wandering people go without a fight?
- For example, how would you feel if your spouse reacted to your infidelity with a shrug?
 - Wouldn’t true love put up a fight?
 - In a ironic turn of events, even though you wandered first, you would feel as if your spouse was the one without love for you
- That’s the situation here between Israel and the Lord
 - The Lord is putting up a fight to keep wandering Israel, His wife
 - And His methods are commensurate with the degree of their wandering
- They’ve pursued idols like a donkey in heat
 - They are enraptured by the idols they see around them
 - So if the Lord is going to bring Israel back to Himself, He must act in jealousy in the strongest possible way
 - His response must break the hold that idols had on Israel’s heart
- So the Lord summarizes the case for that coming judgment, like a prosecutor making his closing argument at trial

Ezek. 23:36 Moreover, the LORD said to me, “Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations.

Ezek. 23:37 “For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. Thus they have committed adultery with their idols and even caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through the fire to them as food.

Ezek. 23:38 “Again, they have done this to Me: they have defiled My sanctuary on the same day and have profaned My sabbaths.

Ezek. 23:39 “For when they had slaughtered their children for their idols, they entered My sanctuary on the same day to profane it; and lo, thus they did within My house.

Ezek. 23:40 “Furthermore, they have even sent for men who come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and lo, they came — for whom you bathed, painted your eyes and decorated yourselves with ornaments;

Ezek. 23:41 and you sat on a splendid couch with a table arranged before it on which you had set My incense and My oil.

Ezek. 23:42 “The sound of a carefree multitude was with her; and drunkards were brought from the wilderness with men of the common sort. And they put bracelets on the hands of the women and beautiful crowns on their heads.

Ezek. 23:43 “Then I said concerning her who was worn out by adulteries, ‘Will they now commit adultery with her when she is thus?’

Ezek. 23:44 “But they went in to her as they would go in to a harlot. Thus they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah, the lewd women.

Ezek. 23:45 “But they, righteous men, will judge them with the judgment of adulteresses and with the judgment of women who shed blood, because they are adulteresses and blood is on their hands.

Ezek. 23:46 “For thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Bring up a company against them and give them over to terror and plunder.

Ezek. 23:47 ‘The company will stone them with stones and cut them down with their swords; they will slay their sons and their daughters and burn their houses with fire.

Ezek. 23:48 ‘Thus I will make lewdness cease from the land, that all women may be admonished and not commit lewdness as you have done.

Ezek. 23:49 ‘Your lewdness will be requited upon you, and you will bear the penalty of worshiping your idols; thus you will know that I am the Lord GOD.’”

- The Lord begins asking Ezekiel to judge these women based on their track record of idolatry
 - They have committed idolatry, and in the process they engaged in the worst practices of that abomination
 - Notice the references in vs.37 & 39 to child sacrifice
 - And between those two references, the Lord reiterates they engaged in idol worship in the temple itself
 - In fact, parents would travel from a high place where they had just killed and literally cooked their children on a sacrificial altar
 - And they went directly into the temple to worship a false idol standing there
 - Doing all this on a Sabbath, which was the day of worship in Israel
 - So they equated Yahweh worship with idol worship and did all these unspeakable things in the course of a normal “church” day
- Furthermore, the nation sought strength in relationship with the pagan nations that surrounded them rather than in the covenant they had with the Lord
 - In vs.40-42 the Lord summarizes their enticing of these foreign suitors, making

themselves as attractive as possible

- Historically, Israel made itself attractive to other nations by dispensing with the requirements of the Law that were intended to make Israel unique
- The Law had as one of its central purposes isolating Israel from the rest of the pagan world
 - The Law made Israel a peculiar people, and it created a separation between God's people and the other nations
 - This made Israel intentionally unattractive to her neighbors
- But when the nation walked away from the Lord and sought to worship the gods of other nations, they needed to make themselves attractive to those neighbors
 - So they made compromise after compromise in setting aside observances of the law
 - In time they had made themselves no different than the pagan nations themselves, which made them an attractive ally
 - But it was a repudiation of the covenant they entered into with the Lord
 - It was like a woman dolling herself up in the way the Lord describes
- But given Israel's track record of spurning her suitors, including the Lord Himself, it's surprising that anyone wanted to align with Israel
 - In vs.43-44 the Lord asks that very question
 - Nevertheless, these nations did go after Israel
- Then in vs.45-49 the Lord pronounces the sentence on the adulteress Israel
 - He says righteous men will judge her, which is a reference to Deuteronomy 22
 - In that chapter of the Law, the Lord spells out how an adulteress is to be handled in Israel
 - She is judged by the righteous elders of Israel, and if she is found to be guilty, she is taken out and stoned to death
 - Here the Lord is making a comparison between idolatry and adultery again
 - Israel is to be punished by Babylon the way an adulteress is punished by elders
 - Notice in vs.46-47 the Lord describes a scene of stoning for a person guilty of adultery
 - He's describing Israel being attacked by Babylon
- Now we move to Chapter 24 and the Lord's report from the front lines of the third attack on Jerusalem

Ezek. 24:1 And the word of the LORD came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, saying,

Ezek. 24:2 "Son of man, write the name of the day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day.

Ezek. 24:3 "Speak a parable to the rebellious house and say to them, 'Thus says

the Lord GOD,

“Put on the pot, put it on and also pour water in it;

Ezek. 24:4 Put in it the pieces,

Every good piece, the thigh and the shoulder;

Fill it with choice bones.

Ezek. 24:5 “Take the choicest of the flock,

And also pile wood under the pot.

Make it boil vigorously.

Also seethe its bones in it.”

Ezek. 24:6 ‘Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD,

“Woe to the bloody city,

To the pot in which there is rust

And whose rust has not gone out of it!

Take out of it piece after piece,

Without making a choice.

Ezek. 24:7 “For her blood is in her midst;

She placed it on the bare rock;

She did not pour it on the ground

To cover it with dust.

Ezek. 24:8 “That it may cause wrath to come up to take vengeance,

I have put her blood on the bare rock,

That it may not be covered.”

Ezek. 24:9 ‘Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD,

“Woe to the bloody city!

I also will make the pile great.

Ezek. 24:10 “Heap on the wood, kindle the fire,

Boil the flesh well

And mix in the spices,

And let the bones be burned.

Ezek. 24:11 “Then set it empty on its coals

So that it may be hot

And its bronze may glow

And its filthiness may be melted in it,

Its rust consumed.

Ezek. 24:12 “She has wearied Me with toil,

Yet her great rust has not gone from her;

Let her rust be in the fire!

Ezek. 24:13 “In your filthiness is lewdness.

Because I would have cleansed you,

Yet you are not clean,

You will not be cleansed from your filthiness again

Until I have spent My wrath on you.

- The chapter begins with another of Ezekiel's precise dates, which tells us this is a new prophecy
 - The date the Lord revealed this to Ezekiel and told him to share it with Israel was January 15, 586 B.C.
 - That date is especially important in this case, because that is the day Nebuchadnezzar began his final siege of Jerusalem
 - This was a momentous day in Israel's history, so devastating that the day is observed to this day in Israel with a special fast
 - And the fact that Ezekiel could declare the day of the siege while it was happening hundreds of miles away further validated his ministry
 - It gave added reason for Israel to believe the rest of his prophecies concerning the future kingdom
 - The song I read is largely self-explanatory
 - It uses the imagery of an earlier chapter to show Israel as meat in a pot being heated up in a judgment fire
 - The pot's rust represents the decay of the hearts of the people
 - The blood of her false sacrifices and from the violence of brother upon brother in the city convicts the people
 - And their bloody judgment was on full display, as blood spilled on a rock, not buried under the sand
 - So that the nations of the world could see God's judgment on display in this event
 - It was a seminal moment in ancient history, something so dramatic that people talked about it for a very long time
 - It was like Israel, the meat in the pot, was being boiled alive
- But then in vs.9-13 the Lord describes turning up the heat even higher
 - The pot gets so hot that even the bones are burned
 - The symbolism is that the devastation of the attack would go beyond what was necessary to capture the city
 - Rather, the army of Nebuchadnezzar has been ordered to show no mercy
 - So when they penetrated the city walls, they took extreme revenge upon the city's inhabitants, showing particular cruelty
 - The effect of this high heat was to consume the rust of the pot
 - Imagine how hot you must heat metal to remove the rust from its surface
 - It has to become almost molten
 - That's the image God uses for how His wrath would hit Israel
 - But the effect of that high heat would be a cleansing of her filthiness, He says in v.13
 - It will be the spending of all of God's wrath against His people

- How much wrath do we think Israel had stored up for itself after doing so much for so long?
- As a final point, the Lord assures the people that this prophecy is coming true as the prophet speaks

Ezek. 24:14 “I, the LORD, have spoken; it is coming and I will act. I will not relent, and I will not pity and I will not be sorry; according to your ways and according to your deeds I will judge you,” declares the Lord GOD.”

- And then to show Israel a sign that Ezekiel’s words are true, the Lord does something extraordinary

Ezek. 24:15 And the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 24:16 “Son of man, behold, I am about to take from you the desire of your eyes with a blow; but you shall not mourn and you shall not weep, and your tears shall not come.

Ezek. 24:17 “Groan silently; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban and put your shoes on your feet, and do not cover your mustache and do not eat the bread of men.”

Ezek. 24:18 So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. And in the morning I did as I was commanded.

Ezek. 24:19 The people said to me, “Will you not tell us what these things that you are doing mean for us?”

Ezek. 24:20 Then I said to them, “The word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 24:21 ‘Speak to the house of Israel, “Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I am about to profane My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes and the delight of your soul; and your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind will fall by the sword.

Ezek. 24:22 ‘You will do as I have done; you will not cover your mustache and you will not eat the bread of men.

Ezek. 24:23 ‘Your turbans will be on your heads and your shoes on your feet. You will not mourn and you will not weep, but you will rot away in your iniquities and you will groan to one another.

Ezek. 24:24 ‘Thus Ezekiel will be a sign to you; according to all that he has done you will do; when it comes, then you will know that I am the Lord GOD.”

- The word of the Lord comes to the prophet again, and this time the Lord says He is about to take from Ezekiel the desire of his eyes
 - That is a Hebrew phrase referring to a man’s wife, so the Lord is saying to Ezekiel that he must be prepared for the sudden death of his wife
 - The Lord is about to take her life

- But as He does, the prophet is not to mourn or weep nor shed tears over her death
- Few men in scripture have been asked to do more difficult things than was asked of Ezekiel
 - In Hebrew and in the East generally, people who lose loved ones were expected to mourn loudly and publicly for a time
 - Mourning publicly was not only a natural thing to do but it was also expected as a way of honoring the departed family member
 - So refraining from mourning was a burden on Ezekiel's heart, and it was an assault on his reputation among the people
 - They would have interpreted his silence as an affront to his wife's honor
- So in v.18 Ezekiel says he told the people what the Lord had told him, and by evening his wife was gone
 - Can you imagine what was going through the man's mind during that day?
 - He knew he had but one day with his wife...he couldn't hide the news from her...he told everyone
 - What was that final day like we wonder? We can only assume his wife was a woman of faith too and knew that she was destined for glory
 - Still, nothing can take away the feeling of loss we instinctively know when we lose someone we love
 - Truly, this was a great burden for Ezekiel to bear
- When the morning comes, Ezekiel does as he is told
 - So in v.19 the people ask the obvious question: why aren't you mourning your wife's death? Tell us what all this means?
 - If he never got their attention before, he certainly has it now
 - And Ezekiel replies Israel is about to lose something they loved as much as a man could love his wife
 - They were about to lose the temple in Jerusalem, something they never thought they would ever lose
 - But in that tragedy, the people in exile respond exactly as Ezekiel did for his wife
 - The people will be in such shock, stupefied by the news, that they won't know how to respond
 - Moreover, in their captivity they won't have the freedom to mourn as they might prefer
 - Their captors will not tolerate it
 - The bottom line is in v.24...Ezekiel is a sign to the people, and what he has experienced will be what they experience
 - Just as God took something dear to Ezekiel, so is the Lord about to take something dear from all Israel

- And just as Ezekiel couldn't express his remorse adequately, so the people of Israel will not have adequate means to mourn their loss
- To end the first half of Ezekiel, the Lord gives Ezekiel another burden...

Ezek. 24:25 'As for you, son of man, will it not be on the day when I take from them their stronghold, the joy of their pride, the desire of their eyes and their heart's delight, their sons and their daughters,

Ezek. 24:26 that on that day he who escapes will come to you with information for your ears?

Ezek. 24:27 'On that day your mouth will be opened to him who escaped, and you will speak and be mute no longer. Thus you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD.'"

- Remember, the prophecy that started this chapter came to Ezekiel on the day the final siege of Jerusalem began
 - That siege lasted about 3 years before the city was captured for the final time
 - Ezekiel has prophesied the start of that siege
 - And now the Lord has told Ezekiel that he must remain entirely mute on this subject until the survivors arrive following the battle
- Ezekiel was not to speak another word concerning the siege of the city until the siege was over
 - He had said all that needed to be said and the people would soon see the truth of it come to pass
 - Once the news reports came to the exiles confirming Ezekiel's prophecies, then the prophet could begin to speak again about Jerusalem
 - The ending of judgment would open the door for Ezekiel to being speaking about Israel's coming glory
- Now that doesn't mean Ezekiel said nothing at all during those three years
 - He was not allowed to speak about Jerusalem and God's judgment against Israel
 - But he could speak about other matters, and so the Lord uses the three years of the siege to tie up loose ends
- Specifically, the Lord gives Ezekiel prophecies about how He will judge her enemies
 - That section serves as a transition between the first half of the book where Israel's judgment was the topic
 - And it bridges us into the second half where Israel's glory will be the focus

- Welcome to Chapter 25 and to the second half of Ezekiel and the third major division of the book
 - Up through Chapter 24, we've followed the circumstances of the prophet Ezekiel living in exile in Babylon with his fellow Jews
 - Ezekiel joined the exiles following a second invasion by Nebuchadnezzar's army
 - He's been in the land for several years already, prophesying to the people of Israel
 - And his message during those years has been one of unrelenting judgment
 - As the Lord directed, Ezekiel told the nation over and over again that their nation was about to suffer a great destruction
 - The nation's centuries of misdeeds have now come home to roost, and God's wrath was about to be poured out on His people
 - The nation would experience one final destructive siege and defeat by Nebuchadnezzar
 - The people in exile heard Ezekiel's warnings and refused to accept their circumstances
 - They ignored him, mocked him and gave excuses
 - They dismissed the warnings
 - And then after nearly a decade, the date of judgment finally came
- As the battle commenced, Ezekiel narrated events to the exiles in real time
 - As the Babylonian army advanced on the city some 500 miles to the west, Ezekiel told the exiles the day of judgment had finally arrived
 - The siege on the city began on January 15, 588 BC, and lasted three years until January 8, 585 BC
 - And during that time the people of Israel suffered unimaginably
 - And as the city fell for the final time and the remaining Jews were either killed or enslaved, Israel's enemies celebrated
 - For all who witnessed these events, the end of the nation seemed at hand
 - Who could recover from such a devastating defeat?
 - How could the people of Israel survive much less regain their place in the land?
 - Certainly, that's what Israel's enemies thought and it's also what many of the exiles believed as well
 - As the reader reaches the end Chapter 24, we're also left wondering for the fate of the nation?
 - The prophet has set up the prospect of Israel's end at the hands of an angry God
 - Yet he's also alluded to future glory according to the promises made in the covenants
 - So which will it be? Devastation or glory?

- As it turns out, the answer is both: devastation *then* glory
- But because the battle last three years, the prophet spends that time speaking prophecies against Israel's enemies who mocked her judgment
 - That's the section we enter into now, and it runs from Chapters 25-32
 - It's a bridge between the messages of judgment and visions of Israel's glory in the Kingdom to come
 - And it answers a fundamental concern for the Jewish people
 - How can God deal with His own people in this way while leaving Israel's enemies untouched?
 - So to fill the time between the beginning and end of Israel's destruction, Ezekiel reassures the exiles that Israel's enemies won't escape
 - As the Lord was at work enforcing the terms of Israel's covenant, He was also fulfilling His covenant to Abraham
 - Specifically, the Lord told Abraham in Genesis 12:3 that He would curse those who cursed Israel
 - In fact, the Law itself promises that as God brings Israel out of exile and into glory, He will also move against Israel's enemies

Deut. 30:4 If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you.

Deut. 30:5 And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.

Deut. 30:6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

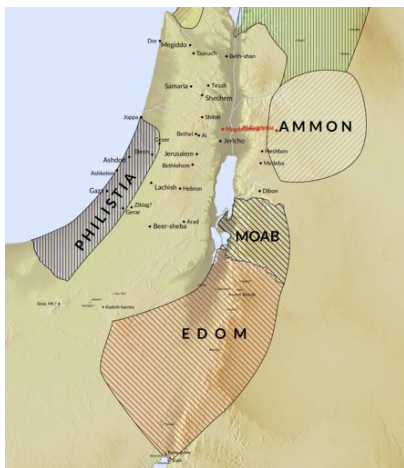
Deut. 30:7 And the LORD your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you.

Deut. 30:8 And you shall again obey the voice of the LORD and keep all his commandments that I command you today.

- So the Lord connects three major events in His plan for Israel
 - First, the nation will be regathered into her land
 - Secondly, the entire nation of Israel will – for the first time – have hearts that perfectly obey the Lord
 - And thirdly, the nation will live in peace and prosperity having seen all its enemies conquered
 - All of these things happen at a point in time and bring to fulfillment all of God's promises
- Overall, the Bible lists 11 nations or people groups who were enemies of Israel and will

be judged for their role in opposing God's people

- Those nations were Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, Egypt, Damascus, Babylon, Ethiopia, and Assyria
 - Ezekiel speaks against seven of these, while the rest are covered by other prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, or the minor prophets
 - In fact, of all the prophets in the Bible, only Hosea says nothing about Israel's enemies
 - So God's promises to deal with Israel's enemies is a major part of prophecy
- Ezekiel and Jeremiah each prophesy against Israel's enemies, though each deals with only seven of the 11
 - That makes sense when you remember that the number 7 in Scripture is the number for completeness (i.e., 100%)
 - So by listing seven, the Lord promises He will judge 100% of Israel's enemies
 - Interestingly, Ezekiel's treatment of Israel's enemies differs somewhat from other prophets
- First, Ezekiel doesn't speak a prophecy against the most obvious enemy of his day: Babylon
 - Why didn't the Lord give him a prophecy against the country holding Israel captive at the time?
 - Perhaps it was meant to protect God's people
 - Speaking a prophecy of judgment against Babylon while in captivity might have been dangerous for the exiles
- Secondly, Ezekiel doesn't mention any opportunity for future repentance and redemption for the people of these nations
 - But we know from other Scriptures this does happen
 - The Lord will save some people out of all these nations and in many cases the nations are re-established in the Kingdom
- In the first chapter, the Lord hands out judgment to four of the seven nations
 - Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia are mentioned in order, which is a clockwise pattern around Israel proceeding from east to west
 - The remaining three nations – Tyre, Sidon and Egypt – get substantially more text in Chapters 26-32
 - These differences in treatment in the text generally reflects the relative importance of each enemy in corrupting Israel
 - The corruption of Egyptians and the Philistines were far more damaging to Israel than that of the Ammonites or Moabites
 - See Map below:



- Turning to Chapter 25, each of the four nations judged in this chapter follow a consistent pattern
 - Each has an introduction, the Lord's charge or indictment, a declaration of punishment and the result of the judgment
 - And the list begins with Ammon

Ezek. 25:1 And the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 25:2 “Son of man, set your face toward the sons of Ammon and prophesy against them,

Ezek. 25:3 and say to the sons of Ammon, ‘Hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD, “Because you said, ‘Aha!’ against My sanctuary when it was profaned, and against the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and against the house of Judah when they went into exile,

Ezek. 25:4 therefore, behold, I am going to give you to the sons of the east for a possession, and they will set their encampments among you and make their dwellings among you; they will eat your fruit and drink your milk.

Ezek. 25:5 “I will make Rabbah a pasture for camels and the sons of Ammon a resting place for flocks. Thus you will know that I am the LORD.”

Ezek. 25:6 ‘For thus says the Lord GOD, “Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the scorn of your soul against the land of Israel,

Ezek. 25:7 therefore, behold, I have stretched out My hand against you and I will give you for spoil to the nations. And I will cut you off from the peoples and make you perish from the lands; I will destroy you. Thus you will know that I am the LORD.”

- You may remember back in Chapter 21 Ezekiel gave an earlier judgment against Ammon when he spoke about the song of the sword

- That chapter explained how the destruction of the city was not a random act of Israel's enemies
 - Rather it was the conscious choice of Israel's God to bring judgment against His people
 - It was as if His sword was falling on them
- And at the end of the chapter, the Lord added that it would also fall on Ammon for their part in rejoicing over Israel's fall and plundering the land
 - That oracle of judgment was added to the text of 21 because of the Ammonite's unique connection to the fall of Jerusalem
 - They were standing by in the midst of the city's destruction to pick up the pieces
 - And so they were the first nation judged by God
- The Lord says they said "Aha" against the sanctuary of God
 - Their statement is one of trump and gloating
 - It suggests opportunity for the Ammonites to gain from Israel's loss
 - And so the Lord says in their desire to profit from Israel's misery, the Lord would take away the nation altogether
- The Lord says this nation will be overrun by the sons of the east, referring to the Babylonians
 - Sure enough, the Babylonian army destroyed the nation in the course of Nebuchadnezzar's reign
 - Leaving it to Bedouins to settle, as the Lord describes in v.4
- In fact, the Jordanians who occupy the territory today are the descendants of those Bedouins
 - The capital of Jordan, Amman, is located on the site of ancient Rabbah, mentioned in v.5
 - And in the centuries after Israel's captivity, the city of Rabbah lay in ruins and was nothing more than pasture
 - In these things, the survivors of Ammon in Ezekiel's day could say that Israel's God is the Lord
 - The nation became spoil for other nations
- Now there is more to be said about Ammon historically, because although the nation was destroyed in Ezekiel's time, the nation will return again
 - In a show of mercy to the Ammonite people, the Lord tells us in Jeremiah that He will bring a remnant into the Kingdom

Jer. 49:3 "Wail, O Heshbon, for Ai has been destroyed!"

**Cry out, O daughters of Rabbah,
Gird yourselves with sackcloth and lament,**

And rush back and forth inside the walls;
 For Malcam will go into exile
 Together with his priests and his princes.

Jer. 49:4 “How boastful you are about the valleys!

Your valley is flowing away,
 O backsliding daughter
 Who trusts in her treasures, saying,
 ‘Who will come against me?’

Jer. 49:5 “Behold, I am going to bring terror upon you,”

Declares the Lord GOD of hosts,
 “From all directions around you;
 And each of you will be driven out headlong,
 With no one to gather the fugitives together.

Jer. 49:6 “But afterward I will restore
 The fortunes of the sons of Ammon,”
 Declares the LORD.

- After the destruction that Ezekiel describes, the Lord alludes to a time when the fortunes of the Ammorites will be restored
- The Lord says a similar thing about Ammon and others of Israel’s enemies in Jeremiah 46

Jer. 46:25 The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, says, “Behold, I am going to punish Amon of Thebes, and Pharaoh, and Egypt along with her gods and her kings, even Pharaoh and those who trust in him.

Jer. 46:26 “I shall give them over to the power of those who are seeking their lives, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of his officers. Afterwards, however, it will be inhabited as in the days of old,” declares the LORD.

- Notice again the Lord says “afterwards” the people of Amon (along with others) will return as in the days of old
- That is a reference to the Kingdom, in which Israel lives in the land as do the countries that were formally her enemies
- Moving on to the next enemy, Moab:

Ezek. 25:8 ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Because Moab and Seir say, ‘Behold, the house of Judah is like all the nations,’

Ezek. 25:9 therefore, behold, I am going to deprive the flank of Moab of its cities, of its cities which are on its frontiers, the glory of the land, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon and Kiriathaim,

Ezek. 25:10 and I will give it for a possession along with the sons of Ammon to the sons of the east, so that the sons of Ammon will not be remembered among the nations.

Ezek. 25:11 “Thus I will execute judgments on Moab, and they will know that I am the LORD.”

- The Moabites lived directly east of Israel on the other side of the Jordan in present day Jordan
 - The destiny of Ammon and Moab are linked in Scripture
 - Both originated from the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters
 - Both opposed Israel from the beginning, and here we see them sharing a similar fate
 - Their offense in this case was in viewing Judah as no more important than any other nation
 - When Judah fell, they didn't get the message that the Lord had acted against His own people
 - They simply concluded that Judah was a victim of Babylon like the rest of the world
 - Like Ammon, they took delight in Judah's downfall
- Yet they of all peoples (Ammon, Moab and Seir which is Edom) should have appreciated better than anyone else that God's people were unique
 - Because these three people groups were unblessed branches of Abraham's family
 - Edomites came from Esau while Ammon and Moab came from Lot
 - Yet they refused to see how the Lord took pride in Judah as His people
 - So as judgment, the Lord takes away the pride of their Moabites, which were their cities on the border with Israel
 - Beth-jeshimoth lay in the Jordan Valley and guarded the eastern ascent to the Medeba Plateau
 - Baal-meon stood farther to the east and south in northern Moab
 - Kiriathaim, meaning “glory of the land”, was another northern town on the Medeba Plateau
 - Notice the Lord used similar words in v.9 to mock the Moab's pride and to confirm to this nation that Yahweh is the Lord
- Like Ammon, this prophecy was fulfilled during the time Israel spent in exile
 - Babylon also wiped out the nation of Moab, while Bedouins took their place
 - And like Ammon, this nation will too return to the land in the time of the Kingdom

Jer. 48:46 “Woe to you, Moab!

**The people of Chemosh have perished;
For your sons have been taken away captive
And your daughters into captivity.**

Jer. 48:47 “Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab

In the latter days,” declares the LORD. Thus far the judgment on Moab.

- The nation of Moab will see its fortunes restored in the Kingdom
- What people will inhabit these nations?
 - In many cases, it will be Jews because these lands are actually within the borders of Israel in the Kingdom
 - In other cases, the lands fall outside the borders of Israel, in which case the lands will be occupied by Gentile believers
- Those Gentile believers may include those believers who once lived in the land during their lifetime
 - Or perhaps the Lord will populate the land with other Gentiles based on His rewards for those individuals
 - We’ll come back to that question in later chapters dealing with the Kingdom
- The next nation the Lord judges is Edom, the nation that descended from Esau

Ezek. 25:12 ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Because Edom has acted against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and has incurred grievous guilt, and avenged themselves upon them,”

Ezek. 25:13 therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “I will also stretch out My hand against Edom and cut off man and beast from it. And I will lay it waste; from Teman even to Dedan they will fall by the sword.

Ezek. 25:14 “I will lay My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel. Therefore, they will act in Edom according to My anger and according to My wrath; thus they will know My vengeance,” declares the Lord GOD.

- Edom is located southeast of Israel in present-day southern Jordan
 - The Edomites have the longest history of any enemy of Israel, going all the way back to Esau himself who opposed his brother Jacob
 - Later, the nation of Edom joined in the battle with the Babylonians to fight against Judah
 - Notice in v.12 Ezekiel says they took vengeance which is a reference to fighting Israel when it was already down
 - Amos describes it this way

Amos 1:11 Thus says the LORD,

**“For three transgressions of Edom and for four
I will not revoke its punishment,
Because he pursued his brother with the sword,
While he stifled his compassion;
His anger also tore continually,
And he maintained his fury forever.**

**Amos 1:12 “So I will send fire upon Teman
And it will consume the citadels of Bozrah.”**

- Amos says the Edomites pursued their “brothers” with the sword
 - Here again, the Edomites should have been sympathetic to Judah since they had a blood relationship through Isaac
 - That made their treachery all the worse
 - And their sin of pursuing Judah with the sword was also more grievous than the Ammonites or Moabites who merely gloated
- So the Lord says He will cut off all living things from this land, both man and beast
 - This is a different judgment than the first two we’ve seen
 - In the case of Ammon and Moab, the nations were destroyed but Bedouins took over the land
 - Yet in the case of Edom, nothing would inhabit the land again
 - It would become a desolate wasteland
 - This judgment has yet to happen, which tells us that it remains in the future
 - And when we consult other Scriptures, we come to find that this punishment will be handed out in the Kingdom
 - That is this land will be uninhabited in the time of the Kingdom...no man nor beast shall live there...only demons

Jer. 49:17 “Edom will become an object of horror; everyone who passes by it will be horrified and will hiss at all its wounds.

Jer. 49:18 “Like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah with its neighbors,” says the LORD, “no one will live there, nor will a son of man reside in it.

- Once again, the context of Jeremiah 49 is speaking of the times of the end of the age
- So this is a prophecy of the nature of these lands in the time of the Millennial Kingdom
- Isaiah 34 gives us the details to explain how the land is judged in that day

Is. 34:1 Draw near, O nations, to hear; and listen, O peoples!

Let the earth and all it contains hear, and the world and all that springs from it.

Is. 34:2 For the LORD’S indignation is against all the nations,

**And His wrath against all their armies;
He has utterly destroyed them,
He has given them over to slaughter.**
Is. 34:3 So their slain will be thrown out,
**And their corpses will give off their stench,
And the mountains will be drenched with their blood.**
Is. 34:4 And all the host of heaven will wear away,
**And the sky will be rolled up like a scroll;
All their hosts will also wither away
As a leaf withers from the vine,
Or as one withers from the fig tree.**

- Clearly the chapter opens speaking of the events of the last days and the end of this age, specifically the end of Tribulation
 - Corpses everywhere (v.3), mountains drenched in blood
 - In v.4 the sky will be rolled away, the hosts of the sky (sun, moon, stars) wither
 - These are details that confirm that the timing of judgment God promised for Edom is at the end of Tribulation
 - This is when the judgments previously promised come to pass

Is. 34:5 For My sword is satiated in heaven,
**Behold it shall descend for judgment upon Edom
And upon the people whom I have devoted to destruction.**

- Then we read descriptions of what the land will be like in that day

Is. 34:8 For the LORD has a day of vengeance,
A year of recompense for the cause of Zion.
Is. 34:9 Its streams will be turned into pitch,
**And its loose earth into brimstone,
And its land will become burning pitch.**
Is. 34:10 It will not be quenched night or day;
**Its smoke will go up forever.
From generation to generation it will be desolate;
None will pass through it forever and ever.**

- The land itself resembles descriptions of Hell itself
 - Non-stop burning, unquenched day and night
 - Smoke going up forever, remaining desolate
 - And none passing through it, meaning none can leave

- Finally, Isaiah says there are inhabitants in that land, but they are neither man nor beast

Is. 34:14 The desert creatures will meet with the wolves,
The hairy goat also will cry to its kind;
Yes, the night monster will settle there
And will find herself a resting place.

Is. 34:15 The tree snake will make its nest and lay eggs there,
And it will hatch and gather them under its protection.
Yes, the hawks will be gathered there,
Every one with its kind.

- At first it sounds like the land does have animals after all
- But remember other Scripture tells us that this is not the case, so we must reconcile these two passages without contradiction
- In this case, the Hebrew words Isaiah uses helps us solve the riddle
- Isaiah mentions hawks, wolves, hairy goats, a “night monster”, and a snake in a tree
 - Three of these animals have clear links to demons
 - First, the Hebrew word for “hairy goat” actually means demons in goat form when literally translated
 - And it’s no coincidence that satanists worship a symbol of a hairy goat with horns
- And the word translated night monster could be translated night demon also
 - Finally, the tree snake seems like an allusion to Satan himself, brooding over his demon angels
 - The other references to wolves and hawks could likewise be seen as symbolic for demons that hunt for prey though we have no confirmation of this
- Since we know that there will be no “beasts” in the land, these animals must refer to Satan and his demons
 - This makes sense because we know that Satan and his agents will not have free reign during the Kingdom

Rev. 20:1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.

Rev. 20:2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;

Rev. 20:3 and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

- At the beginning of the Kingdom, the Lord binds Satan (and by extension, his demons) in a place called the Abyss

- The Abyss is located in the earth like Hell, and also like Hell, the Abyss is a place of confinement
- The Abyss is the place the Lord confines especially wicked demons while they await their final day of judgment
- Just as Hell is the place God confines the spirits of unbelievers until the day of their judgment
- The devil and his demons will be set free for a short time at the end of the Millennial Kingdom
 - And therefore, the Abyss will have some channel or portal on the earth giving passage for the devil to exit the Abyss
 - That passageway will vent smoke, Isaiah says, throughout the time of the Kingdom, pointing the way to the Abyss
- And Revelation confirms that detail
 - At a point in time near the middle of Tribulation, the Lord allows some of the demons confined in the Abyss to exit
 - As the Abyss is opened, we see smoke rising just as Isaiah described

Rev. 9:1 Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him.

Rev. 9:2 He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.

- So based on Revelation's and Isaiah's descriptions, the location for the entrance to the Abyss during the Kingdom will be in ancient Edom
 - And in that place we find the home of demons and no one else
 - The initial destruction of the land takes place at the hands of the Jewish people in armed conflict
 - This has never happened in history, so it must refer to a moment in Tribulation at the Second Coming of Christ
- Finally, the fourth peoples to be judged: Philistia or the land of the Philistines

Ezek. 25:15 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Because the Philistines have acted in revenge and have taken vengeance with scorn of soul to destroy with everlasting enmity,"

Ezek. 25:16 therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will stretch out My hand against the Philistines, even cut off the Cherethites and destroy the remnant of the seacoast.

Ezek. 25:17 "I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes; and they will know that I am the LORD when I lay My vengeance on them."'''

- The area of Philistia occupies the Mediterranean coast in an area today called the Gaza Strip and a little north to the port of Joppa (Jaffe today)
 - The Philistines originated in Crete and were known as Cherethites
 - They settled along the coastal plains and occupied five key city-states
 - They were a warring people and drove the Israelites out of that region leaving Israel to hold the Shephelah foothills and mountains of Judea
 - They were the cause of the Dainties migrating north, and they tormented Saul and David
 - They effectively cut off half of Israel by barring access to the sea coast
 - So the Lord says he will cut them off from the land, which is a play on words with their name
 - The root of the word Cherethite means to cut off
 - As the Lord promised, the Philistines went extinct
 - There is no record of them after the second century BC
 - Only the names of their cities remain today, include Gath and Ashdod and Ashqelon, all modern Jewish cities
 - There is no mention of them in the Kingdom, because their lands lay entirely inside Israel's land
 - So they can have no territory in the Kingdom
- The Lord says He does all these things to demonstrate He is the Lord to these peoples
 - Ultimately, that demonstration will be known in eternity
 - Both those under the judgments and those who receive mercy will see the impact of the Lord's work
 - Obviously, those who suffered His judgment will have no choice but to acknowledge that the Lord is God and they are under His wrath
 - And those who receive His grace will see evidence of His judgment in the geo-political boundaries of the Kingdom
 - Even the rising smoke in Edom will remind us of their ultimate judgment
 - So what do these judgments teach the nations of *our* world, especially as it relates to our treatment of the nation of Israel?
 - Obviously, the Lord takes note of how any group of Gentiles approaches God's people, Israel
 - These certain nations have been singled out in Scripture for their historical relationships to their neighbor
 - But in light of God's words spoken to Abraham, it would make sense to conclude that the same principle is at work in the world
 - That those who respect Israel, who mourn when she mourns and rejoice when she rejoices, are pleasing God's heart
 - And if we respond otherwise to the plight of the Jewish people, we risk incurring

the wrath of God as well

- But it's also important to distinguish between Biblical Israel and the current political state of Israel
 - Biblically speaking, the nation of Israel are all Jews in general, wherever they live
 - And certainly that includes Jews living in the modern political state of Israel
 - But by the same token, the modern political state does not define what supporting the Jewish "nation" means
 - Supporting God's Israel does not necessarily mean supporting every political decision made by those who govern the state of Israel today
 - That's especially true if political compromise decided to return Jewish land to Arabs, etc.
 - We know the Lord will eventually bring all Israel into the land and give His people what He promised
 - In the meantime, we should find solidarity with the Jewish people in the same way that Rahab comforted the spies
 - And in the way Ruth attached herself to the future of Israel
 - Obviously, those who have faith in Christ receive no condemnation, regardless of how they behave toward Israel
 - But we still must consider our treatment of the Jewish nation as part of our Christian testimony
 - I believe most (if not all) who believe in Jesus will find love in their hearts for the Jewish nation
 - But as the Lord made clear in His testimony tonight, He will make those who oppose His people into testimonies one way or another
 - He wants the world to know that the One true God is the God of Israel
 - Let us be testimonies of obedience to His word by our love for the Jewish people rather than as testimonies of God's wrath



Ezekiel - Lesson 26-27

Chapter 26; 27:1-24

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- Let's continue through the oracles against the enemies of Israel
 - This is the third major section of Ezekiel and runs through Chapter 32
 - In this section, the Lord explains to captive Israel how He plans to judge the nation's long-time enemies
 - Israel was suffering under its own judgment for their sins
 - So it was important for the Lord to explain how Israel's enemies would be judged as well
 - So that the nation would not suppose that the Lord was dealing unfairly with them
 - In his prophecies, Ezekiel addresses seven of Israel's eleven historical enemies
 - Most of these prophecies are fulfilled in Ezekiel's time as these nations suffered destruction at the hands of the Babylonians
 - So the same army that captured Judah also conquered many of Israel's surrounding neighbors
 - But some of these prophecies relate to events of the future
 - Specifically, some countries aren't fully judged until they enter into the Kingdom
 - In that future day, they will see the full measure of what the Lord has planned for them
 - So that a testimony of what happens to those who oppose God's people will persist into the Kingdom period
 - And as we saw last week, these future judgments also include Israel's ultimate enemy, Satan
- In Chapter 25 last week, we studied the prophecies for four of the seven enemies: Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia
 - This week, we move to the fifth of these enemies, Tyre

Ezek. 26:1 Now in the eleventh year, on the first of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 26:2 “Son of man, because Tyre has said concerning Jerusalem, ‘Aha, the gateway of the peoples is broken; it has opened to me. I shall be filled, now that she is laid waste,’

- Ezekiel says this prophecy came to him in the eleventh month of the eleventh year
 - Which means this oracle came to Ezekiel two years into Nebuchadnezzar's three-year siege of Jerusalem around 587-586 BC
 - It consists of seven prophecies altogether, including four in this chapter
 - Together, they promise a coming judgment for the people of Tyre because they rejoiced at Jerusalem's fall
- In v.2 the Lord says the city saw Jerusalem's fall as opportunity, as all ruthless business-minded people would

- The ruin of Judah meant increased opportunity for Tyre, as if a competitor had gone out of business
- Tyre was the undisputed trading power over sea, but Judah controlled valuable land trading routes to the East and Arabia
- But now the Babylonians had “opened the gateway” for Tyre to trade with the East without competition
- The prophets Amos and Joel also record that the Tyrians profited from selling Jewish slaves to Greeks and Edomites
- So what follows are a series of prophecies against the Tyrians, including a few interesting characters in coming chapters
 - The name Tyre means rock and it was the most impressive city of the Phoenician peoples
 - We don’t talk much about the city today, but it was all the talk in Ezekiel’s day
 - In fact, Tyre’s prophecies run three chapters, reflecting its importance in the ancient world
 - Tyre possessed unique geography which is reflected in the oracle
 - It was located on the coast of present-day Lebanon just north of the Israeli border and about 35 miles from the Sea of Galilee
 - Part of the city was on the Mediterranean coast and was known as “Old Tyre”
 - But the main part of the city – the most impressive part – was located one kilometer offshore on a rocky outcropping in the Mediterranean
 - The island had two excellent harbors, including perhaps the best harbor in all the Mediterranean
 - As a result, Tyre was the center of a great commercial and colonial empire
 - From their port, the city oversaw the movement of trade throughout the ancient world and facilitated the conquest of many peoples
 - Nations could purchase almost any imaginable commodity from Tyre, including raw materials, basic commodities, luxury goods and even mercenary armies
 - Ironically, the remnant of Israel that returns from Persia under Zerubbabel bought cedar from Tyre to rebuild the temple

Ezra 3:7 Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians, to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

- Naturally, the city was very wealthy
 - It had stunning architecture, a wealthy business class
 - And it sat in the perfect location from which to profit from the movement of goods
 - In modern terms, it was like New York City, Singapore or Hong Kong
- The island was also heavily fortified making it nearly impenetrable

- As a result, the Israelites never conquered Tyre
 - Throughout the centuries that followed, the Tyrians were a thorn in Israel's side but more so as competitors than enemies
 - The Tyrians sought to profit at Israel's expense by dominating trade and making it difficult for Israel to buy goods
- In Ezekiel's day, Tyre remained independent but Babylon, the reigning super power, was intent on world domination, and Tyre was too desirable to ignore
 - So the Lord says Nebuchadnezzar will set his sights on defeating the island stronghold

Ezek. 26:3 therefore thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves.

Ezek. 26:4 'They will destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; and I will scrape her debris from her and make her a bare rock.

Ezek. 26:5 'She will be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken,' declares the Lord GOD, 'and she will become spoil for the nations.

Ezek. 26:6 'Also her daughters who are on the mainland will be slain by the sword, and they will know that I am the LORD.'"

- The Lord promises to bring "many nations" against Tyre in "waves" drawing upon the image of the ocean to mock the Tyrian's dominance of the sea
 - Various world powers would conquer the island one after another like waves rolling in
 - Each power would hold the island for a while until its power began to wane and then Tyre would reassert its independence
 - Until the next power would rise and reconquer the island
 - First came the Babylonians followed by the Persians, Greeks, Romans and the Ottomans who finally put an end to Tyre
 - Alexander the great was the first to breach the defenses of the island itself
 - When Alexander's army arrived in 332 BC, they faced walls rising 150 ft straight out of the sea
 - There was literally no way to breach them, so Alexander's army blockaded the island for seven months
 - And during that time, his army built a 1km earthen causeway in an attempt to connect the island to the mainland
 - In the end, he couldn't complete the causeway due to deep water and the city's counter attacks
 - So Alexander positioned his artillery at the end of the causeway, which was now close enough to bombard the city and weaken its defenses
 - Meanwhile, his vast naval fleet came against the city walls with floating battering rams testing the walls
 - Once he breached the wall, his army took the city easily

- Because of the length and difficulty of the siege, Alexander took out his revenge on the people of Tyre
- Over 6,000 soldiers died in the city, 2,000 Tyrians were crucified on the beach and 30,000 were sold as slaves
- During the centuries that followed, the causeway grew
 - Ocean tides deposited silt along the southern side of the causeway filling the harbor of one of its ports
 - Eventually the silting process connected the island to the mainland
 - Today the island is just a feature of the Lebanese coast line!
- In v.4 the Lord promises this would happen: He says He will bring down Tyre's walls and defensive towers
 - And He will scrape the city clean making her as barren as a rock
 - Of course, He's describing Alexander's invasion and subsequent destruction of the city
 - Remembering the name of the city means "rock", we see the Lord is using more irony to mock the city
 - In v.5 He says in contrast to its illustrious past, Tyre would become known for little more than as a place to lay out fishing nets
 - Fisherman would ground their boats on the shore and dry their nets on what was left of Tyre
 - The city will have become spoil for other nations rather than a place that profited from distributing the world's spoil
 - Furthermore the daughters of Tyre, the mainland towns that depended on her, would be attacked as well
 - That was merely the overview of what's coming, so now we get a detailed description of the first wave by Babylon

Ezek. 26:7 For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will bring upon Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, chariots, cavalry and a great army.

Ezek. 26:8 "He will slay your daughters on the mainland with the sword; and he will make siege walls against you, cast up a ramp against you and raise up a large shield against you.

Ezek. 26:9 "The blow of his battering rams he will direct against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers.

Ezek. 26:10 "Because of the multitude of his horses, the dust raised by them will cover you; your walls will shake at the noise of cavalry and wagons and chariots when he enters your gates as men enter a city that is breached.

Ezek. 26:11 "With the hoofs of his horses he will trample all your streets. He will slay your people with the sword; and your strong pillars will come down to the ground.

Ezek. 26:12 "Also they will make a spoil of your riches and a prey of your merchandise, break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses, and

throw your stones and your timbers and your debris into the water.

Ezek. 26:13 “So I will silence the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps will be heard no more.

Ezek. 26:14 “I will make you a bare rock; you will be a place for the spreading of nets. You will be built no more, for I the LORD have spoken,” declares the Lord GOD.

- The first wave would be Babylon, which happened immediately after the final siege of Jerusalem
 - Remember, this oracle came one year before that siege ended, so within a very short time the prophet’s accuracy was verified
 - In the same year, 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar’s great army approached the coastal city of Old Tyre and began to attack
 - As the Lord says, Nebuchadnezzar made siege walls and ramps and breeched the walls, destroying the defensive towers
 - His huge number of horses will kick up so much dust that it coats the city and people
 - The walls shake at the sound of so many cavalry
 - They will trample down the city and people
 - And all the city’s riches would be hauled off and their ability to conduct commerce ruined
 - Notice in v.12 the Lord says that after the city’s destruction, the rubble would be thrown into the sea
 - That’s a very labor-intensive process
 - So under most circumstances, an invading army wouldn’t take the time to do something so useless
 - Unless there was a good purpose in doing so
 - The Lord fulfilled this promise through Alexander the Great, who used that rubble to help construct his causeway
 - But also notice back in v.6 that all this destruction would be against Tyre’s “daughters” on the mainland
 - Nebuchadnezzar never breached the walls of the island city
 - Instead, he blockaded it for 13 years, putting a stop to the city’s commerce, and eventually forcing the city to sue for peace
 - In 573 BC, the island surrendered and became a vassal of Babylon paying tribute taxes to Nebuchadnezzar
 - Finally, the Lord says the coastal towns will never again be built
 - The statement in Hebrew could be better translated “will not be built-up again” as in built to the same level of prominence
 - And that is historically accurate
 - All the settlements that followed were small and insignificant compared to the original towns

- Then the Lord explains how this destruction will impact Tyre's customers

Ezek. 26:15 Thus says the Lord GOD to Tyre, “Shall not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall when the wounded groan, when the slaughter occurs in your midst?

Ezek. 26:16 “Then all the princes of the sea will go down from their thrones, remove their robes and strip off their embroidered garments. They will clothe themselves with trembling; they will sit on the ground, tremble every moment and be appalled at you.

Ezek. 26:17 “They will take up a lamentation over you and say to you, ‘How you have perished, O inhabited one, From the seas, O renowned city, Which was mighty on the sea, She and her inhabitants, Who imposed her terror On all her inhabitants!

Ezek. 26:18 ‘Now the coastlands will tremble On the day of your fall; Yes, the coastlands which are by the sea Will be terrified at your passing.’”

- So much of the ancient world depended on the materials that flowed through Tyre
 - So to see this trading center destroyed was too much to bear
 - Also, many other settlements around the Mediterranean region were vassals of Tyre and depended on Tyre for protection
 - The Tyrians had been the first to explore the Mediterranean by sea, reaching to Spain and beyond
- So seeing this commercial center brought low shook every region of the known world
 - If Tyre could be defeated, then no one was safe
 - Moreover, Tyre's trade upon which the world's rich and powerful depended was also at risk
 - Babylon's rise to dominance was a groundbreaking change in ancient times
- So Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of Tyre was proof that the world was changing, and in vs.17-18 they sing a lament over Tyre
 - It begins by remembering her greatness, which led the world to assume she was unassailable
 - And then it ends with the astonishment of her fall
 - All this is ironic since it was Tyre's gloating over Jerusalem's fall that brought about this judgment
- It's also ironic in another, prophetic way
 - In a future day during the Tribulation, a similar set of circumstances take place, only in reverse

- Babylon will be the victim of God's judgment, and yet the world will react in the same way

Rev. 18:1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory.

Rev. 18:2 And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.

Rev. 18:7 "To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I SIT as A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.'

Rev. 18:8 "For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.

Rev. 18:9 "And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning,

Rev. 18:10 standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'

Rev. 18:11 "And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more —

Rev. 18:12 cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble,

Rev. 18:13 and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives.

Rev. 18:14 "The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will no longer find them.

Rev. 18:15 "The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning,

Rev. 18:16 saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls;

Rev. 18:17 for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!' And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance,

Rev. 18:18 and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What city is like the great city?'

Rev. 18:19 "And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping

and mourning, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!’

Rev. 18:20 “Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.”

- Notice how the world’s rich again lament the loss of their riches and way of life
- But equally, they mourn the notion that all they depended upon could be taken from them so quickly
- That’s the more fundamental aspect in this judgment
 - The world places its trust in riches, in the rewards that this world offers
 - Every human being can find enjoyment in the things of this world, including believers, and that’s not a problem
 - But the unbelieving world places its trust in the economy of the world
 - Such that all purpose and meaning in life, along with security and stability, depends on the continuation of that system
 - And no one contemplates the end of it
 - The world even mocks the idea of an “end” so when it does finally come... even on a small scale...they are left without an anchor
 - Remember when the twin towers fell in New York, and for a time, many people felt like it was the end of normal life
 - People were speechless and couldn’t understand where to go next
 - As dramatic as the event was, it was just two buildings in one city
 - Imagine the scene when a major city is completely gone and when the world itself begins to fall apart in Tribulation
 - It reveals to the humanity that all they’ve depended upon is a facade that can crumble easily
 - But when you’ve placed your trust on eternal things found in Christ, the crumbling of the world isn’t a cause for alarm...it’s a cause for joy
 - Because the closer the world gets to total destruction, the closer we are to the Kingdom
 - And we know that nothing that comes upon the world will disturb our future
 - That eternal perspective is priceless, and it becomes even more invaluable as you see the world growing more panicked
- Speaking of eternal, notice how the Lord ends this part of His judgment against the city

Ezek. 26:19 For thus says the Lord GOD, “When I make you a desolate city, like the cities which are not inhabited, when I bring up the deep over you and the great waters cover you,

Ezek. 26:20 then I will bring you down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of old, and I will make you dwell in the lower parts of the earth, like the ancient waste places, with those who go down to the pit, so that you will

not be inhabited; but I will set glory in the land of the living.

Ezek. 26:21 “I will bring terrors on you and you will be no more; though you will be sought, you will never be found again,” declares the Lord GOD.

- The Lord speaks of the city’s demise in language that connects the city’s end with the final destiny of its inhabitants
 - The Lord connects two images: the metaphor of a city sinking into the sea with the reality of its people descending into Sheol
 - He says the city will be desolate and will be covered over by the sea
 - In reality the city was never covered by the sea in this way, at least not permanently
 - But metaphorically, we can say the city was wiped clean as if the sea had covered it
- Then in v.20 the Lord says the people of the city will likewise go down in to the pit
 - The pit is one of several names the Bible uses to describe a literal place located in the depths of the earth
 - The name of the pit is Sheol, and prior to Christ it was the holding place for the souls of every person who died
- As Jesus explains in Luke 16, Sheol consists of two sides: Hades and Abraham’s Bosom
 - Hades is the place we commonly call Hell
 - It’s a temporary holding place for the souls of unbelievers
 - As Jesus described, Hades is an incredibly hot place of torment, and there is no relief for those who wait there
 - One day, they are brought up from this place to receive their final judgment, which is to spend eternity in the Lake of Fire
- The other side called Abraham’s Bosom is currently empty, but prior to Christ it held the souls of those who died in faith
 - Those souls couldn’t rise directly to God because the sacrifice for sin had not yet been made on the cross
 - So like the living world, they awaited the Messiah, and when He came, they were set free, Paul says in Ephesians
 - Having been set free, they accompanied Jesus into the Heavenly Throne room after the resurrection
 - Since that time, believers who die go directly into the presence of Christ
- So today, Sheol consists only of Hades, and it’s that side of Sheol that this passage describes as the pit
 - Notice in v.20 the description of this place fits the description I summarized from Luke 16
 - A place down in the lower parts of the earth, a place for people “of old,” a place of terrors where people are never seen again
 - So the reality for those who place their trust in the best of this world is they receive the worst of it in the end

- This passage is a classic example of how the Lord uses the sea as a picture of the resting place of the dead
 - In the Bible the sea pictures the dark, bottomless deep of Sheol
 - Which is why the sea exists on this earth but does not exist in the New Heavens and Earth
 - God has placed the sea on earth now, in part, to serve as a metaphor for eternal judgment, which you see Him using here
 - In the New Heavens and Earth, there is no sin and therefore no death or judgment
 - Therefore, there is no need for a metaphor of such things, and so we're told the New Heavens and Earth do not have a sea
- We now move into Chapter 27, though we aren't going to complete it tonight
 - This chapter is a mix of prose and poetry coming together as a lamentation or song sung for the dead
 - It consists of remarkably precise imagery of the city and those who lived in it and profited from it
 - The details in this chapter are so unique that it's unparalleled in the history of ancient literature
 - It's gives the most detailed and accurate description of any ancient city
 - To understand it properly we must consult the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 and the prophecies of Isaiah 13-14 and Revelation 18, which I read earlier
 - The first 24 verses, which we cover tonight, recount how Tyre gained its splendor and distinction
 - The final 10 verses are a description of the destruction of this splendor
 - But it's the detail in these descriptions that makes the chapter so unique

Ezek. 27:1 Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 27:2 “And you, son of man, take up a lamentation over Tyre;

Ezek. 27:3 and say to Tyre, who dwells at the entrance to the sea, merchant of the peoples to many coastlands, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “O Tyre, you have said, ‘I am perfect in beauty.’

Ezek. 27:4 “Your borders are in the heart of the seas;

Your builders have perfected your beauty.

Ezek. 27:5 “They have made all your planks of fir trees from Senir;

They have taken a cedar from Lebanon to make a mast for you.

Ezek. 27:6 “Of oaks from Bashan they have made your oars;

With ivory they have inlaid your deck of boxwood from the coastlands of Cyprus.

Ezek. 27:7 “Your sail was of fine embroidered linen from Egypt

So that it became your distinguishing mark;

Your awning was blue and purple from the coastlands of Elishah.

Ezek. 27:8 “The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your rowers;

Your wise men, O Tyre, were aboard; they were your pilots.

**Ezek. 27:9 “The elders of Gebal and her wise men were with you repairing your seams;
All the ships of the sea and their sailors were with you in order to deal in your merchandise.**

- In effect, the Lord has directed Ezekiel to eulogize Tyre, which is what this lament is
 - Remember, Ezekiel writes these things at least a year before the events begin and almost 15 years before they conclude
 - The eulogy is directed to those in Tyre who dwelled in the city
 - So the audience for this lamentation were the present-day inhabitants who were soon to experience God’s wrath
 - Therefore, the eulogy serves as a warning as well
 - It begins where all sin begins: with pride
 - The city was prideful of its accomplishments
 - It said to itself that it was perfect in beauty
 - Those high walls that descended into the sea gave it great confidence
 - It said its builders made it beautiful
 - So its first mistake was crediting itself with its strength and accomplishments
 - Or as Paul might say, they worshipped the creature rather than the Creator
 - Their builders were their gods and their security was their walls
- In v.4 the Lord begins to describe the city as if it were a ship on the high seas
 - The city saw itself as a tall stately ship with a tall mast
 - The Phoenicians were world-class ship builders
 - Their largest trade ships had a crew of 200 and up to three banks of oars on each side of the ship
 - They made the ships from the best materials, fir from Senir, which is Mt. Hermon
 - The sides of the ship used cedar from Lebanon, some of the best wood in the world
 - Oaks of Bashaw served as oars
 - Ivory and boxwood from Cyprus for the decking
 - The sails were finely embroidered linen from Egypt, which was so extravagant it had become the mark of the realm
 - Moreover, the Tyrians had the money to hire the best crew in the world, men from Sidon and Arvad
 - Sidonians and men of Arvad were fellow Phoenicians
 - Phoenicians were unequalled in their seamanship, producing the best sailors and strongest rowers in the world
 - Their pilots were trained to navigate any water
 - They also sailed with artisans who could repair any part of the ship while at

sea

- This is a description of a world power at its height displaying conspicuous wealth
 - It's an indication of how special Tyre was in the world
 - It was like the United States at the height of its power, unchallenged and unrivaled
 - Wealth that the rest of the world could only dream about
 - Perhaps a better example today would be the Arab oil countries of business and trade centers like Singapore or Hong Kong or Dubai
 - Regardless of your example, it's the same prideful arrogance
 - The wealth of Tyre deceived its residents into thinking they were the cause of their own success
 - They explained their circumstances as the natural result of their superior nature
 - From God's point of view, this was offensive because it amounted to taking credit for God's goodness and mercy
 - The Tyrians were merely the beneficiaries of the life God decided to give them in His plan for history
 - Much like we benefit from being placed in this country at this time of history, they had their time and place
 - Had we been born under different circumstances, even with the same intellect, we would not have achieved the same things
 - So all we have is testimony to the Lord
- To make this point, the Lord begins to remind Tyre of how their success was connected with the other peoples of the earth
 - Immediately, those connections will draw our attention back to the Table of Nations in Genesis 10
 - And in doing so, we're reminded of God's scattering of all peoples according to His purpose and desire
 - Which negates Tyre's pride in what they obtained in their place
 - Let's look at these peoples briefly one at a time to understand their contribution

Ezek. 27:10 “Persia and Lud and Put were in your army, your men of war. They hung shield and helmet in you; they set forth your splendor.

Ezek. 27:11 “The sons of Arvad and your army were on your walls, all around, and the Gammadim were in your towers. They hung their shields on your walls all around; they perfected your beauty.

- Tyre didn't keep a standing army, and soldiers weren't included in the city's elite and powerful
- So to protect itself, Tyre hired a mercenary army
- Tyre could attract fighting men from all around because they could pay well and the

city had good defenses

- In v.10 it says they had men from as far away as Persia, Lud (eastern Turkey) and Put (could be Libya or another African people)
 - Likewise sons of Arvad and Gammadim guarded the city walls
 - The great distances these men traveled from indicates how selective Tyre could be in hiring their soldiers...only the best
 - But it also illustrated that Tyre's success and beauty depended heavily on those who were not Tyrians
 - Notice in v.11 the Lord says these men "perfected" Tyre's beauty
- Then the Lord turns to those who made Tyre rich, beginning with those who bought from Tyre

Ezek. 27:12 "Tarshish was your customer because of the abundance of all kinds of wealth; with silver, iron, tin and lead they paid for your wares.

Ezek. 27:13 "Javan, Tubal and Meshech, they were your traders; with the lives of men and vessels of bronze they paid for your merchandise.

Ezek. 27:14 "Those from Beth-togarmah gave horses and war horses and mules for your wares.

Ezek. 27:15 "The sons of Dedan were your traders. Many coastlands were your market; ivory tusks and ebony they brought as your payment.

Ezek. 27:16 "Aram was your customer because of the abundance of your goods; they paid for your wares with emeralds, purple, embroidered work, fine linen, coral and rubies.

Ezek. 27:17 "Judah and the land of Israel, they were your traders; with the wheat of Minnith, cakes, honey, oil and balm they paid for your merchandise.

Ezek. 27:18 "Damascus was your customer because of the abundance of your goods, because of the abundance of all kinds of wealth, because of the wine of Helbon and white wool.

Ezek. 27:19 "Vedan and Javan paid for your wares from Uzal; wrought iron, cassia and sweet cane were among your merchandise.

Ezek. 27:20 "Dedan traded with you in saddlecloths for riding.

Ezek. 27:21 "Arabia and all the princes of Kedar, they were your customers for lambs, rams and goats; for these they were your customers.

Ezek. 27:22 "The traders of Sheba and Raamah, they traded with you; they paid for your wares with the best of all kinds of spices, and with all kinds of precious stones and gold.

Ezek. 27:23 "Haran, Canneh, Eden, the traders of Sheba, Asshur and Chilmad traded with you.

Ezek. 27:24 "They traded with you in choice garments, in clothes of blue and embroidered work, and in carpets of many colors and tightly wound cords, which were among your merchandise.

- All these various people groups traded with Tyre, and the list reminds us of how people spread out after God confused language

- Tarshish refers to modern-day Spain, which paid for Tyre's goods with silver and other valuable metals
 - Javan (Greece), Tubal and Meshech (both eastern Turkey) bought from Tyre with human slaves and bronze
 - This wealth was tangible and durable, therefore it increased the wealth of the city overall for centuries to come
- And the people of Beth-togarmah, modern-day Armenia, paid with mules and donkeys
 - That included war horses, which were larger breeds trained for battle
 - The reference to Dedan in v.15 should probably be translated Rhodes, and these people paid with ivory and ebony
 - Aram is Syria, and they used precious stones to buy goods
- Judah traded with crops and valuable food products
 - Damascus used wine as currency along with wool
 - Vedan and Javan (Greeks) paid using items obtained from Uzal, modern Yemen, including iron and spices
 - Dedan (Greece) traded in leather while Arabia paid in livestock
 - Sheba and Raamah, also in Arabia, brought a variety of valuable items including gold
- Even beyond these, Tyre traded with regions like Mesopotamia, Haran, Assyria and beyond
 - Carpets, garments, raw materials, and every imaginable consumer good flooded into the city
 - All of these descriptions only served to remind the people of the great luxury they had by means of the rest of the world
- So who made the city beautiful?
 - Could Tyre be Tyre without all those other people?
 - Could Tyre even exist?
 - And who placed those people in their respective locations and defined their borders, including Tyre itself?

Acts 17:26 and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,

Acts 17:27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

- The Lord made every nation, and determined both the place and time of each person's habitation
 - He did so in the expectation that each would seek for God, in recognition that an omnipotent hand was responsible for these outcomes

- Instead, Tyre took its blessing for granted and even credited itself
- In doing so, they conveniently overlooked the obvious dependence that Tyre had on the rest of the world
 - That dependence argued against their view of themselves as inherently beautiful and powerful
 - In reality they were merely the product of a merciful God Who had appointed them to this end
 - And at the same time they were dependent on the rest of the world to support their lifestyle
- So therefore, when that illusion came crashing down, they were without hope or strength
 - This is the chief conceit of the unbelieving world
 - They live in a bubble of self-deceit that allows them to sleep at night
 - Yet it's so fragile that at any moment, the Lord can bring it all to an end
 - And for Tyre, He did
- Next time we finish this chapter, where the Lord describes the sinking of this metaphoric ship
 - And then we move into Chapter 28, which is a fascinating look at two characters who stand over all history
 - It's one of the most interesting and important chapters of the Old Testament
 - And I guarantee you, it will surprise you, the things you learn

- After our holiday break, we're returning to our study of Ezekiel, and specifically to the third major section of his book
 - The third section runs through Chapter 32, and in this section the Lord explains to Israel how He plans to judge the nation's long-time enemies
 - This section is a bridge between the first half of the book, where we studied Israel's offenses and the Lord's response of judgment
 - And it leads us into the second half of the book, which reveals the amazing glory awaiting Israel in the Kingdom to come
 - In between we find this section where the Lord reassures Israel that He will deal fairly with Israel's enemies
 - After all, if the Lord was willing to go to such terrible lengths to hold His own people accountable, what would He do to Israel's adversaries?
 - He tells Israel that they too will be judged, some in Ezekiel's day and some in a time to come in the Kingdom
 - So far we've studied Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia, and we've started the fifth enemy, Tyre
 - In Chapters 26-27 we learned about God's judgment of this wealthy and independent city state
 - They were proud and began to think that their immense wealth and influence was their own making
 - But they overlooked how the Lord had placed them in the perfect position to profit from the world's trade
 - Therefore, because of their arrogance and pride, blinded by their wealth, the Lord said He would judge the nation
 - They were an enemy of Israel, but their offenses included failing to glorify the Lord
 - So the Lord promised to level the city, remove its prominence
 - And the merchants of the world would mourn its loss
- As we ended, we reached the last part of Chapter 27, where the Lord asked Ezekiel to pronounce a eulogy against the city
 - The Lord reminded the city how they conveniently overlooked their obvious dependence on the rest of the world and ultimately on God
 - He used a metaphor of a tall, majestic sailing ship to picture the city in its splendor
 - Now we pick up in the second half of the chapter
 - In v.25 the chapter moves from prose to poetry where we see that "ship" experiencing shipwreck
 - The poem doesn't give us much new information on the future of the city
 - It simply presents it in more succinct and therefore powerful ways, playing upon a picture that was uniquely appropriate for this city

- Being the king of the seas, the Tyrians could appreciate the symbolism better than anyone

Ezek. 27:25 “The ships of Tarshish were the carriers for your merchandise.

And you were filled and were very glorious

In the heart of the seas.

Ezek. 27:26 “Your rowers have brought you

Into great waters;

The east wind has broken you

In the heart of the seas.

Ezek. 27:27 “Your wealth, your wares, your merchandise,

Your sailors and your pilots,

Your repairers of seams, your dealers in merchandise

And all your men of war who are in you,

With all your company that is in your midst,

Will fall into the heart of the seas

On the day of your overthrow.

Ezek. 27:28 “At the sound of the cry of your pilots

The pasture lands will shake.

Ezek. 27:29 “All who handle the oar,

The sailors and all the pilots of the sea

Will come down from their ships;

They will stand on the land,

Ezek. 27:30 And they will make their voice heard over you

And will cry bitterly.

They will cast dust on their heads,

They will wallow in ashes.

Ezek. 27:31 “Also they will make themselves bald for you

And gird themselves with sackcloth;

And they will weep for you in bitterness of soul

With bitter mourning.

Ezek. 27:32 “Moreover, in their wailing they will take up a lamentation for you

And lament over you:

‘Who is like Tyre,

Like her who is silent in the midst of the sea?

Ezek. 27:33 ‘When your wares went out from the seas,

You satisfied many peoples;

With the abundance of your wealth and your merchandise

You enriched the kings of earth.

Ezek. 27:34 ‘Now that you are broken by the seas

In the depths of the waters,

Your merchandise and all your company

Have fallen in the midst of you.

Ezek. 27:35 ‘All the inhabitants of the coastlands

Are appalled at you,

And their kings are horribly afraid;

They are troubled in countenance.

Ezek. 27:36 ‘The merchants among the peoples hiss at you;

You have become terrified

And you will cease to be forever.’”””

- Once again we have the metaphor of the ship sailing the open seas
 - The great ship represents the fate of the great city
 - The ship entered open waters, which was the most dangerous part of a sea journey for any ship
 - And at that moment a gale blows in from the east and breaks the ship
 - East in the Bible is a picture of sin or evil
 - And in this case, it’s also the direction from which the Babylonians arrived to conquer the city
 - As the “ship” was broken, its cargo and crew were tossed into the sea
 - In v.26-27 we see all the fine things that were cataloged in the prior chapter falling into the deep
 - Remember, the sea is a picture in the Old Testament of the abyss, of the place of judgment in the center of the earth
 - So this scene is picturing what we learned in the earlier chapter when the Lord promised to bring those in the city into Hades
 - Secondly, as the Lord the promised, the destruction of the city would lead the world of merchants to cry out in despair as their livelihood is gone
 - The Lord says in v.28 that pasture lands would shake with their cries
 - Seaman who depended on the trade stand at the seashore and gawk at the destruction of the great ship
 - Men will weep bitterly...this is what the world of commerce did when the Lord brought down Tyre
 - As we studied last time, these laments are similar to what will happen when the Babylon of Tribulation is destroyed by God
 - The world will have trouble grasping that something so great could be destroyed
 - I think this will be the state of humanity when great nations like the U.S. or other world powers today are brought low by God
 - The Bible promises that the world will be reshaped in dramatic fashion in preparation for the rise of the antichrist during Tribulation
- Then in v.32, the Lord gives us the lament of those who mourn for Tyre, beginning with a question of “Who is like Tyre?”

- Tyre's historic strength and resistance to invasion made it the envy of the world
 - Therefore, its fall was as stunning as it would be today to hear that the U.S. or China had fallen to an enemy
 - So the lamentation is a mixture of amazement and horror
- In vs.32-34 the lament recounts the fall of the ship, which tells us that the people of the earth were retelling the fall of Tyre for years after
 - It was the news no one could stop talking about
 - This is a good example of how the Lord brings Himself glory even among the ungodly
 - His works are so stunning and awe-inspiring that it causes the world to testify to God's greatness without even knowing Who they credit
- Finally, the fall of this great city will cause the kings of the world to become horribly afraid
 - The world has been rocked
 - When your hope for the future doesn't come from knowing the Lord's promises, you only have the world as your foundation
 - And for the world, Tyre was the "sure bet"
 - So if you wanted to rest your confidence for the future on something that you felt couldn't be shaken, you bet on Tyre remaining strong
 - You threw your lot in with Tyre's so that your business depended on Tyre's prosperity
 - And your security depended on Tyre's mercenary armies and your trading partners depended on access to Tyre's ships
 - Nothing in the world was more dependable, or so the world thought
 - So when the city fell, it rocked the world, leading kings to be troubled
 - Because if Tyre could be taken, who could be safe?
 - And if Tyre wasn't dependable, what was?
 - That's why the word of God says:

**Is. 28:16 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD,
 "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone,
 A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.
 He who believes in it will not be disturbed.**

- So the Lord pronounced judgment on the city, and it came to pass shortly after Ezekiel revealed it
 - Babylon subjugated the city immediately after conquering Jerusalem for the third time
 - Later when the city is conquered by the Greeks, they penetrate the walls, the

- city is taken and ransacked for the first time
 - Eventually, the city ceases to be a place of importance
- But the Lord isn't done speaking judgment against Tyre, and now He moves to naming certain individuals specifically
 - These two characters are the subject of the final chapter dedicated to Tyre
 - The first is the prince of Tyre, while the second is called the king of Tyre
 - Let's look at each in turn:

Ezek. 28:1 The word of the LORD came again to me, saying,

Ezek. 28:2 “Son of man, say to the leader of Tyre, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,

“Because your heart is lifted up

And you have said, ‘I am a god,

I sit in the seat of gods

In the heart of the seas’;

Yet you are a man and not God,

Although you make your heart like the heart of God —

Ezek. 28:3 Behold, you are wiser than Daniel;

There is no secret that is a match for you.

Ezek. 28:4 “By your wisdom and understanding

You have acquired riches for yourself

And have acquired gold and silver for your treasures.

Ezek. 28:5 “By your great wisdom, by your trade

You have increased your riches

And your heart is lifted up because of your riches —

Ezek. 28:6 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD,

‘Because you have made your heart

Like the heart of God,

Ezek. 28:7 Therefore, behold, I will bring strangers upon you,

The most ruthless of the nations.

And they will draw their swords

Against the beauty of your wisdom

And defile your splendor.

Ezek. 28:8 ‘They will bring you down to the pit,

And you will die the death of those who are slain

In the heart of the seas.

Ezek. 28:9 ‘Will you still say, “I am a god,”

In the presence of your slayer,

Though you are a man and not God,

In the hands of those who wound you?

Ezek. 28:10 ‘You will die the death of the uncircumcised

By the hand of strangers,

For I have spoken!’ declares the Lord GOD!’””

- This section pronounces judgment against a man who is very rich and as a result is proudly declaring himself to be a god
 - He is called a “prince” which indicates he is a ruler, and the title obviously contrasts with the later section in this chapter
 - Notice down in v.12 Ezekiel is given another lamentation about the “king” of Tyre
 - Yet we know that there was only one ruler over the city at any given time and there were no significant secondary rulers (i.e., princes)
 - So who do these two characters represent?
 - We don’t want to jump ahead to the second character just yet, but when we get there, you’ll see that the description of that king is very unusual
 - Things said about the “king” of Tyre don’t match any known details of the city’s rulers
 - As a result, we have to look in an entirely different direction to find this “king”, look to an entirely different ruler
 - On the other hand, the things God says about the prince of Tyre do fit the historical records of the rulers of Tyre
 - Therefore, the “king” of Tyre doesn’t refer to the actual king of the city but to a different leader who has a special relationship to Tyre
 - Meanwhile, the “prince” of Tyre is the actual city ruler, a man called Ithobaal II who ruled in Ezekiel’s day
 - He is called a prince instead of a king to distinguish him from another ruler of sorts who was the real power behind the scenes
 - That will become clearer as we study the second part of this chapter
- But first, looking at what the Lord says about this prince, we find a similar message as before: the king’s problem was pride
 - Specifically, the king’s (prince’s) heart was lifted up by his wealth and power
 - He reached a point where he declared himself to be a god, much like the Pharaohs and the Caesars of Rome
 - He didn’t just tell others that he was a god, but he came to believe it in his own heart
 - Notice at the end of v.2 the Lord says he has a heart like the heart of God
 - That isn’t intended to suggest that the prince of Tyre had a godly heart
 - It refers to the man’s inflated sense of power, that his heart perceived itself to be like the heart of God
 - But the Lord points out a line earlier that he is just a man, a statement that should be obvious to everyone

- Yet if we lack true spiritual knowledge, our evil heart is capable of fooling itself into thinking it is god
 - This is particularly true when that heart has access to almost unlimited wealth and power
 - That kind of limitless authority leads the person into thinking that no one and nothing is more powerful...
 - Until the person meets the true God face-to-face
- Nevertheless, the king (prince) of Tyre did have real abilities that contributed to his pride and self-deception
 - First, the Lord says in v.3 that the king was an intelligent person, by God's grace
 - In fact, the Lord says that the man is smarter than Daniel
 - Remember, Daniel and Ezekiel were contemporaries living in Babylon together
 - By the time Ezekiel wrote this prophecy, Daniel had been in Babylon for about 20 years
 - And by that time he had ascended to his position next to Nebuchadnezzar
 - He has interpreted those dreams and been placed in charge of the court of magi
 - His story was probably known throughout the empire, and he was admired as an intelligent man
 - Yet the Lord acknowledges that the king of Tyre was actually a smarter man than Daniel
 - And because of his intelligence, the man had amassed great wealth
 - With the combination of his intelligence and wealth, he had risen to a place of great power
- This comparison between the king and Daniel offers us a useful reminder that we can't judge the quality of a person, nor his importance to God, based on human performance statistics
 - The world would have compared Daniel and the king and concluded the king was the better man
 - He was smarter, mightier, and richer
 - And the Lord made him that way...the Lord granted this man the skills that propelled him into his position and success
 - Of course, the Lord did the same for Daniel
 - The point is that the Lord often gifts the unbelieving world with great skills, which allows them to achieve great achievements and wealth
 - And the world celebrates such achievements because that's all they have to cheer about
 - Wealth and power is "heaven" to the world that has no eternal future
 - So when we see the unbelieving world blessed in these ways, we need to be careful about making value judgments about their standing with God

- Conversely, when believers are less successful in worldly terms, that doesn't mean God isn't happy with us
- Daniel was less successful than the king of Tyre, nevertheless he was far more blessed in the long run
- Then we see the final accounting of who was actually the better man, starting in v.7
 - Strangers would come against this king, and this ruthless nation would draw its swords and take away the king's wealth and power
 - When that same ruthless nation came against the less-intelligent Daniel, it resulted in him being exalted to a position of power
 - This is how God commonly works...he turns the tables on the world to show that the world's wisdom is actually foolishness
 - Then in v.8 the Lord promises this leader of the city would be brought down to his appointed end
 - He would die the death of those who are slain in battle
 - He would be no different than those who are buried at sea
 - So that in the end, the man who was so powerful and wealthy was indistinguishable from the pauper who dies in the gutter
 - Death is the great equalizer
 - It treats everyone the same, and it leads everyone to the same place
 - Nothing you gain in this world will make a difference in that end moment
 - Only the state of your relationship with the Lord will bring you distinction in that moment
- Finally, the Lord mocks the king by asking in v.9 if he will be able to say he is a king when he stares in the eyes of the soldier who slays him?
 - What a wonderful way to expose the folly of any man claiming to be a god
 - We may be able to fool many ignorant people into thinking we are a god, as the ancient kings of the world often did
 - And in many cases, such leaders might become so arrogant that they are able to convince even themselves that they are gods
 - But when the moment an adversary comes against the man ready to cut him down as easily as any other human being, he will know the truth
 - As the Lord says, will that person still maintain they are a god?
 - Won't they know in that moment that they have no power at all?
 - As you read the Lord's retort to the king, you might be tempted to compare this situation to that of Christ on the cross
 - After all, Christ is God and yet He too was struck down by His adversaries
 - Couldn't we say the same things about Christ...would He say He is a god if He can be struck down?
 - The difference is that no one took Christ's life from Him...he was struck and He was

pierced, but He didn't die until He chose to die

- Nothing took His life...He lay it down for His sheep, He said
- Presumably, had Christ not given up His spirit He never would have died
- That's the difference between a God Who chose to die for His Creation
- Vs. a creature who cannot stop death despite claiming to be god
- The king of Babylon dies the death of the uncircumcised, the Lord says in v.10,
 - This may sound strange as if it suggests that there is a different death for Gentiles vs. Jew, but it's speaking of something else
 - The Tyrians practiced circumcision too, but obviously not for the reasons Israel received circumcision
 - The mark of circumcision was seen as a mark of distinction for that culture
 - So the Lord is promising the king would die shamefully at the hands of those who were not privileged in the way he thought himself to be
 - His mark didn't save him because the Lord has judged him
 - So King Ithobaal II was deposed when Nebuchadnezzar attacked
 - But this lament applies to all the kings of Tyre, including those who followed Ithobaal during the short periods that the city retained power
 - Each was defeated at a point and died
 - Eventually, the city ceased to be and there were no more successors
- Now we reach the second half of the lament for the "king" of Tyre, a mysterious figure

Ezek. 28:11 Again the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 28:12 "Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,
 "You had the seal of perfection,
 Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

Ezek. 28:13 "You were in Eden, the garden of God;
 Every precious stone was your covering:
 The ruby, the topaz and the diamond;
 The beryl, the onyx and the jasper;
 The lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald;
 And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets,
 Was in you.

On the day that you were created
 They were prepared.

Ezek. 28:14 "You were the anointed cherub who covers,
 And I placed you there.
 You were on the holy mountain of God;
 You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.

Ezek. 28:15 “You were blameless in your ways

From the day you were created

Until unrighteousness was found in you.

Ezek. 28:16 “By the abundance of your trade

You were internally filled with violence,

And you sinned;

Therefore I have cast you as profane

From the mountain of God.

And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub,

From the midst of the stones of fire.

Ezek. 28:17 “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;

You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.

I cast you to the ground;

I put you before kings,

That they may see you.

Ezek. 28:18 “By the multitude of your iniquities,

In the unrighteousness of your trade

You profaned your sanctuaries.

Therefore I have brought fire from the midst of you;

It has consumed you,

And I have turned you to ashes on the earth

In the eyes of all who see you.

Ezek. 28:19 “All who know you among the peoples

Are appalled at you;

You have become terrified

And you will cease to be forever.”””

- This character is called the king of Tyre – though we know the earlier character, the prince, was actually the man running the city
 - Yet this character is called the king, meaning the one who truly had the power over Tyre
 - But as I said earlier, we know the city didn’t have multiple leaders or levels of kings operating
 - So there was only one king over the city at any given time and no princes
 - Since the prince we studied earlier was the true king of the city, who is this second, greater “king”?
 - Our answer comes from examining the description of this individual carefully
 - Beginning with noticing the similarities and differences to the prince
 - First, like the earlier prince who ruled the city, this king meets his end because of pride over his wisdom and beauty
 - And like the first leader, this one will be thrown down and brought low despite

his high view of self

- But very quickly, we start to see major differences between the two characters
 - First, this king's wisdom and beauty exceed that of the prince
 - The king's wisdom and beauty are perfect, the Lord says
 - In fact, he has the seal of perfection, meaning the Lord has judged this leader to be without flaw – at least at the start
- These statements are not hyperbole, because the context indicates they are to be taken literally
 - This king had perfect wisdom, meaning no created thing had more wisdom
 - And likewise, no created thing was more beautiful than this king
- Now at this point, we're struggling to think of all that God made in Creation, what was most wise and most beautiful
 - If we look back at the Creation account, we get an important clue

Gen. 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"

- The serpent of Genesis 3 was the most crafty, meaning most wise, of any creature God created
- Why was the snake so wise? Because in that particular moment, the snake was being indwelt by Satan who was the wisest creature on earth
- Revelation 20 tells us this:

Rev. 20:1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.

Rev. 20:2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;

- The serpent was Satan, and therefore the testimony of Scripture is that Satan is the wisest creature God ever made
 - Therefore, the king of Tyre is Satan, which begins to fit the text very well
 - The prince of Tyre was the evil, earthly king ruling the people
 - But the king of Tyre was the true spiritual power behind the scenes, directing the king and ruling through him
- That's Satan's M.O. in every situation:

Eph. 6:11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm

against the schemes of the devil.

Eph. 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

- The devil, Paul says, is our true adversary
- In fact, the word Satan comes from the Hebrew word spelled the same meaning “adversary”
- So our spiritual struggles — and often our earthly struggles — are against him, not against the human agents he is working through
 - Those human agents are pawns
 - And should God rescue them out of Satan’s hands, they would become our brothers and sisters
- So the king of Tyre was the power behind the scenes in the city, and therefore he is also the true enemy of Israel
 - In fact, he is the power behind every evil thing we face on earth and the father of lies
 - And in this passage, we’re reading about not only his promised downfall and judgment for Israel’s sake but for all humanity
 - But what’s even more fascinating about this account is its record of Satan’s backstory including his fall into sin
 - That story begins in v.13 where we’re told Satan was in Eden, the Garden of God
 - Now at first, that sounds like something we know well; the Garden of Eden, humanity’s first home
 - But notice this garden is called the Eden, the Garden of God
 - That may seem like a minor difference, but it’s our first clue that Scripture is referring to a different place
- Secondly, notice Satan’s own appearance later in that verse
 - He was covered by every precious stone in God’s creation
 - Altogether, there are nine precious jewels covering Satan, like a garment made of sparkling sequins
 - And the setting for these jewels in his covering were gold
 - Satan must have sparkled like a disco ball
 - We remember elsewhere in Scripture as Paul describes Satan as an “angel of light”
 - Paul was referring to the way Satan disguises himself as truth and enlightenment, though the opposite is true
 - Well now we know that Paul’s description is also literally true...Satan glitters and shines, reflecting light from his many jeweled appearance
 - No wonder he dazzles any who see him

- Truly, Satan was the most beautiful thing God created, and beyond this God assigned Satan a most-privileged position
 - In v.14 we're told that Satan's job was to be the anointed cherub who covers
 - That language immediately takes us back to the Law God gave to Israel

Ex. 25:17 “You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide.

Ex. 25:18 “You shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat.

Ex. 25:19 “Make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends.

Ex. 25:20 “The cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat.

Ex. 25:21 “You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you.

Ex. 25:22 “There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel.

- The ark God commanded Moses to build had a lid called a mercy seat
 - This golden lid had two statues molded into its top
 - These statues were cherubim, angelic beings we studied earlier in this book
 - Those cherubim guarded the glory of God
 - As the Lord tell Moses, His glory would appear in the space above the mercy seat underneath the guarding wings of the cherubim
- Now we're told that Satan's job was as the “covering cherub”
 - Obviously, the gold cherubim on the mercy seat of the ark were not real angels... they were gold statues
 - But the book of Hebrews tells us that the design God gave Moses for the tabernacle and all its furnishing was a pattern

Heb. 8:4 Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law;

Heb. 8:5 who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “SEE,” He says, “THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN.”

- Every element of the design of the tabernacle was a copy, a shadow, of something in

heaven, the writer says

- So in Heaven stands the actual temple of God
- And the tabernacle on earth is patterned after that heavenly structure
- So if there are gold cherubim guarding God's glory over the ark on earth, then it means there is an actual mercy seat in the heavenly tabernacle
 - And that heavenly tabernacle also had guardians for God's glory
 - Those guardians weren't golden cherubim but actual cherubim
 - Remember, the ones on earth made of gold were patterned after real things in heaven
- And now we're learning that Satan's job in Heaven was to be the covering cherub, the angelic being guarding the glory of God
 - And then we get another clue concerning where this is taking place
 - In v.14 we're told he's serving on the holy mountain of God
 - Walking in the midst of the stones of fire
 - These two details point to the heavenly throne room of God
 - The throne of God is often called the mountain of God or Mt. Zion in scripture
 - And descriptions of God's throne by Ezekiel and others include descriptions of stones of burning fire around the throne
 - Putting that together with the earlier reference to the Garden of God, and we begin to understand that we're talking about another pattern again
 - Just as the tabernacle was constructed according to a pattern of something found in Heaven, so was Eden
 - Eden on earth was patterned after the Garden of God in Heaven
 - Satan served in the heaven tabernacle on the heavenly mercy seat
- But before long, he disqualifies himself from the position
 - In v.15 the Lord says that Satan served in his role perfectly without a flaw from the day he was created
 - Until a day came when unrighteousness was found in Satan
 - The sentence construction makes clear that the origin of sin was within Satan, not from an outside source
 - This is why Jesus says Satan is the father of lies...he gave birth to all that opposes truth
 - What caused sin to manifest in Satan? In v.16 we see the chain of events
 - First, the abundance of Satan's trade filled him internally with violence leading to sin
 - We have to read between the lines a little to decode this cryptic sentence
 - First, Satan's trade was covering the glory of God in the heavenly tabernacle

- In a sense, we can say that Satan was the closest created being to the glory of God
- Of the three branches of angelic beings — angels, seraphim and cherubim — cherubim served closest to God's glory
- And of all cherubim, Satan served the closest of all
- That's what the Scripture means when it says Satan's trade (or occupation) was abundant
- Secondly, this supreme privilege became cause for him to be filled internally with violence
 - That means inside Satan came the desire to act in malice against God
 - We don't know exactly what action Satan took (or was intending to take)
 - But we know what Satan is seen trying to do throughout Scripture
 - From the beginning, Satan has tried to replace God's authority with his own
 - He began by deceiving woman in the Garden
 - He continues to seek to encourage mankind to worship him instead of God
 - He tried to tempt Jesus to do the same during the wilderness temptations
 - And perhaps most telling, Daniel tells us that after Satan indwells the Antichrist during the Tribulation he will declare himself to be God

Dan. 11:36 “Then the king will do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods; and he will prosper until the indignation is finished, for that which is decreed will be done.

- I believe Satan's goals have always been the same
- Therefore, I propose that his act of violence was attempting to assume God's place
- Satan stared at God's glory in the mercy seat and thought to himself he could sit in God's place and rule
- Furthermore, remember he was called the anointed cherub
 - The word anointed in Hebrew is *messiah*
 - So Satan was the messiah'd cherub, which certainly must have suggested to him that he could be a replacement for Jesus
- That act of violence was sin, and it introduced rebellion into God's creation
 - And though Satan's sin was much greater than that of the prince of Tyre, we should take a moment to look at how similar they are
 - The prince of Tyre, the human leader, was judged for pride also
 - His pride was the result of the abundance of his earthly trade
 - He had so much power and wealth that he let it go to his head, and he began to

think himself a god

- Pride was so powerful in the man's heart, that it caused him to think crazy thoughts and believe them
 - And as he acted according to those thoughts, he offended the God who granted him those privileges in the first place
 - And as a result, the Lord cast him down
- Now we see that this man's sin was following a pattern in heaven also
 - Satan was the heavenly model, and he blazed the path that all sin follows today
 - It begins with blessing from God, which endows us with certain things we take for granted and begin to take credit for
 - That generates pride, and that pride causes us to act out against the God Who gave us what we have
- So abundance leads to self-satisfaction
 - And self-satisfaction leads to pride
 - And pride leads to malice toward God, which manifests in many ways, but in all cases is sin
- Satan pioneered the pattern, and we who share in Satan's nature follow his pattern
 - It's interesting that not only do good things in heaven serve as patterns for things on earth (like the tabernacle of Israel)
 - But our sin is also patterned on the original sin of Satan
- Satan's corruption of the heavenly tabernacle and our following in sin after his pattern come together in another way also
 - Both were reconciled in Heaven by Jesus' blood
 - When Jesus was resurrected, He traveled to the throne room of God to make atonement for sin with His blood
 - He took His blood and applied it to the mercy seat that Satan used to guard
 - And by that application, Jesus cleansed the heavenly tabernacle

Heb. 9:22 And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Heb. 9:23 Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

Heb. 9:24 For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

Heb. 9:25 nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own.

- You may remember that after Jesus resurrected, there was a short time when He

wouldn't allow anyone to touch His body

John 20:16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher).

John 20:17 Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'"

- Jesus couldn't become unclean by the stain of sin now that He was purified in His resurrected state
- His blood needed to be pure for the purpose of atonement in the Heavenly throne where He was to ascend
- And Hebrews said that His blood was applied to heavenly things to cleanse them
- The article being cleansed in heaven was the mercy seat, because of Satan's sin
- So go back to the time when Satan was serving God on the mercy seat and imagine the scene...
 - God has created the most beautiful and wise creature in all existence, Lucifer
 - His assignment is to guard the mercy seat and cover the glory of God
 - At this point there is no sin anywhere in God's creation, since not even Satan himself has fallen yet
 - But what is a mercy seat for? What is mercy for?
 - A mercy seat is the place where sin is cleansed by the application of blood atonement

Lev. 16:15 "Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.

Lev. 16:16 "He shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities.

- A mercy seat is only necessary because sin exists and must be atoned for through blood sacrifice
- Yet as we established, at the time that Satan was serving in this capacity, there was no sin
- So there was no need for a mercy seat...yet
- So I wonder if Satan ever pondered the purpose in his job guarding a mercy seat?

- Did he ask God why do I guard this mercy seat? Who is the mercy for?
- To which God may have answered, just wait a little longer...you'll find out
- And before long, Satan's fall made the mercy seat necessary
 - Yet it was Satan's job guarding that seat which brought about sin in the first place
 - So if God hadn't made a mercy seat, would sin have ever come into existence?
 - The paradoxical nature of this situation suggests that God not only knew sin was coming but made a way for it to arrive
 - And therefore, the entire plan of redemption was planned before anything even existed
- Next time we return to study the Lord's judgment against Satan

- Let's jump back into one of the most fascinating chapters of Scripture in all the Bible
 - We're midway through Chapter 28 studying the Lord's declaration of judgment against Tyre, one of Israel's historical enemies
 - This section on Tyre runs from Chapter 26-28
 - The first two and a half chapters dealt with the city, its people and finally its leader
 - Tyre was a city-state, a single settlement sitting on a rocky island about 1km off shore of present-day Lebanon
 - It had an ideal harbor for deep ships, and high walls that extended into the island and into the sea
 - Which made the city practically impenetrable, an ideal place from which to regulate and rule world trade through the Mediterranean
 - So for centuries Tyre was the trading power and envy of the world
 - But the Lord says that their pride and wealth conspired to deceive the people's hearts
 - They looked around at the wealth and power and decided they were captains of their own fate
 - They believe they accumulated so much wealth and ruled commerce because they were inherently superior to other peoples
 - And at the top of the heap were the men who ruled Tyre, the kings who amassed wealth and power at an astounding rate
 - So as the Lord spoke to Tyre through Ezekiel, He declared the city would be brought low, robbed of its wealth and stripped of its power
 - The city would cease to be important and influential
 - And the people would perish in the sea
 - And the king of the city, a man the Lord calls "prince" of Tyre, would be judged for his pride and arrogance against God
- Then in v.11 of Chapter 28, the Lord shifted gears in a major way, still speaking about Tyre but referencing a new and very different character
 - Addressing this character as the "king" of Tyre, the Lord retells a story of privilege leading to pride and a fall into judgment and destruction
 - While that outline sounded very similar to the one we studied in the first 10 verses of the Chapter, it deviated in major ways
 - This new character served God in the throne room in a very special way
 - And his fall into sin shook both heaven and earth
 - So clearly, this individual was no ordinary ruler of the city of Tyre
 - Rather, we learned last week that the king of Tyre was a reference to Satan himself
 - Satan was the spiritual authority operating invisibly behind the scenes

- He corrupts the hearts of the people and drives their opposition to God and the people of Israel
- So as the Lord promised Israel that their earthly enemies would be judged in time, so also He promises that Israel's – and mankind's – spiritual enemy would meet his fate too
- We read the entire lamentation for Satan last week but only studied through the first part of it
- Tonight, we'll re-read the whole section again, and even as we move forward in our study, we will need to revisit some of those earlier details

Ezek. 28:11 Again the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 28:12 “Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,
“You had the seal of perfection,
Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

Ezek. 28:13 “You were in Eden, the garden of God;
Every precious stone was your covering:
The ruby, the topaz and the diamond;
The beryl, the onyx and the jasper;
The lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald;
And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets,
Was in you.
On the day that you were created
They were prepared.

Ezek. 28:14 “You were the anointed cherub who covers,
And I placed you there.
You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.

Ezek. 28:15 “You were blameless in your ways
From the day you were created
Until unrighteousness was found in you.

Ezek. 28:16 “By the abundance of your trade
You were internally filled with violence,
And you sinned;
Therefore I have cast you as profane
From the mountain of God.
And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub,
From the midst of the stones of fire.

Ezek. 28:17 “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;
You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.
I cast you to the ground;
I put you before kings,

That they may see you.

Ezek. 28:18 “By the multitude of your iniquities,

In the unrighteousness of your trade

You profaned your sanctuaries.

Therefore I have brought fire from the midst of you;

It has consumed you,

And I have turned you to ashes on the earth

In the eyes of all who see you.

Ezek. 28:19 “All who know you among the peoples

Are appalled at you;

You have become terrified

And you will cease to be forever.”””

- Last week I taught through the first part of v.16, but before we move into what follows, let's remember what we learned in those verses
 - First, we learned about Satan's origins, his appearance, intelligence and abode
 - Satan was created to be the wisest and most beautiful creature in all Creation
 - He was adorned with every precious jewel, resulting in a brilliant appearance that reminds us that Satan presents himself as an angel of light
 - And he began his existence in Eden, the Garden of God
 - Last week we learned that this Eden is not the same one we see in Genesis 2, where Adam and Woman first lived
 - The Eden of that chapter is the Garden of Adam, not the Garden of God
 - And it was created specifically for Adam and Woman, not for Satan
 - Furthermore, we noticed in v.14 that Satan was on the holy mountain of God, Mt. Zion, in the midst of burning stones of fire
 - From other Scripture, we learned that this was a description of God's throne room, not a place on earth
 - Furthermore, as we'll see tonight, Ezekiel says Satan was cast down from this place to the earth after he sins
 - So the Garden of God was a place Satan lived before he sinned and before he was cast down to the earth
- Then we learned about Satan's occupation prior to his fall, and that was probably the most fascinating aspect of the entire account
 - In v.14 we're told that Satan was the anointed, covering cherub
 - A covering cherub is the name given in the Bible for the figure that guarded the top of the ark in the tabernacle
 - Two golden covering cherubim were carved into the mercy seat and underneath their wings appeared the glory of God
 - Furthermore, we remembered that Hebrews tells us that the tabernacle and all its

furniture were patterned after things found in Heaven

- There is a heavenly sanctuary, a heavenly tabernacle, the writer of Hebrews tells us
- And the things God told Moses and the children of Israel to build were patterned after things in Heaven, including the mercy seat
- So since the mercy seat on earth had golden statues of cherubim, we can know that the mercy seat in Heaven used actual cherubim
- Cherubim are angels created by God to guard His glory
 - And now we know that Satan's original trade, his occupation, was to be the cherub guarding God's glory on the heavenly mercy seat
 - Day by day, Satan stood guard, the closest created thing to the glory of God
- And his privileged position became the source of his downfall
 - Then we're told in v.16 that the abundance of Satan's trade (or his high occupation) caused him to become prideful and arrogant
 - Much like the human king of Tyre, this spiritual king of Tyre let his success and beauty and power go to his head
 - And eventually, Satan's pride led him to sin against God
 - In v.15 we're told that unrighteousness was found within him...sin originated in the heart of Satan
 - His sinful heart brought him to violence, and though we don't know what violent act resulted, I suggested one possibility
 - We know that throughout history, Satan has sought to take the place of God
 - In several instances, he tried to seat himself in the place of God in the heavenly tabernacle
 - So perhaps that pattern started from the beginning, when Satan guarded that very place in Heaven
 - Perhaps he sought to sit in that place of authority in Heaven, trying to take the mercy seat by force
 - Whatever Satan did in heaven, it results in the Lord casting him down, which is where we pick up again tonight
 - Notice in v.16 that after Satan sinned against God, he was cast down from the mountain of God in Heaven
 - And Satan is removed from the stones of fire, further confirmation that this place is not the Eden on earth
 - Likewise in v.17 we're told Satan is cast to the ground because he was corrupted by his beauty and splendor
 - His beautiful appearance gave him reason to think he was inherently powerful and worthy of authority and privilege
 - And as we read earlier, his position guarding the glory of God puffed him up

- The phrase ending the first half of v.17 actually reads, you have corrupted your wisdom because of brightness
 - The reference to brightness refers to the glory of God, which Satan guarded
 - Because he stood so close to it, it corrupted his wisdom leading him to think he could replace God
- So the Lord cast Satan down as profane, meaning as unholy, impure and unworthy to remain in the presence of God
 - Now to this point in the narrative, we know we're studying past events
 - These events aren't just the past for us...they were also in the past for Ezekiel's Israel
 - These things happened before Adam and Woman even existed
 - So this part of Satan's story is merely the beginning of his judgment
 - So now we move ahead to the next step of that judgment, beginning with the second half of v.17
 - The Lord says he has put Satan before kings that they might see him brought low
 - We know this can't refer to the immediate aftermath of his fall
 - Because when Satan fell, there were no human beings in existence, much less kings
 - So clearly, the narrative has transitioned to future events, so now we need to understand what period of history the Lord has moved into
 - Going to the next verse, the narrative initially takes a step back before moving forward again
 - The Lord repeats that Satan's fall was the result of the unrighteousness of Satan's trade
 - That refers to the sinful way Satan went about performing the role he was given by God
 - And as a result, Satan profaned his sanctuaries
 - The sanctuaries refers to the Heavenly tabernacle where Satan worked
 - His sin made this place unholy for a time, until Christ's death sanctified the temple by His blood
 - This is further evidence that Satan served as a covering cherub
- But then the narrative returns to future judgment in the second half of v.18
 - The Lord says He bought fire from the midst of Satan, which is a cryptic phrase
 - But then notice that this fire will consume Satan
 - Ultimately it will turn him to ashes and kings will be astonished
 - This passage has been written in a poetic way to parallel what was said earlier about the prince of Tyre, making it more difficult to follow

- But because we have other Scripture to consult, we can figure out what it's saying
- First, we know that in a day to come, during the middle of Tribulation on earth, the Lord begins to carry out His plan to destroy Satan
- He will permanently bar Satan from having access to Heaven

Rev. 12:9 And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Rev. 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.

Rev. 12:11 "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

Rev. 12:12 "For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time."

- This future day is the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy that Satan is cast down to the ground before kings
 - Even now, Satan has been cast down in the sense that he was removed from his place of honor in heaven
 - But in the meantime, he is permitted to roam to and fro on the earth
 - And he may even enter the throne room of God as we read in Job

Job 1:6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.

Job 1:7 The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it."

- The angels are present before God, and Satan is among them
 - Notice Satan is not presenting himself before God, since he has fallen and cannot stand before God in that way any longer
 - But Satan moves among the angels
 - And by his own testimony, he can move freely on earth
- But Revelation tells us that these days of freedom for Satan are numbered
 - In a day to come he will be barred from heaven forever

- And in that day, it marks a new chapter of horror for the inhabitants of the earth says Revelation 12
- Because on that day, Satan faces the reality that his time is short
- Until that day, he held hope that he could find a way to avoid the fate God has promised him
- But once he is barred from Heaven, he becomes like an angry, caged animal, leading him to produce even more destruction on earth
 - We know from the rest of Revelation that he begins to persecute the world, especially Jews and Christians, with ferocity never seen before
 - That persecution leads the world into the very end of the age when Jesus comes back
 - And at the end, the Lord's return results in Satan's downfall
- At that moment, Satan is caught and bound and placed in the Abyss, a place of torment for angels similar to Hades for human beings

Rev. 20:1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.

Rev. 20:2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;

Rev. 20:3 and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

- At this moment, the kings of the earth are able to marvel at his predicament
- Which kings? Those who share his fate in Hades, who can see Satan in the pit, in the abyss
- We hear a description of this moment in Isaiah
 - Like Ezekiel, the Lord spoke through Isaiah to Israel reassuring them that their eternal enemy would be judged

Is. 14:3 And it will be in the day when the LORD gives you rest from your pain and turmoil and harsh service in which you have been enslaved,

Is. 14:4 that you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon, and say,

“How the oppressor has ceased,

And how fury has ceased!

Is. 14:5 “The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked,

The scepter of rulers

Is. 14:6 Which used to strike the peoples in fury with unceasing strokes,

Which subdued the nations in anger with unrestrained persecution.

Is. 14:7 “The whole earth is at rest and is quiet;

They break forth into shouts of joy.

Is. 14:8 “Even the cypress trees rejoice over you, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying,

‘Since you were laid low, no tree cutter comes up against us.’

Is. 14:9 “Sheol from beneath is excited over you to meet you when you come; It arouses for you the spirits of the dead, all the leaders of the earth; It raises all the kings of the nations from their thrones.

Is. 14:10 “They will all respond and say to you, ‘Even you have been made weak as we, You have become like us.

Is. 14:11 ‘Your pomp and the music of your harps Have been brought down to Sheol; Maggots are spread out as your bed beneath you And worms are your covering.’

Is. 14:12 “How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations!

Is. 14:13 “But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north.

Is. 14:14 ‘I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’

Is. 14:15 “Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, To the recesses of the pit.

- The Lord tells Israel that in the day when Israel receives the glory of the Kingdom as they were promised, their enemy will meet his fate
 - In this passage, Satan is called the king of Babylon, which is similar to the way Ezekiel describes him
 - In Ezekiel’s text, Satan is the king of Tyre, which becomes a type of the Tribulation world power; Babylon
 - In both cases, the power behind the scene is Satan; the true king
 - To that king, Isaiah says a day comes when his oppression will cease
 - The Lord breaks the scepter of wicked earthly dominions in preparation for His Son’s return to rule the earth
 - The whole earth is at peace, at rest, everyone breaks forth in joy
 - Try to imagine a world without the enemy at work, no rebellion and no temptation to sin...that produces a worldwide response of joy

- But beneath the earth, it's a different scene...it's a scene of misery and gloating
 - In v.9 Isaiah says that Sheol beneath greets the arrival of Satan (and the antichrist he indwelt) gleefully
 - They take pleasure in seeing their ruthless leader suffering in judgement just as they are
 - It's a misery-loves-company moment on a cosmic scale
- Notice the description of how Satan lives...with maggots as a bed and worms for a covering
 - Quite a contrast with a covering of precious stones and a place on the mercy seat in the heavenly tabernacle!
 - In v.12 the Lord says Satan has fallen from heaven, the star of the morning, the son of the dawn
 - That phrase may seem odd, since it almost sounds like we're talking about Jesus
- But the morning star is the ancient name for the planet Venus
 - Venus was visible in the early morning light until the sun rose in the east and the light of the sun eclipsed the light of Venus
 - For that reason, the Bible refers to Satan as the Day Star, because his light shines in the world only until the Son of God returns
 - His glory will outshine Satan and as the Son of God reigns forever, the light of the Day Star will never be seen again
 - And by the way, the name Lucifer means "day star" in Hebrew
- So Isaiah 14:12 is speaking to Satan about his fall, the day star cut down to the earth, the one who weakened nations
 - In v.13 Isaiah reminds us of his fall repeating a piece of Ezekiel's story
 - Satan said he could ascend to the throne, seated on the mount of the assembling
 - Becoming like the Most High
 - But instead, Satan was thrust down to Sheol, to the pit
 - So that's the punishment Ezekiel is speaking about in v.18; the beginning of Satan's punishment that happens in Tribulation
 - He is cast down at mid-Tribulation
 - The Lord brings forth fire from Satan's midst, meaning that from what Satan begins the Lord orchestrates Satan's downfall
 - The fury that Satan produces on earth among the nations becomes the means by which the Lord brings Satan to his end
 - And he becomes "ashes" in the eyes of all who see him
- But this is merely the first part of Satan's destruction
 - In v.19 Ezekiel repeats that Satan will be appalled by all the people

- Again, that can't be speaking about today or any day in the past
- Because the world as a whole has yet to be appalled by Satan
- In fact, many worship him, directly or indirectly
- The rest pretend he doesn't exist or isn't real
- But notice in the future, all who know him among the peoples (or you could translates that word as all creatures)
 - So on some day in the future, all creatures in creation who know Satan will be appalled at his fate
 - That day will be at the end of the Kingdom, when the world will be cleansed of all sin and evil

Rev. 20:7 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,

Rev. 20:8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.

Rev. 20:9 And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

Rev. 20:10 And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

- At the end of the 1,000 year kingdom on earth, the Lord begins to wrap up His plans for this physical Creation, beginning with our eternal enemy
 - Satan is released from the abyss for a short time, leading him to recruit all those unbelieving on earth
 - This army of unbelievers rallies to his side, because they are essentially already on his side by virtue of their unregenerate nature
 - (For a deeper discussion of how unbelievers play a part in the Kingdom, listen to our Revelation study)
- The rebellion doesn't go very far or last very long
 - Satan and his forces are defeated by fire from heaven in a brief moment
 - Then Satan is cast into a lake of fire specially prepared for him and his angels
 - This is the place where he ceases to be forever, as Ezekiel says in v.19
 - Remember, the Bible describes the eternal Lake of Fire as the Second Death
 - It is not a literal cessation of existence, but rather an unending period of torment
 - It's called the "second death" in the sense that it's the final resting place for the

soul

- Just as the first death is the final resting place of the body
- So in summary, the Lord ends His declaration of judgment against Tyre with a promise of reckoning for Israel's ultimate enemy
 - The Tyrians were thorns in the side of Israel through their idolatrous influence and persecution
 - And now we have confirmation that the enemy was behind these attacks, as we always knew he was
 - He was corrupting Israel through the influence of places like Tyre and Sidon
- So the Lord is promising to judge these places even as He judges the people Satan directed
 - So let's look at the specific judgment spoken against the sixth enemy in Ezekiel's oracles, a sister city of Tyre: Sidon

Ezek. 28:20 And the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 28:21 "Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, prophesy against her

Ezek. 28:22 and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,

"Behold, I am against you, O Sidon,

And I will be glorified in your midst.

Then they will know that I am the LORD when I execute judgments in her,

And I will manifest My holiness in her.

Ezek. 28:23 "For I will send pestilence to her

And blood to her streets,

And the wounded will fall in her midst

By the sword upon her on every side;

Then they will know that I am the LORD.

Ezek. 28:24 "And there will be no more for the house of Israel a prickling brier or a painful thorn from any round about them who scorned them; then they will know that I am the Lord GOD."

- Sidon was Tyre's neighbor, only about 20 miles away to the north, also present-day Lebanon
 - It was named after Canaan's first son, Sidon
 - Like Tyre, Sidon was a Phoenician city-state and a thorn in Israel's side
 - Asher was supposed to dispossess both of these peoples, but failed to do so
 - And the gods of both the Tyrians and Sidonians became cause for spiritual corruption among the tribes of Israel
 - Sidon once rivaled Tyre as the world center of shipping, but it occupied the shoreline rather than an impenetrable island
 - So when the Philistines destroyed the city, they lost their place to Tyre

- The city was later rebuilt, but by then Tyre had eclipsed Sidon's power
 - Later it was destroyed again by the Assyrians, but once more it rebuilt itself
- Under the Persians, Sidon prospered and reached its height of power
 - Sidonians were great ship builders and the captain of the Persian fleet was the king of Sidon
 - But a rebellion against the Persian empire sealed the city's fate and brought about the judgment God is promising here
- Once again, the judgment begins with the Lord setting forth His purpose in bringing this action
 - He says will be glorified in the midst of Sidon's destruction
 - By His action the Lord will create a testimony to all people for all time
 - That testimony is you cannot mock or oppose God nor corrupt His people without facing judgment
 - God responds in the end and when Sidon fell, the world would know that the Lord had executed the judgment
 - In v.23 the Lord describes the punishment generally as pestilence, blood in the streets and wounded falling in the midst of the city on every side
 - Historically, the army that brought this prophecy to fulfillment was the Persian army
 - When the city rebelled, King Artaxerxes Ochus came against the Sidonians to force them into submission
 - Greek historians record that as the army approached, the citizens of Sidon locked and barred the city gates locking the population inside
 - The leaders of Sidon elected to implement a scorched earth policy rather than surrender to the Persians
 - They set fire to their own city rather than allow it to fall into Ochus' hands
 - The inferno spread rapidly, consuming the city, and induced panic in the streets
 - The fire and panic left 40,000 people dead, reducing the city to a smoldering, bloody mess
 - It never regained its power
 - Although the region has remained inhabited even to this day, it has never risen above the destruction by the Persians
 - That is the legacy of God's judgment against the city
 - The city may have continued to exist in some limited sense
 - But the Lord's promise in v.24 has been kept...the city has never again been a thorn in Israel's side
- That ends the sixth oracle against Israel's enemies
 - The only one that remains is Egypt which is the subject of Chapters 29-32, after which we move into the descriptions of the Kingdom

- Before we get to Egypt, there is a short intermission at the end of 28 where the Lord reminds Israel of her coming glory

Ezek. 28:25 ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and will manifest My holiness in them in the sight of the nations, then they will live in their land which I gave to My servant Jacob.

Ezek. 28:26 “They will live in it securely; and they will build houses, plant vineyards and live securely when I execute judgments upon all who scorn them round about them. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God.”’”

- The Lord gives perhaps the shortest, most succinct description of Israel’s life in the Kingdom found in the whole Bible
 - In v.25 the Lord promises that the Kingdom’s appearance on earth begins with a preparation step for the nation of Israel
 - Before the Lord brings the Kingdom to Israel, the Lord works on earth to bring Israel to the place of their Kingdom
 - Specifically, the Lord begins moving the people of Israel across the face of the earth toward their Promised land in Israel
 - This migration of Jews back to Israel is the Bible’s first sign that the Kingdom promised to Israel was about to appear
 - These words were written even as the nation was in the process of being scattered
 - And then in centuries that followed, the nation has undergone periods of mini-returns
 - The first happens just 70 years later when the Lord allows a remnant to return from Babylon to rebuild the temple (see Ezra)
 - But that mini return of Israel (and others that followed in centuries later) are not the regathering that the Lord promises here and elsewhere
 - It’s easy to get them confused, and in fact no less than the prophet Daniel made that very mistake himself in Chapter 9
 - While Daniel sat in Babylon, he read the prophet Jeremiah’s promise that Israel would return to her land after 70 years
 - In reading that promise, Daniel assumed that return was the one God said would lead Israel into the Kingdom
 - So Daniel began praying to usher in the Kingdom
 - At that moment, the angel Gabriel visited Daniel to correct him
 - He let Daniel know that the final grand return of Israel in preparation for the kingdom was still many years away
- The distinction between these earlier, mini-returns of Israel to their land and the final return the Lord is talking about here is the degree and the occasion of their return

- First, the return of Israel before the kingdom is a return of all Israel
 - All Jews on the earth will end up in the land of Israel or else they will perish
 - There will be no other population of Jews on earth besides those in Israel
 - Notice in v.25 the Lord says plainly He gathers “the house of Israel” back in her land
 - That description points to all of the nation, not just a representative group
- Secondly, the occasion of their return is ultimately to greet the Kingdom’s arrival
 - The regathering leads to the Lord manifesting His holiness in their sight
 - This never happened in the earlier regatherings, meaning they were not THE regathering promised here and elsewhere
- So in a day yet to come, the Lord says all the house of Israel will find their way back to the land of Israel
 - And once they are assembled, the glory of the Lord will appear, leading to the appearance of the Kingdom
 - And of course, if the Kingdom appears so must the King, Christ
- So as we look at history, we find multiple mini-regatherings like the one led by Zerubbabel or the one that followed persecutions by the Romans
 - But these didn’t lead to the Lord showing His holiness to the people, nor to the arrival of all the Jews
 - So we’re still looking for the fulfillment of this regathering and we can see it happening now in our very day
 - The return of Israel to her land began at the end of the 19th century and picked up speed in the 20th century
 - It continues today, but we still have a long way to go
 - Only recently has the population of Jews living in Israel exceeded the total number of Jews living outside Israel
 - Still that’s an accomplishment, and it’s a sign that the end of the age is approaching
 - We may be studying events of the distant past, but they have an obvious connection to our day right now
 - We are watching the fulfillment of the first part of v.25
 - Which means the rest is soon to come to pass
 - After they are regathered, then the Lord returns (and us with Him) and the Kingdom will begin as promised
 - And in v.26 we’re told the Jews will live in their Promised Land peacefully and securely
 - This is another proof that we’re still waiting to see this prophecy fulfilled
 - Because though the Jews have returned to their land for a period of time, in the past and even now, they have yet to live in peace

- That's one of the hallmarks of the Kingdom age, and until we see that detail fulfilled, we know we haven't seen the Kingdom yet
- And to be sure we understand what "peace" means, the Lord defines it specifically in the rest of v.26
 - They will work the land, enjoying its fruit without concern for any threat
 - And they will have no threat because all Israel's enemy's will have been judged by God and will have no power to contend with Israel
 - Clearly, that has never happened before, since Israel has remained at risk of enemies even until today
- That's the day we're all waiting for because what the Lord has planned for Israel He has planned for us as well
 - We share in their future and so we cheer on the fulfillment of these things
 - In that day to come, Israel will know the Lord as we do
 - Come quickly, Lord Jesus

- Our study last week tackled the strange and fascinating story of Tyre
 - The city-state of Tyre was one of Israel's historical enemies which God promised Israel He would judge
 - Tyre was one of seven enemies that Ezekiel includes in this section of his book
 - We've studied Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, and at the very end of last week, Sidon
 - And after we conclude these prophecies about the enemies of Israel, we reach the second half of Ezekiel's prophecy
 - In the second half of this book, starting at Chapter 33, we will enter a new section of prophecy looking at the Kingdom to come
 - That will be a challenging set of prophecies to tackle
 - But before we get there, we still have the matter of one remaining enemy of Israel: Egypt
 - Ezekiel's prophecy against Egypt is divided into seven distinct messages
 - In fact, the seven messages against Egypt are equal in length to all six of the prophecies against the prior enemies
 - That reflects Egypt's unique importance in corrupting Israel
- We'll look at their influence throughout these messages, but we already know about Egypt's role in introducing Israel to idolatry
 - Earlier in this book we learned that Israel was first taken in by idolatry while they were living in the land before slavery
 - Later they brought idolatry with them as they left Egypt
 - And it has dogged them ever since
 - Egypt was the beginning of that curse, and it was because of idolatry that Israel is now facing exile and the destruction of the city and temple
 - So it makes sense that the Lord has saved His greatest judgment for this nation
 - But this section of prophecy is some of the most difficult to interpret
 - And therefore it's some of the most divisive among scholars
 - Some see these prophecies as entirely fulfilled in past events while other see some of these events as past and some as future
 - Adding to the confusion is the fact that some of these prophecies are out of order chronologically
 - Remember that Ezekiel is known for dating his prophecies precisely
 - So as we look at the dates, we will see that he presents them out of order, so we need to understand why he's doing that
- So we begin with the first of the seven messages

Ezek. 29:1 In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth of the month, the

word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 29:2 “Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt and prophesy against him and against all Egypt.

Ezek. 29:3 “Speak and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,
“Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt,
The great monster that lies in the midst of his rivers,
That has said, ‘My Nile is mine, and I myself have made it.’

Ezek. 29:4 “I will put hooks in your jaws
And make the fish of your rivers cling to your scales.
And I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers,
And all the fish of your rivers will cling to your scales.

Ezek. 29:5 “I will abandon you to the wilderness, you and all the fish of your rivers;

You will fall on the open field; you will not be brought together or gathered.
I have given you for food to the beasts of the earth and to the birds of the sky.

Ezek. 29:6 “Then all the inhabitants of Egypt will know that I am the LORD,
Because they have been only a staff made of reed to the house of Israel.

Ezek. 29:7 “When they took hold of you with the hand,
You broke and tore all their hands;
And when they leaned on you,
You broke and made all their loins quake.”

- Based on the date of this prophecy, Ezekiel received this oracle in the year before the first oracle against Tyre
 - The specific date on our modern calendar would be January 7, 587 BC
 - This date is important because of how it relates to historical events of that time
 - During the time Ezekiel receives these prophecies about Israel’s enemies, the city of Jerusalem is under siege by Nebuchadnezzar
 - That siege lasts about three years, but it goes through stages
 - At about 588 BC Egypt came to Israel’s aid against Nebuchadnezzar’s army and helped break the siege against the city
 - They Egyptians had been trying to dominate Israel and take the territory away from Nebuchadnezzar
 - So when Babylon came to siege Jerusalem in their third attack, the Pharaoh saw an opportunity to defeat Babylon and take Israel
 - But after less than a year, the Babylonians had repelled the Egyptians and re-established a siege of Jerusalem
 - They re-established the siege in 587 BC as Ezekiel was receiving this prophecy concerning Egypt
 - Now we might think that God would be pleased with Egypt for helping defend Israel...*except that God sent the Babylonians*

- Babylon was the instrument of God's judgment against Israel
- So ironically Egypt made themselves an enemy of God even as they tried to defend Jerusalem
- Therefore, at the same time that Babylon was repelling Egypt, the Lord was speaking to Israel through their prophet in judgment against Egypt
 - Notice in v.2 that this prophecy is against the leader of the nation but also against all the people of Egypt
 - So the punishments God pronounces are against the entire nation, not just the leadership
 - That detail helps us begin to form an opinion about what time these events take place
 - In v.3 the Lord promises that He will set Himself against the Pharaoh
 - The Lord calls the Pharaoh a great monster that lies in the midst of the rivers
 - The Hebrew word for monster is actually the ancient word for serpent (Satan)
 - So the Lord is not-so-subtly calling Pharaoh an instrument of Satan
 - Similar to what we studied with Tyre, the leader of the nation and the power behind the throne have an unholy union
 - Satan is working behind the scenes to bring down Israel
 - And he's manifesting that work in the heart of the Egyptian king by creating in him a prideful heart
 - Notice in v.3 the Pharaoh says that the Nile is his, when in fact the earth belongs to the Lord
 - Egyptians thought the Nile was a god, and the Pharaoh also claimed to be a god who created the Nile
 - So because of his prideful arrogance against Israel, the Lord says in v.4 He will pull the Pharaohs out of Egypt like fish out of water
 - They will be pulled out by hooks, which was the way Egyptians pulled crocodiles out of the water before killing them
 - The Lord explains in v.5 that this means that the king and all his people would be abandoned to the wilderness
 - The king and the people would fall on the open field and become food for birds
- Finally, in vs.6-7 the Lord gives the charge against the nation: they were like a walking staff for Israel made from a Nile reed
 - A walking staff made walking on rocky ground safe, but if your staff was not strong, it was a serious liability
 - A staff that broke at the wrong moment could lead the person to tumble down, perhaps over a cliff
 - That's the picture the Lord uses to describes Egypt's relationship to Israel
 - They portrayed themselves as a staff to support Israel in difficult times

- As when famine hit Israel, the Jews would go to Egypt for support
- And when Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, the nation looked to Egypt for help
- But Egypt was like a staff made from a thick Nile reed, that although it looked like it could support weight, in the end it collapses
 - And as it does, it causes Israel to stumble
 - That's a succinct record of Israel's history with Egypt
 - Israel leaned on Egypt when it shouldn't have, and in the end Egypt always caused Israel to stumble
- So for that the Lord will judge the king and the people

Ezek. 29:8 'Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will bring upon you a sword and I will cut off from you man and beast.

Ezek. 29:9 "The land of Egypt will become a desolation and waste. Then they will know that I am the LORD. Because you said, 'The Nile is mine, and I have made it,'

Ezek. 29:10 therefore, behold, I am against you and against your rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation, from Migdol to Syene and even to the border of Ethiopia.

Ezek. 29:11 "A man's foot will not pass through it, and the foot of a beast will not pass through it, and it will not be inhabited for forty years.

Ezek. 29:12 "So I will make the land of Egypt a desolation in the midst of desolated lands. And her cities, in the midst of cities that are laid waste, will be desolate forty years; and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the lands."

Ezek. 29:13 'For thus says the Lord GOD, "At the end of forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the peoples among whom they were scattered.

Ezek. 29:14 "I will turn the fortunes of Egypt and make them return to the land of Pathros, to the land of their origin, and there they will be a lowly kingdom.

Ezek. 29:15 "It will be the lowest of the kingdoms, and it will never again lift itself up above the nations. And I will make them so small that they will not rule over the nations.

Ezek. 29:16 "And it will never again be the confidence of the house of Israel, bringing to mind the iniquity of their having turned to Egypt. Then they will know that I am the Lord GOD."'"

- This is the judgment God promises to bring against the nation, so let's take note of the details as we try to identify the time and nature of the judgment
 - First, the Lord said He will bring against Pharaoh a sword and cut off man and beast
 - In fact, the land will become desolate and a waste because of the pride of the nation and the king

- The Lord says this desolation will extend from Migdol to Syene to Ethiopia, locations in the extreme north and south and west of Egypt
 - So the point is that the entire length of the nation of Egypt will be absent people and animals
 - In fact, neither a human foot nor the foot of a beast will even pass through the land
- Such devastation has not happened to Egypt since this prophecy was given, which leads us to look to future events
 - Nevertheless, some commentaries suggest this prophecy was fulfilled in ancient time when Egypt was conquered by Babylon
 - But the only way to reach that conclusion is by overlooking these details or assuming that the Lord is exaggerating
- But the context doesn't indicate we should interpret it as anything other than a literal description
 - We have geographical markers in the description
 - We have literal descriptions of devastation and abandonment, including descriptions of the absence of animals
- And we even have a timetable for this destruction: forty years
 - The Lord says in v.11 that this period of abandonment will last forty years
 - For forty years the land will be unoccupied by man or beast
 - And in v.12 the Lord adds that the citizens of the nation will be dispersed among the other nations for that period of time
 - That degree of specificity strongly indicates that this is a description of literal events
 - And if so, then they must be future events since they are so dramatic they can't compare to anything in our past
 - That leaves the only conclusion that this is a period in the coming Kingdom
 - We've already seen prophecies concerning other enemies of Israel that referred to future destruction in the Kingdom
 - Therefore, it isn't unprecedented to conclude that these prophecies are also looking forward to the Kingdom
 - And if so, then we find further confirmation in the way this first message ends
 - In v.13 the Lord says that after 40 years, He will gather the Egyptians back to their land
 - That is strikingly similar to language the Lord uses in relationship to Israel's judgment
 - Israel is scattered outside their land for a time and then allowed to return later
 - So if we conclude that God's promises to scatter and regather Israel are to be taken literally, then we must apply the same logic to interpreting these prophecies
 - Egypt is likewise being scattered to be regathered later

- They return to Pathros, the Lord says in v.14, to the land of their origin
- Pathros is the southern half of Egypt near Thebes
- From this place, the newly returned Egyptians will never again be a mighty people
 - They will be a lowly nation that can never rule another nation again
 - More importantly, Egypt will never again be an attractive supporter to Israel
 - Israel will never again place their confidence in Egypt instead of the Lord
 - The effect of this judgment will be that the people of Egypt come to recognize the Lord is the only One
 - Now that would be a truly remarkable outcome given Israel's history
 - Egypt has never been anything other than a pagan nation
 - The latest incarnation of false religion is Islam
 - So once again, we're forced to look into the future, to the Kingdom
 - The sword that begins this judgment back in v.8 must refer to the sword of Christ at His second coming

Rev. 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

Rev. 19:12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself.

Rev. 19:13 He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

Rev. 19:14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.

Rev. 19:15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

Rev. 19:16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

- The sword Christ wields is His word of power, by which He destroys His enemies under the Antichrist's rule, including Egypt
- Also in Ezekiel 29:5 we read that the bodies destroyed in the judgment would become food for birds
 - And likewise, we hear that same truth repeated in the description of Jesus' return

Rev. 19:17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God,

Rev. 19:18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and

the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.”

Rev. 19:19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.

Rev. 19:20 And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.

Rev. 19:21 And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

- So it seems reasonable to conclude that the judgment taking place in Ezekiel is the judgment of Christ's second coming
- And at that moment, the entire nation of Egypt will be judged
- Furthermore, at the end of the battle, the nation will experience a period of forty years without any inhabitants
 - That would mean that for the first forty years of the 1,000 year Kingdom, the nation of Egypt exists but the land stands empty
 - Then after 40 years, the Lord allows the nation to be repopulated
 - But the resulting nation is not a powerful entity on earth and it certainly never challenges Israel again
- Now assuming my interpretation is correct, then that means Ezekiel started with a prophecy that looks far into the future
 - So from there he moves to a prophecy about events that were soon to happen to Egypt

Ezek. 29:17 Now in the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, on the first of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 29:18 “Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre; every head was made bald and every shoulder was rubbed bare. But he and his army had no wages from Tyre for the labor that he had performed against it.”

Ezek. 29:19 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. And he will carry off her wealth and capture her spoil and seize her plunder; and it will be wages for his army.

Ezek. 29:20 “I have given him the land of Egypt for his labor which he performed, because they acted for Me,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 29:21 “On that day I will make a horn sprout for the house of Israel, and I will open your mouth in their midst. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

- This prophecy came on April 26, 571 BC, which means it came to Ezekiel seventeen years

after the one we just studied

- By the order of the seven messages, we count this as the second prophecy against Egypt
- But based on the dates of the prophecies, this is the sixth message Ezekiel received about Egypt
- So why does Ezekiel move this prophecy up earlier in his book?
- This message concerns events that intended to balance the first message
 - The earlier prophecy in this chapter is the ultimate judgment on the nation
 - But that judgment will not happen for a long time
 - So in the meantime the Lord shows the people that there will be other judgments too
 - So that as these near term judgments come to pass in Ezekiel's day, they give Israel confidence to trust in Ezekiel's Kingdom prophecies too
- So Ezekiel now reveals to Israel how Nebuchadnezzar would be given Egypt as spoil in a future military battle
 - But notice that the battle begins with Tyre again
 - After Nebuchadnezzar besieged and destroyed Jerusalem for the third time, the Babylonian army moved north
 - Soon after he seized Tyre
 - If you remember I said that the siege of Jerusalem lasted 3 years, during which time Ezekiel wrote most of these prophecies
 - And then the siege of Tyre lasted 13 years beyond that
 - So Ezekiel is writing this prophecy around the time of Tyre's fall to Babylon
 - As we learned before, Tyre's fall was earth shattering news to the ancient world
 - So the captives in Babylon would have certainly heard of Tyre's fall when it happened
 - Which would have validated the earlier prophecies of Ezekiel
 - So now the Lord is speaking through Ezekiel to the exiles to tell them that now that Nebuchadnezzar had succeeded in Tyre, he would go to Egypt to get paid
 - Notice in v.18 we're told that the battle against Tyre was hard work for Babylon's army
 - Every head was bald, made so by having to wear a helmet for so many years
 - And every shoulder had been rubbed raw by the coat of armor
 - Even worse, the army hadn't been paid for their service
 - To understand that statement, you have to know how ancient armies made their living
 - Armies were paid little or nothing by their master
 - The incentive to join the army was the booty they could collect from the

vanquished

- But when you consider the army had fought for 13 years at Tyre, they didn't get near enough booty from such a small city
 - Much of the city's wealth had been consumed in the long siege or lost in the battle itself
 - In fact, there is historical evidence that Tyre and Egypt were allies against Babylon
 - So Tyre may have depleted its wealth by smuggling it out to pay Egypt for support and supplies
- So after 13 years you have an unhappy, tired army that wants to be paid
 - So the Lord says His judgment over Egypt will include turning Egypt into spoil for Nebuchadnezzar's army
 - In v.19 the Lord says He gives Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar so he can carry off its wealth
 - This only make sense that the wealth of Tyre ended up in Egypt's hands
 - And because Egypt was again trying to thwart God's justice by opposing Babylon just as they did with Jerusalem (v.20)
 - So the Lord's justice will prevail over both Tyre and Egypt
 - Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt around 568 BC
 - And as he did, the Lord says in v.21, Israel began to grow a horn, so to speak
 - A horn is a depiction of strength and power in the Bible
 - So the idea is that Israel's future immediately became stronger as Egypt was weakened
 - This is the third time in Scripture that we've seen this kind of judgment against Egypt
 - You'll remember that when Abraham and Sarah went into Egypt, they left with many possessions
 - And you'll remember that when Israel left Egypt in the Exodus, the people left with many possessions from Egypt
 - And now we see the Lord taking spoil from Egypt again, which is leading Israel to have a stronger position
- Now, as we leave Chapter 29, I told you that this section of Ezekiel's prophecies is particularly hard to interpret – and it's about to get a little harder
 - We continue into the third message of seven against the nation

Ezek. 30:1 The word of the LORD came again to me saying,

Ezek. 30:2 “Son of man, prophesy and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,
“Wail, ‘Alas for the day!’

Ezek. 30:3 “For the day is near,

Even the day of the LORD is near;
It will be a day of clouds,
A time of doom for the nations.

Ezek. 30:4 “A sword will come upon Egypt,
And anguish will be in Ethiopia;
When the slain fall in Egypt,
They take away her wealth,
And her foundations are torn down.

Ezek. 30:5 “Ethiopia, Put, Lud, all Arabia, Libya and the people of the land that is in league will fall with them by the sword.”

Ezek. 30:6 ‘Thus says the LORD,
“Indeed, those who support Egypt will fall
And the pride of her power will come down;
From Migdol to Syene
They will fall within her by the sword,”
Declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 30:7 “They will be desolate
In the midst of the desolated lands;
And her cities will be
In the midst of the devastated cities.

Ezek. 30:8 “And they will know that I am the LORD,
When I set a fire in Egypt
And all her helpers are broken.

Ezek. 30:9 “On that day messengers will go forth from Me in ships to frighten secure Ethiopia; and anguish will be on them as on the day of Egypt; for behold, it comes!”

- This prophecy is undated, and therefore it makes it a little hard to place among the list of seven messages
 - It comes third in sequence of Ezekiel’s book, but was it a later prophecy moved up like the previous message?
 - Looking at the content, it seems to join up with the first message, because it’s evidently looking at end times
 - The phrase “day of the Lord” is a key marker
 - That phrase generally means the seven-year period of Tribulation on earth
 - Secondly, notice the opening descriptions of the promise of judgment
 - It’s a day of doom and gloom for all the nations, not just one
 - And it includes the slain in Ethiopia, Put, Lud and Libya
 - These are Egypt’s neighbors and they are likewise destroyed in the great doom
 - Many of these surrounding nations contributed soldiers to Egypt’s army, which is why they are included in this judgment

- And again the Lord mentions the cities being left desolate
 - So it would seem this is also a prophecy of far, distant events
 - But now it's speaking about the Tribulation, which immediately precedes the judgment of Christ's second coming
 - So the land is devastated in the judgments of Tribulation even before the ultimate judgment inflicted by Christ
- In v.9 we see reference to ships sent by the Lord that are so mighty they frighten even secure Ethiopia
 - This is an obscure reference, and it's one reason some believe this is talking about events of the past instead of the future
 - But too much of the rest of the prophecy won't fit a historical view
- Interestingly, based on my interpretation we start to see a pattern in the messages
 - Ezekiel's first message was about distant destruction at Christ's Second Coming
 - Then we had a prophecy of near-term destruction of the nation by Nebuchadnezzar
 - Clearly, the destruction at Christ's return is much greater than what Nebuchadnezzar accomplished
 - Then we seem to return to the first theme with a prophecy about the ultimate destruction of the nation in the time of Tribulation
 - And if the pattern is to hold, then the next prophecy we would expect to see would be of a near-term event
 - Sure enough, that's what we find

Ezek. 30:10 'Thus says the Lord GOD,
 "I will also make the hordes of Egypt cease
 By the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.

Ezek. 30:11 "He and his people with him,
 The most ruthless of the nations,
 Will be brought in to destroy the land;
 And they will draw their swords against Egypt
 And fill the land with the slain.

Ezek. 30:12 "Moreover, I will make the Nile canals dry
 And sell the land into the hands of evil men.
 And I will make the land desolate
 And all that is in it,
 By the hand of strangers; I the LORD have spoken."

Ezek. 30:13 'Thus says the Lord GOD,
 "I will also destroy the idols
 And make the images cease from Memphis.
 And there will no longer be a prince in the land of Egypt;

And I will put fear in the land of Egypt.

Ezek. 30:14 “I will make Pathros desolate,

Set a fire in Zoan

And execute judgments on Thebes.

Ezek. 30:15 “I will pour out My wrath on Sin,

The stronghold of Egypt;

I will also cut off the hordes of Thebes.

Ezek. 30:16 “I will set a fire in Egypt;

Sin will writhe in anguish,

Thebes will be breached

And Memphis will have distresses daily.

Ezek. 30:17 “The young men of On and of Pi-beseth

Will fall by the sword,

And the women will go into captivity.

Ezek. 30:18 “In Tehaphnehes the day will be dark

When I break there the yoke bars of Egypt.

Then the pride of her power will cease in her;

A cloud will cover her,

And her daughters will go into captivity.

Ezek. 30:19 “Thus I will execute judgments on Egypt,

And they will know that I am the LORD.”””

- Technically, we’re still in the third message, but clearly we’ve come back to the period of Ezekiel’s day
 - The Lord says He will also make the hordes of Egypt cease by the king of Babylon
 - The word “also” is important because it reflects that this is a separate judgment from the one just discussed above
 - In addition to bringing judgment against Egypt in the Tribulation, the Lord will also bring judgment by Babylon
 - This description is another retelling of the way Babylon invaded Egypt after destroying Tyre
 - He mentions that the canals of the Nile would dry up
 - These were manmade canals that diverted river water into fields for irrigating crops
 - They required constant maintenance to remove blowing sand
 - But when the nation went to war, the men had to leave the fields to fight
 - That caused the canals to go unmaintained, they dried up and the crop land went to rot
 - And the land was taken over (“sold” by God) to the Babylonians
 - History records that Egypt had invented around 1,200 gods that they worshipped

- Truly, Egypt was the mothership of idolatry in the ancient world
- The chief god was the sun and Pharaoh was the incarnation of the sun god
- But God says in v.13 that their gods would be no more after Babylon's invasion
- And the royal line of Pharaohs ended after the Babylonian invasion
- In vs.14-19 the Lord gives details of how this invasion would impact the land
 - The southern area of Pathros would be desolate, rather than rich farm land
 - Zoan would be burned, which is modern Tanis
 - He would also judge Thebes, which is Luxor today
 - In v.15 the Lord says He will judge Sin – except that this means a place name, not iniquity
 - Sin was a northernmost stronghold of Egypt
 - Thebes, mentioned again, will be breached and Memphis attacked daily
 - In v.17 two more major cities will fall and women taken into captivity
 - It would be a dark day for Tehaphnehes, which was a fortress home to Pharaohs
 - So we know that place was especially targeted by Nebuchadnezzar
 - In the that day, Egypt's power is broken
 - A cloud settles over her as her pride is broken
 - So once more these judgments show that the Lord is God alone
- Before we look at the final prophecy, notice the pattern again...
 - Kingdom judgment for Egypt followed by a lessor judgment brought by Nebuchadnezzar
 - Then again, an end times judgment followed by lessor judgment carried out by Nebuchadnezzar
 - The pattern creates the suggestion that there is something about Nebuchadnezzar's rule that suggests what's coming at the end
 - And sure enough, that's the message we get from one of Ezekiel's contemporaries – Daniel
 - In the visions Daniel receives in his book he tells of a long period of history that begins with Nebuchadnezzar and ends with Christ's return
 - And at the beginning of that period, Daniel says Nebuchadnezzar is given complete rule of the world

Dan. 2:37 “You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory;

Dan. 2:38 and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold.

- Another contemporary of Ezekiel and Daniel, Jeremiah, says the same thing

Jer. 27:5 “I have made the earth, the men and the beasts which are on the face of the earth by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and I will give it to the one who is pleasing in My sight.

Jer. 27:6 “Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and I have given him also the wild animals of the field to serve him.

Jer. 27:7 “All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson until the time of his own land comes; then many nations and great kings will make him their servant.

- So though Nebuchadnezzar’s rule did not extend outside western Asia, the Bible says God gave him rule of the whole earth
 - No ruler since has had the same unchallenged world power as Nebuchadnezzar did
 - But the Bible says that a future ruler will one day equal Nebuchadnezzar’s power, at least for a while

Dan. 7:23 “Thus he said: ‘The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it.

Dan. 7:24 ‘As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings.

Dan. 7:25 ‘He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.

- In end times terminology, the “beast” is a reference to a man who obtains power to rule the entire world – as did Nebuchadnezzar
 - Shortly before this man rises to power, the world has already been placed under the control of ten kings
 - These men then yield to the power of the beast
- In Revelation, we hear something similar

Rev. 17:12 “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.

Rev. 17:13 “These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast.

- These ten world rulers to come are brought to power explicitly so that they can facilitate the Antichrist's rise
- It's a lot easier for one man to grab power from among ten world rulers than from among 100+ as it is today
- This antichrist rules the world for a short time (an "hour") before his reign comes to an end at the second coming of Christ
 - Also at Christ's return, the judgments against Egypt that we've heard about earlier will take place
 - So Ezekiel seems to be connecting these events for us
 - The near term judgments against Egypt are carried out by God through the agency of an all-powerful world leader, Nebuchadnezzar
 - And the longterm prophecies of judgment are carried out by God through the agency of the Antichrist, an all-powerful world leader
 - And ultimately through Christ, THE all-all-powerful world leader
 - So as each leader gets more powerful through history, the associated judgment on Egypt likewise grows stronger
 - The judgements under Nebuchadnezzar produce a degree of destruction
 - The judgments created during the Tribulation by the Antichrist's rise to power will create even greater calamity for Egypt
 - And Christ's Second Coming produces ultimate devastation
 - The Lord is showing His people the great extents He was prepared to go to avenge Egypt's undermining of God's people
 - Some of that satisfaction would come in Ezekiel's day
 - Some await the ultimate days of justice
- So let's finish the chapter with the fourth message of judgment

Ezek. 30:20 In the eleventh year, in the first month, on the seventh of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 30:21 "Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and, behold, it has not been bound up for healing or wrapped with a bandage, that it may be strong to hold the sword.

Ezek. 30:22 "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt and will break his arms, both the strong and the broken; and I will make the sword fall from his hand.

Ezek. 30:23 'I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the lands.

Ezek. 30:24 'For I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand; and I will break the arms of Pharaoh, so that he will groan before him with the groanings of a wounded man.

Ezek. 30:25 'Thus I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, but the arms of

Pharaoh will fall. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt.

Ezek. 30:26 ‘When I scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the lands, then they will know that I am the LORD.’”

- This is the fourth message by count, but according to date this is the second prophecy Ezekiel received
 - The date is April 29, 587 BC, which is less than four months since the first message against Egypt
 - The prophecy begins speaking about Pharaoh having a broken arm
 - We don't know whether this is metaphor or literal
 - It's possible that the Lord is speaking literally about Pharaoh having a broken arm because of a battle against Nebuchadnezzar
 - During the time Nebuchadnezzar had Jerusalem under siege, the Egyptians attacked the Babylonians to support Israel
 - They succeeded in pushing Babylon back only for a few months
 - Those months may have coincided with the four months between Ezekiel's first and second messages
 - If so, then perhaps the Lord is telling us what happened to the king of Egypt in that battle
 - Some wonder if perhaps the Pharaoh suffered a broken arm in the battle
 - And as a result, the king could not hold a sword in battle, v.21 says
 - So the Lord uses that condition to personify the future state of the nation
 - At the time of this prophecy, Babylon had not yet defeated Tyre much less traveled down to defeat Egypt
 - So this prophecy is speaking about the coming destruction of the nation under Babylon's army
 - But that is still a decade and a half away
- So this message ends with the Lord promising that what happened to the king in battle was a sign of what would happen to the entire nation in a day to come
 - Their strong arm, which they welded over Israel, would be broken
 - Egypt would no longer be a super power
 - They king couldn't hold a sword and the nation wouldn't be able to fight either
 - As you contemplate this prophecy, try to remember how dominant Egypt had been for so long
 - For over 2,000 years Egypt had been a world power virtually unchallenged
 - They were building the pyramids thousands of years prior to Babylon's rise

- And now the Lord was telling Israel that this chief enemy, the unchallenged power on earth, would soon be nothing
- And in a day to come, it would be completely empty
- It's important to remember Egypt's fate when you hear Daniel's and Revelation's prophesy about a coming 10-king world government
 - We hear that prophecy and we imagine it must be far in the future
 - After all, the U.S. and other world nations are too strong to be displaced by anything or anyone else, right?
- Ask Egypt how quickly God can bring a world power down to the ground
 - The connections between Egypt and the Antichrist seem designed to remind the powerful nations of that future day that God can move nations as He desires
 - Which is why we want to remember that our country is not of this earth

- Tonight we reach the end of the first half of the book of Ezekiel
 - This first half of Ezekiel (which is actually 66% of the book) ends in Chapter 32
 - And in those 32 chapters Ezekiel was given the difficult task of telling Israel that time was up
 - Israel had engaged in gross idolatry repeatedly over centuries in spite of the Lord's warnings spoken through various prophets
 - So Ezekiel said the time had arrived for the city and temple to be destroyed
 - He's communicated that message in a variety of ways over more than a decade
 - The exiles in Babylon have ignored the prophet, made excuses, and argued with him
 - Meanwhile, the glory of the Lord has departed the temple and the Babylonian army has descended on the city
 - Nebuchadnezzar's final siege will last for three years
 - After the battle, the remaining remnant of the people will make their way to join the rest in exile
 - And Israel will appear to be gone forever, destroyed by the very God Who made them a people and gave them the land
 - But that isn't the end of the story for God's people, and in fact a glorious future awaits
 - That's what we learn in the second part of this book
- Before we get there, we have to finish the prophecies against Israel's enemies
 - Last week we began the seven oracles against Israel's greatest enemy, Egypt
 - Egypt's worst offense against God's people was introducing them to idolatry
 - And therefore the Lord gives them the longest rebuke
 - Last week we studied the first three of the seven messages against Egypt
 - The Lord promised to judge Egypt in the future through a unique period of abandonment of the land
 - Neither man nor beast would set foot in the land for 40 years
 - When we studied this prophecy, we concluded that the fulfillment must be in the Kingdom to come
 - That for the first forty years of the 1,000-year Kingdom, the land of Egypt will be left empty as a testimony against the nation
 - After which time the people of Egypt would be allowed to return for the remainder of the 1,000 years
 - But the nation would be the least among all the nations
 - This prophecy was followed by a near-term prophecy, promising that Egypt's Pharaoh would be judged in the immediate future
 - He tried to oppose Babylon when it attacked Jerusalem

- And in that he was opposing God Who sent Babylon
- So the Lord promised to use the Babylonian army to eliminate Pharaoh's power
- And as we learned, just as the Lord promised, Nebuchadnezzar's army put an end to the reign of Pharaohs over Egypt
- Now we reach the fourth message to Egypt, and this message is an argument of logic against the false sense of security that Egypt maintained
 - The oracle begins with a comparison to another great power of the age, Assyria

Ezek. 31:1 In the eleventh year, in the third month, on the first of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 31:2 "Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his hordes, 'Whom are you like in your greatness?

Ezek. 31:3 'Behold, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon

With beautiful branches and forest shade,

And very high,

And its top was among the clouds.

Ezek. 31:4 'The waters made it grow, the deep made it high.

With its rivers it continually extended all around its planting place,

And sent out its channels to all the trees of the field.

Ezek. 31:5 'Therefore its height was loftier than all the trees of the field

And its boughs became many and its branches long

Because of many waters as it spread them out.

Ezek. 31:6 'All the birds of the heavens nested in its boughs,

And under its branches all the beasts of the field gave birth,

And all great nations lived under its shade.

Ezek. 31:7 'So it was beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its branches;

For its roots extended to many waters.

Ezek. 31:8 'The cedars in God's garden could not match it;

The cypresses could not compare with its boughs,

And the plane trees could not match its branches.

No tree in God's garden could compare with it in its beauty.

Ezek. 31:9 'I made it beautiful with the multitude of its branches,

And all the trees of Eden, which were in the garden of God, were jealous of it.

- This oracle is dated to June 21, 587, which is about 2 months from the previous message God gave Ezekiel
 - The oracle is directed at the current Pharaoh of Egypt who was a man named Hophra
 - Ezekiel is writing in Babylon, so we must assume that God was either delivering this message to Pharaoh through some messenger
 - The point of this oracle is stated simply in v.2

- Whom is Egypt like in its greatness?
- Egypt was undoubtedly a great world power, and the nation had been great for thousands of years
 - It was the world power back in Abraham's day
 - And in Ezekiel's day it was one of two powers, along with Babylon, that vied for domination
- But there was one big difference between Egypt and Babylon...Babylon had been chosen by God to execute His judgments
 - Babylon was the nation God chose to discipline His people, Israel
 - And likewise Babylon would be used by God to judge many of Israel's enemies, including Egypt
- So the question God is asking Egypt is "who do you think you are? Just how great do you think you are?"
 - It's a rhetorical question, so the Lord proceeds to give Pharaoh an answer
 - He compares the greatness of Egypt to another world power of that period of history: Assyria
- Assyria was the world power that preceded Babylon on the world stage
 - For centuries Assyria was THE world power who competed with Egypt, but it was they who dominated the world scene
 - At this point in history, Assyria was gone
 - Babylon had conquered Assyria after Nebuchadnezzar's rise to power
 - But in its day, it was glorious
 - So in vs.3-9 the Lord uses figurative language to remind the Egyptians how truly great and powerful the kingdom of Assyria had been
 - Assyria was like the dominant cedar in Lebanon
 - The old growth cedar trees in Lebanon are gone today...the region was deforested long ago, over centuries
 - But the Bible is filled with references to these trees of old
 - In fact, the cedars of Lebanon are the most commonly referenced plants in the Bible
 - That fact is a testimony to how impressive these trees were...something like the giant redwoods of California
 - These trees reportedly stood 80 feet tall and were beautifully symmetrical like a perfect carved column of stone
 - And they possessed a thick canopy of interwoven branches
 - Cedars were the keels of the great ships of the ancient world
 - They were used to build the temple in Jerusalem
 - In v.3 the Lord uses the cedar as a picture of the greatness of Assyria in its day

- In the way a giant cedar's branches shaded and protected a large patch of ground, so did Assyria "shade" or cover much of the world
 - It was the top nation, like a cedar reaching to the clouds
- The point is obvious...as great as Egypt was, it wasn't the first or only nation to have achieved such greatness or prominence
 - In fact, the Lord uses the picture of a river to make a direct comparison to Egypt
 - In v.4 the Lord says Assyria was made strong by water that fed it like a river by a cedar tree
 - Literally speaking, the Lord is describing the Tigris river, which contributed greatly to Assyria's power
 - It watered the fields and supported trade with other nations
 - Likewise, Egypt's greatness was owed in large part to the power of the Nile river
 - So the Lord is drawing Egypt's attention to the similarities between it and Assyria
 - In v.5 the Lord uses birds nesting in branches to describe how Assyria, like Egypt, provided support and protection to many other nations
 - People often fled to Egypt for food in the midst of famine, and nations near Assyria turned there for support as well
 - So in summary, in vs.6-7, the nation of Assyria was a sight to behold in its day
 - It was the center of the world, the strongest nation and unmatched in power
 - No other nation could compare with Assyria
- Yet even great Assyria had its day of reckoning

Ezek. 31:10 'Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Because it is high in stature and has set its top among the clouds, and its heart is haughty in its loftiness, **Ezek. 31:11** therefore I will give it into the hand of a despot of the nations; he will thoroughly deal with it. According to its wickedness I have driven it away.

Ezek. 31:12 "Alien tyrants of the nations have cut it down and left it; on the mountains and in all the valleys its branches have fallen and its boughs have been broken in all the ravines of the land. And all the peoples of the earth have gone down from its shade and left it.

Ezek. 31:13 "On its ruin all the birds of the heavens will dwell, and all the beasts of the field will be on its fallen branches

Ezek. 31:14 so that all the trees by the waters may not be exalted in their stature, nor set their top among the clouds, nor their well-watered mighty ones stand erect in their height. For they have all been given over to death, to the earth beneath, among the sons of men, with those who go down to the pit."

Ezek. 31:15 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "On the day when it went down to Sheol I caused lamentations; I closed the deep over it and held back its rivers. And its many waters were stopped up, and I made Lebanon mourn for it, and all the

trees of the field wilted away on account of it.

Ezek. 31:16 “I made the nations quake at the sound of its fall when I made it go down to Sheol with those who go down to the pit; and all the well-watered trees of Eden, the choicest and best of Lebanon, were comforted in the earth beneath.

Ezek. 31:17 “They also went down with it to Sheol to those who were slain by the sword; and those who were its strength lived under its shade among the nations.

- At a point in time, the Lord contended with the pride of Assyria
 - Like all nations, the Lord had raised up Assyria for a purpose
 - Assyria was called by God to bring discipline against the northern tribes of Israel
 - The king of Assyria did indeed conquer northern Israel and Samaria as God intended
 - We hear a summary of the Lord’s act in 2 Kings 18:

2Kings 18:11 Then the king of Assyria carried Israel away into exile to Assyria, and put them in Halah and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes,

2Kings 18:12 because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed His covenant, even all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded; they would neither listen nor do it.

- But the Lord also told the king that he was not permitted to attack Judah
 - The Lord’s judgment at that time was against the northern tribes alone
 - But after completing the work God gave to him, the king of Assyria still wanted more

2Chr. 32:1 After these acts of faithfulness Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah and besieged the fortified cities, and thought to break into them for himself.

- The Assyrian king became greedy and forgot Who it was giving him the power to defeat Israel
 - So he assumed he could keep going south and take Judah too in his own power
 - But the Lord defended Judah

2Chr. 32:20 But King Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed about this and cried out to heaven.

2Chr. 32:21 And the LORD sent an angel who destroyed every mighty warrior,

commander and officer in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned in shame to his own land. And when he had entered the temple of his god, some of his own children killed him there with the sword.

2Chr. 32:22 So the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria and from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side.

- The Lord defeats the entire Assyrian army overnight without Judah lifting a finger
 - In 2 Kings we learn that 185,000 Assyrian warriors were killed
 - That essentially put an end to the Assyrian army
 - And beyond this judgment, they determined to bring the entire kingdom to an end
- Notice in v.11 the Lord says He would give Assyria into the hands of a despot of nations
 - That man was Nebuchadnezzar, and he would thoroughly deal with the rebellious, arrogant Assyria
 - Assyria's wickedness was cause for God to send a greater wickedness against it
 - Referring again to the cedar analogy; the Lord says that alien tyrants cut Assyria down, leaving it splintered on mountains and valleys
 - Its branches and bough fell, referring to the alliances that crumbled after Assyria's downfall
 - The peoples of the earth would flee from its destruction and in its ruins new things would rise up
 - Notice in v.14 the Lord declares that all "trees" by waters would not be exalted in their stature nor be set among clouds
 - Rather, these trees have been given over to death; to the earth beneath
 - Among the sons of the men who go down to the pit
 - The point here is clear: Assyria has no inherent power of its own
 - The nation, like all nations (i.e., trees), lived to serve God and had no power apart from what God gave it
 - And in the end all nations come to an end, in the same way that all things die and go back into the earth
 - And when Assyria's time was up, the Lord says in v.15 that it too went down to Sheol
 - Referring to the destination of souls, the Lord is comparing the death of a nation to the death of a man
 - No man, however powerful he is in life, can escape death
 - Which is a reminder that every person's – and every nation's – power is an illusion
 - It's merely a temporary assignment by God, and in the moment God is finished with our service, our power comes to an end

- Assyria's end was a shock to the world, because Assyria seemed unbeatable
 - In v.16 the Lord says the nations quaked at the fall of this cedar
 - And because Assyria fell, the other nations profited in the end
 - In the way smaller trees get more sunlight after a tall tree is cut down, the rest of the nations prospered when freed from Assyria
 - They didn't pay tribute or suffer under the authoritarian rule
 - But those nations that had aligned themselves with Assyria were brought down with her
 - Like a tall tree falling on other trees in the forest, the Lord says in v.17 that those who lived under Assyria's sword went to Sheol too
 - So those who were oppressed by Assyria were set free, while those who oppressed with her shared her fate
- What's the point here? Assyria was every bit as great as Egypt, and in fact Assyria was even greater in its day
 - And yet consider what happened to Assyria in the end?
 - When it stopped serving a purpose to God, God brought it down
 - It only had power because the Lord gave it power
 - So when the Lord withdrew His hand, the nation fell quickly
 - We're talking about an ancient superpower disappearing overnight at the hands of Babylon
 - It's similar to the end of the Soviet Union
 - That nation was virtually equal in power to the United States for decades
 - And then almost overnight, it disappeared
 - That's the power of God to move nations as He wills
 - So the point to Egypt was that they ought not delude themselves by thinking that they were invincible
 - They certainly have existed for far longer than Assyria
 - But they are no more powerful, and therefore they can disappear just as fast when God wills
 - And that's exactly the final point the Lord makes in this oracle

Ezek. 31:18 “To which among the trees of Eden are you thus equal in glory and greatness? Yet you will be brought down with the trees of Eden to the earth beneath; you will lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those who were slain by the sword. So is Pharaoh and all his hordes!” declares the Lord GOD.”

- To Egypt, the Lord asks which of the trees in Eden are you equal to?
- The Lord uses the term Eden to emphasize that the “garden” of nations were planted by

God like trees in Eden

- So the Lord says to Egypt you have no equal among the nations of the earth, yet you too will be brought down
 - You will be slain, lying with the uncircumcised, meaning with the unworthy outcasts
 - The Egyptians practiced their own form of circumcision, though Babylonians did not
 - And for an Egyptian, to die unburied and uncircumcised was the worst end imaginable
 - In Egyptian thinking, these indignities prevented a person from entering into the afterlife
 - So will be Pharaoh and all his hordes
 - Not only was this prophecy intended to put Egypt in its place, but it was also directed to the exiles in Babylon
 - Some were probably holding out hope that another nation might rescue them from Babylon
 - And the only nation with enough power to make that happen was Egypt
 - But now the exiles are hearing that there will be no rescue from Egypt
 - This was the end of the line for Egypt as a meaningful world power
 - And it was the end of the line for the exiles hoping for a way out of Babylon apart from the Lord's grace to release His people
- Which brings us the final two messages written to Egypt, the first of which is a lamentation or eulogy for Egypt's fall

Ezek. 32:1 In the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 32:2 "Son of man, take up a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt and say to him,

'You compared yourself to a young lion of the nations,
Yet you are like the monster in the seas;
And you burst forth in your rivers
And muddied the waters with your feet
And fouled their rivers.'"

Ezek. 32:3 Thus says the Lord GOD,
"Now I will spread My net over you
With a company of many peoples,
And they shall lift you up in My net.

Ezek. 32:4 "I will leave you on the land;
I will cast you on the open field.
And I will cause all the birds of the heavens to dwell on you,
And I will satisfy the beasts of the whole earth with you.

Ezek. 32:5 “I will lay your flesh on the mountains

And fill the valleys with your refuse.

Ezek. 32:6 “I will also make the land drink the discharge of your blood

As far as the mountains,

And the ravines will be full of you.

Ezek. 32:7 “And when I extinguish you,

I will cover the heavens and darken their stars;

I will cover the sun with a cloud

And the moon will not give its light.

Ezek. 32:8 “All the shining lights in the heavens

I will darken over you

And will set darkness on your land,”

Declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 32:9 “I will also trouble the hearts of many peoples when I bring your destruction among the nations, into lands which you have not known.

Ezek. 32:10 “I will make many peoples appalled at you, and their kings will be horribly afraid of you when I brandish My sword before them; and they will tremble every moment, every man for his own life, on the day of your fall.”

- This oracle and the one that follows come in the final month of the twelfth year of exile
 - This one comes on the first of the month, while the second one comes 2 weeks later
 - Based on the dates provided in the next chapter (Chapter 33), we learn that this oracle comes several months after Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar
 - And it also comes two months after the exiles in Babylon first learned of Jerusalem’s fall
 - If the exiles had heard of Jerusalem’s fall, then certainly the Egyptians had also heard the same
 - And the news probably gave them reason to celebrate, since it meant one less rival on the world stage
 - But the Lord sends this message to the exiles and to the Egyptians to make clear they had no reason to celebrate
 - Though it would take a few more years to come to pass, the Egyptians would likewise be destroyed
 - In v.2 Ezekiel is told to speak a lamentation over the Egyptians and specifically over Pharaoh
 - Remember last week we mentioned that Ezekiel recorded the prophecies against Egypt out of order from when he received them from God
 - The different order allowed him to stress other connections, as with Tribulation and the Antichrist as we saw last week
 - And in the case of Chapter 32, it means Ezekiel moved this prophecy to end since lamentations typically follow judgments

- The Lord begins saying that Hophra, the Pharaoh of Egypt, compared himself to a lion, when he was actually a monster of the Nile
 - The Egyptian sphinx has the body of a lion but the head of a pharaoh, which is how the kings saw themselves
 - But the Lord says that was an incorrect picture
 - In reality, the king of Egypt was more like a river monster that comes out of the water to foul the river and muddy it
 - That symbolizes Egypt's negative influence on the nations around it, particularly Israel
- As a result, the Lord promises to catch Pharaoh out of the water like catching a fish in a net
 - The net would be manned by a large group of people, Ezekiel says, referring to first the Babylonian army and later the Persians
 - Interestingly, in the Babylonian account of Creation, they believed that their god Marduk captured a sea monster
 - The sea monster, Tiamat, was responsible for the chaos of the Universe, and Marduk caught the monster in a net and killed it
 - So it appears the Lord is using imagery from Babylonian culture to remind Israel that He is the sovereign Creator over nations
 - We know there was an invasion of Egypt by the Persians resulting in widespread destruction and death in the land
 - The imagery of vs.4-6 indicates many lives would be lost and blood spilled throughout the land of Egypt
 - And in 526 BC, a final battle of Pelusium resulted in Egypt becoming part of the Persian empire
 - But the destruction of that battle didn't equal the destruction described here
 - So unless we are prepared to accuse the Lord of exaggerating, the facts of history are starting to diverge from the text
 - Furthermore, the descriptions in vs.7-8 really go off in a new direction
 - The Lord says in the day of this destruction, the heavens would be impacted as well
 - The stars would be darkened, the sun would not shine and the moon would not give its light
 - Furthermore, the lights of the heavens, referring to the stars, would darken over Egypt and darkness would come over the land
 - That reminds us of the judgments of the Exodus, which are themselves forerunners for the judgments of Tribulation
- So just as we saw last study, these references preclude a historical interpretation
 - There is simply no historical record of these things happening over Egypt in conjunction with an foreign invasion
 - Yet we do see examples of them reflected in end times events

- Specifically, we know the heavens will be shaken by God's judgments during the Tribulation
- Revelation mentions blood from Armageddon flowing like a river for 200 miles, which is the distance from Jerusalem to the Nile delta
 - Furthermore, we see the sun going black for periods, the stars falling, and the moon changing as well
 - These descriptions fit the circumstances described by Ezekiel
 - And they remind us of what we learned in previous oracles, when the Lord will bring ultimate judgment against Israel
- In particular, note in v.9 that the Lord will trouble many other nations by bringing destruction upon them too
 - Clearly that points to something bigger than merely an invasion of Egypt
 - In v.10 the world as a whole would be frightened at Egypt's fall, which also suggests events bigger than one nation
- And the description becomes even more interesting in the next part

Ezek. 32:11 For thus says the Lord GOD, "The sword of the king of Babylon will come upon you.

Ezek. 32:12 "By the swords of the mighty ones I will cause your hordes to fall; all of them are tyrants of the nations,
And they will devastate the pride of Egypt,
And all its hordes will be destroyed.

Ezek. 32:13 "I will also destroy all its cattle from beside many waters;
And the foot of man will not muddy them anymore
And the hoofs of beasts will not muddy them.

Ezek. 32:14 "Then I will make their waters settle
And will cause their rivers to run like oil,"
Declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 32:15 "When I make the land of Egypt a desolation,
And the land is destitute of that which filled it,
When I smite all those who live in it,
Then they shall know that I am the LORD.

Ezek. 32:16 "This is a lamentation and they shall chant it. The daughters of the nations shall chant it. Over Egypt and over all her hordes they shall chant it," declares the Lord GOD.

- Now the Lord tells Egypt that the king of Babylon would be part of the judgment
 - In v.12 the Lord promises that the pride of Egypt would be brought low
 - The hordes of Egypt, referring to its armies, would be cut down
 - And the cattle would also be destroyed

- But then notice that as we saw last time, the Lord says neither man nor beast would set foot in the land
 - The water would settle, as into the ground
 - And in place of water, the rivers would run like oil
 - And the land would become a desolation
 - And all who live in the land would die, He says in v.15
- So the mention of the king of Babylon suggests something historical, perhaps at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar
 - And though we know Nebuchadnezzar did contend with Egypt, there is no record of him attacking to this extent
 - And some of the details simply can't be historical events because nothing like them has ever happened
 - So we're back to our same conclusion...this is a prophecy concerning the destruction of Tribulation
- The desolation is consistent with the destruction of Tribulation
 - And even the reference to the rivers running like oil makes sense
 - The two witnesses of Tribulation have the power to turn waters into blood, which flows like oil
 - And certainly the other references to massive death fits
- If so, then what about the reference to the king of Babylon?
 - That reference also fits if we assume that this is the future king of Babylon, the Antichrist who rules from Babylon during Tribulation
 - If so, then the march of his armies in Egypt refers to the conquests of that man during the early stages of the seven years
 - Apparently the Lord uses the Antichrist to judge Egypt much in the same way He used Nebuchadnezzar to judge Israel's enemies
 - And so in that day to come the world will chant a lamentation over Egypt
 - Because that nation will fall to the Antichrist and signal the start of that man's conquest of the earth
 - And with that statement, Ezekiel receives the final oracle about Egypt, which serves as a summary of all the other six

Ezek. 32:17 In the twelfth year, on the fifteenth of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 32:18 “Son of man, wail for the hordes of Egypt and bring it down, her and the daughters of the powerful nations, to the nether world, with those who go down to the pit;

Ezek. 32:19 ‘Whom do you surpass in beauty?
Go down and make your bed with the uncircumcised.’

Ezek. 32:20 “They shall fall in the midst of those who are slain by the sword. She is given over to the sword; they have drawn her and all her hordes away.

Ezek. 32:21 “The strong among the mighty ones shall speak of him and his helpers from the midst of Sheol, ‘They have gone down, they lie still, the uncircumcised, slain by the sword.’

Ezek. 32:22 “Assyria is there and all her company; her graves are round about her. All of them are slain, fallen by the sword,

Ezek. 32:23 whose graves are set in the remotest parts of the pit and her company is round about her grave. All of them are slain, fallen by the sword, who spread terror in the land of the living.

Ezek. 32:24 “Elam is there and all her hordes around her grave; all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who went down uncircumcised to the lower parts of the earth, who instilled their terror in the land of the living and bore their disgrace with those who went down to the pit.

Ezek. 32:25 “They have made a bed for her among the slain with all her hordes. Her graves are around it, they are all uncircumcised, slain by the sword (although their terror was instilled in the land of the living), and they bore their disgrace with those who go down to the pit; they were put in the midst of the slain.

Ezek. 32:26 “Meshech, Tubal and all their hordes are there; their graves surround them. All of them were slain by the sword uncircumcised, though they instilled their terror in the land of the living.

Ezek. 32:27 “Nor do they lie beside the fallen heroes of the uncircumcised, who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war and whose swords were laid under their heads; but the punishment for their iniquity rested on their bones, though the terror of these heroes was once in the land of the living.

Ezek. 32:28 “But in the midst of the uncircumcised you will be broken and lie with those slain by the sword.

Ezek. 32:29 “There also is Edom, its kings and all its princes, who for all their might are laid with those slain by the sword; they will lie with the uncircumcised and with those who go down to the pit.

Ezek. 32:30 “There also are the chiefs of the north, all of them, and all the Sidonians, who in spite of the terror resulting from their might, in shame went down with the slain. So they lay down uncircumcised with those slain by the sword and bore their disgrace with those who go down to the pit.

Ezek. 32:31 “These Pharaoh will see, and he will be comforted for all his hordes slain by the sword, even Pharaoh and all his army,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 32:32 “Though I instilled a terror of him in the land of the living, yet he will be made to lie down among the uncircumcised along with those slain by the sword, even Pharaoh and all his hordes,” declares the Lord GOD.

- Just two weeks later, Ezekiel gets the final oracle about Egypt

- It's a bit tongue-in-cheek picturing Egypt in her final resting place alongside the other enemies of Israel who have been judged
 - Each nation is personalized as if they could literally descend into Hell
 - It starts with the Lord mocking Egypt for all her supposed strength and beauty
 - Nevertheless, they will end up among the lowly in the pit
- The people of the nation will be destroyed in battle, Ezekiel says in vs.20-21, slain by a sword
 - They are given over to the sword, which indicates that the Lord appointed this outcome for the nation
 - In v.21 Ezekiel says the strongest among the mighty nations of the world would speak of Egypt and its helpers as barbarians, brought low with the rest
- Among those who see Egypt brought low into Sheol is Assyria
 - Assyria and her allies are strewn around Sheol buried in corners
 - The rest marveled at how a kingdom so great could be brought so low
- Elam is mentioned in v.24 and was a country east of Babylon
 - This a prophetic reference to the Persians, who followed the Babylonians in history
 - Elam is also lying with its hordes in Sheol, put there by God's hand at an appointed time even though the world feared them
 - And Egypt would share their fate as well
- Also, we find Meshech and Tubal, nations that occupied present-day Turkey, which may be a reference to the Alexandrian Empire that followed Persia
 - They suffered a similar fate, of course
 - One moment they ruled the world
 - The next moment, they are gone; their warriors in the grave with their weapons
 - That's the power of God to move nations, and such would be the outcome for Egypt too
 - At the end, the Lord mentions several former powers of the region including Edom, the chiefs of the North and the Sidonians
 - Each were the world power for a time in their region and yet each had come and gone and were now residing in Sheol
 - And those who lived and supported these nations died and landed in Sheol, in disgrace with them
 - So no one in Egypt should be deluded to think they would escape this pattern
 - And Israel should trust the Lord to bring these judgments in the course of time
 - Finally, in an ironic twist, we see the king of Egypt being "comforted" by the sight of so many other mighty nations occupying Sheol
 - Obviously, the king of Pharaoh is not at all comforted to be there

- But it dawns upon the leader that he is sharing the same destiny of all other powerful nations
- That at least Pharaoh was singled-out in judgment
- Even though he was once the terror of the land, now he's merely one among equals all in judgment together
- Death is the great equalizer, and though this scene is obviously contrived to make a point, it also serves as a reminder of the reality of judgment
 - This is the fate for so many in the world
 - It is a conscious existence where understanding follows
 - Those who enter Hades are aware of their fate and of those who shared it
 - Yet it's a timeless state that has no end, leaving no hope
 - And certainly, Chapter 32 ends without a sense of hope for Israel's enemies
 - But for the exiles who first heard the prophet's words, there was an equal sense of hopelessness over their circumstances
 - Their nation had been destroyed, their beloved city razed and their holy temple erased to the foundations
 - The final group of exiles had arrived telling tales of horrors
 - So the emotional low point of Ezekiel's book comes at the end of this chapter, both for the enemies of Israel and for Israel itself
 - And from this pit of despair, the Lord begins to lift Israel up a step at a time
 - That process raises their eyes off of their present circumstances in judgment and onto a vision of the final glory of the Kingdom
 - We start that process of moving upward next week

- Our long-anticipated start to the second part of Ezekiel has finally arrived
 - Today we begin studying prophecies concerning the future glory and blessings the Lord has planned for His people, Israel
 - This is a welcome change from Chapters 1-32, which were a series of oracles pronouncing judgment
 - In those chapters the Lord told Israel that the nation was on the verge of complete destruction
 - The city, the walls and the temple were going to be destroyed by Babylon
 - The Leadership would be removed, the people would be taken out of the land, and their exile would last for some time
 - Finally, at the end of those chapters the Lord spoke judgment against Israel's enemies that surrounded her
 - But now we've come through all that, and the Lord is ready to show His people that better things awaited them in the future
 - Now remember, the calamity Israel has just experienced in Ezekiel's day came as a result of the Mosaic covenant
 - In that covenant the Lord gave His people a law that came with strict requirements and harsh penalties for disobedience
 - The nation agreed to those terms, and now the Lord has acted to hold them accountable to that covenant
 - But before the Lord gave His people the Old Covenant through Moses, He had previously given them a very different covenant through Abraham
 - The Abrahamic covenant, unlike the Mosaic Covenant, promised Abraham's descendants only blessings
 - And also unlike the Mosaic Covenant, the Lord's promises to Abraham were unconditional
 - God asks absolutely nothing of Abraham and his descendants
 - The promises of the Abrahamic covenant would come to pass regardless of what Abraham or any of his descendants did or didn't do
 - So in a sense, the prophecies of the first part of Ezekiel are related to the Mosaic Covenant (though not exclusively)
 - While the promises of the second part of Ezekiel are related to the Abrahamic Covenant (though also not exclusively)
 - So despite the magnitude of Israel's sin evidenced by the first part of the book, nevertheless we will now see the magnitude of the Lord's grace to His people
- As I mentioned last week, this story begins slowly though
 - In fact, the initial chapters may seem similar to what we've been studying in the first part
 - That's because Lord moves the narrative carefully away from the story of judgment and toward a story of restoration

- What God tore apart in Chapters 1-32 He now explains how He will restore in Chapters 33-48
- But that story moves in stages that roughly correspond to the stages of Part 1's prophecies
 - The first half of Chapter 33 is actually a continuation of the prophecy that started in Chapter 32, dated to March of 585 BC
 - Then in the middle of Chapter 33, we begin the thirteenth prophecy that God gives to Ezekiel
 - That prophecy runs all the way until Chapter 39
 - Then the fourteenth and final prophecy runs from Chapter 40-48
- The structure of the thirteenth prophecy follows a pattern we saw in Part 1
 - That is in Part 1, the Lord systematically tore down the nation because of their sin
 - First, the Lord took aim first at Ezekiel himself, warning the prophet to be faithful with the message
 - Part 2 begins the same way here in Chapter 33
 - Then in Part 1 the Lord told the people they were responsible to heed what the prophet told them...that also happens in Chapter 33
- Then Part 1 moved to convicting the leaders and their role in corrupting Israel
 - So in Part 2, Ezekiel tells Israel about new leadership God will raise up
 - And in Part 1 God said Israel would lose access to the blessings of the covenant including their prosperity, their security, and their land
 - So in Part 2 He tells Israel that He will restore those things in new and better ways
- Finally, in Part 1 we saw the nation vacated, the city destroyed, the people scattered
 - So in Part 2 the nation is brought back to life
 - And instead of falling to a foreign enemy, the Lord will protect the nation from devastating foreign attack
- So let's begin that journey with the Lord preparing the prophet and the people for what He will reveal to them

Ezek. 33:1 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezek. 33:2 "Son of man, speak to the sons of your people and say to them, 'If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman,

Ezek. 33:3 and he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows on the trumpet and warns the people,

Ezek. 33:4 then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his own head.

Ezek. 33:5 ‘He heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life.

Ezek. 33:6 ‘But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman’s hand.’

Ezek. 33:7 “Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me.

Ezek. 33:8 “When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand.

Ezek. 33:9 “But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your life.

- This is a recommissioning of the prophet that mirrors the first one in Chapters 2-3
 - Back then we learned that Ezekiel was to act as a watchman, a sentinel who stands guard to warn the people of approaching threats
 - The prophet doesn’t respond to the threat, but merely warns
 - The Lord says that if a watchman does his job and issues a warning, then the response is out of his hands
 - It’s the responsibility of the people being warned to heed that warning
 - And in vs.4-5 the Lord assures Ezekiel that if the people hear but do not heed warnings, they will suffer
 - But their fate is not the watchman’s responsibility
 - The watchman has done his part, he has obeyed the Lord and given His message as the Lord intended
 - That’s the mission of a prophet...to open his mouth and speak what he’s told
 - And he should not concern himself with what comes next
 - On the other hand, the Lord reminds Ezekiel in vs.8-9 that if he’s given a word but doesn’t share it accurately, the Lord will hold Ezekiel accountable
 - The wicked will still die but now so would Ezekiel for failing to warn as instructed
 - But if Ezekiel should deliver the message faithfully, then even if the wicked doesn’t repent, at least Ezekiel would be spared
 - This is the same warning that the Lord issued in Part 1 and it’s always the way the Lord works with those He commissions
 - Do as you’re told and let the results take care of themselves
 - But ignore God’s instructions or think that you know a better way, and you will

be accountable to God

- Now, the Lord turns to the people and reminds them of their responsibility

Ezek. 33:10 “Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus you have spoken, saying, “Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?”’”

Ezek. 33:11 “Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’”

Ezek. 33:12 “And you, son of man, say to your fellow citizens, ‘The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he will not stumble because of it in the day when he turns from his wickedness; whereas a righteous man will not be able to live by his righteousness on the day when he commits sin.’”

Ezek. 33:13 “When I say to the righteous he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die.

Ezek. 33:14 “But when I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ and he turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness,

Ezek. 33:15 if a wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he has taken by robbery, walks by the statutes which ensure life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Ezek. 33:16 “None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has practiced justice and righteousness; he shall surely live.

Ezek. 33:17 “Yet your fellow citizens say, ‘The way of the Lord is not right,’ when it is their own way that is not right.

Ezek. 33:18 “When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, then he shall die in it.

Ezek. 33:19 “But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and practices justice and righteousness, he will live by them.

Ezek. 33:20 “Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not right.’ O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways.”

- The Lord reminds the people as He did at the beginning of Part 1 that there is hope for those who heed the word of God and repent from their sin
 - The people might tell themselves that there was no reason to obey since they have no hope...God was set against them
 - But the Lord says He has no pleasure in their destruction
 - There was opportunity for the wicked who turned back to the Lord

- And at the same time, there was no hope for the righteous who sinned
- The Lord was speaking to two kind of hearts present in Israel, both of which were lost
 - First, there were the wicked in Israel who had knowingly and willingly transgressed the covenant
 - Their sin was self-evident and they stood condemned
- But when you sin in the open and without regret, you set your heart against God and you sear your conscience
 - If ever you begin to consider returning to the Lord, you are stopped at the beginning because you assume that you're too far gone
 - The enemy will work to reinforce that thinking, producing guilt and hopelessness, which give further motivation to sin
 - Such a person tells himself that there is no point in seeking God because even if he returned, he would be rejected
 - So continuing in rebellion seems to be the only option
- Then there's the person at the other end of the spectrum
 - The self-righteous person who doesn't recognize their own sin, and as a result sees no reason for repentance
 - That person lives in an upright fashion, keeping the rituals of religion without understanding their own place in it
 - They view themselves as not needing the forgiveness God offers
 - In v.13 the Lord says that if the righteous person hears that he will live yet goes out to commit sin, his prior good deeds won't save him
 - That person is equally guilty as the first person
 - And unless they too seek God's forgiveness, they will be condemned just as much as the wicked
 - Conversely, if the wicked repent, the Lord says in vs.14-16, then he can be forgiven
 - The first person assumed they couldn't merit God's forgiveness
 - While the second person assumed they didn't need God's forgiveness
 - Both are equally condemned yet both have equal opportunity to repent
 - Then the Lord echos what the people were saying, that the Lord's ways were not right
 - They were accusing the Lord of not treating Israel properly and fairly
 - But the Lord reiterates that His ways are more than fair and that each man will be judged by God accordingly
 - The point is that we might complain now that we shouldn't be held responsible for our actions or that God is unfair
 - But when we face Him, our protests and excuses will count for nothing

- The only thing that matters is what we did with the word of God
- Those who hear and repent receive forgiveness
- Those who don't will die, the Lord says
- With that, we move into the 13th dated prophecy with the Lord again reminding Ezekiel of his role and responsibility

Ezek. 33:21 Now in the twelfth year of our exile, on the fifth of the tenth month, the refugees from Jerusalem came to me, saying, "The city has been taken."

Ezek. 33:22 Now the hand of the LORD had been upon me in the evening, before the refugees came. And He opened my mouth at the time they came to me in the morning; so my mouth was opened and I was no longer speechless.

Ezek. 33:23 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 33:24 "Son of man, they who live in these waste places in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one, yet he possessed the land; so to us who are many the land has been given as a possession.'

Ezek. 33:25 "Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "You eat meat with the blood in it, lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood. Should you then possess the land?"

Ezek. 33:26 "You rely on your sword, you commit abominations and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife. Should you then possess the land?"

Ezek. 33:27 "Thus you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "As I live, surely those who are in the waste places will fall by the sword, and whoever is in the open field I will give to the beasts to be devoured, and those who are in the strongholds and in the caves will die of pestilence.

Ezek. 33:28 "I will make the land a desolation and a waste, and the pride of her power will cease; and the mountains of Israel will be desolate so that no one will pass through.

Ezek. 33:29 "Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I make the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations which they have committed."

- You may remember that the last prophecy of judgment that came as Nebuchadnezzar attacked the city was in Chapter 24
 - As that prophecy ended, the Lord told Ezekiel he would remain mute until the city was destroyed
 - Now we hear that the exiles from that attack are finally making their way into the camp of the exiles
 - So now the time has come for Ezekiel's forced silence to come to an end
 - So on January 19, 585 BC word reaches the exiles that everything Ezekiel has foretold has come to pass
 - The siege of that city began on the tenth day of the tenth month in the ninth

- year of King Zedekiah
 - Ten is the number of testimony while nine is the number of judgment
 - So this is a testimony of God's judgment
- Now after many months later, the news of the city's fall reaches the exiles
 - So in v.22 the Lord has now put His "hand" upon Ezekiel indicating he could open his mouth again to speak to the people
 - And what Ezekiel says is intended to ensure the audience listened with an appreciation for what had transpired
- First in v.24 the Lord repeats what's being said by the few Jews still living in Judea
 - After the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and left, there were a scattering of Jews in the land
 - These were Jews who hid from Babylon in caves, lived in isolation in fields and on mountain sides rather than in the city
 - They escaped death and exile, and so now they were the only Jews remaining in the land
- These Jews looked at their circumstances and concluded they were God's appointed remnant in the land
 - They assumed they would restart the nation and repossess the land, like Abraham
 - In v.24 the Lord says they are telling themselves that they are like Abraham
 - Abraham was only one yet the Lord said he possessed the land
 - So they conclude they will be like Abraham...not mighty in number but nonetheless the Lord was working through them
 - This self-deception overlooked two big differences between them and Abraham
 - First, Abraham was told to dwell in the land by God
 - These people have been told by their prophets that God wanted them to leave the land
 - Secondly, the promise God gave Abraham was that he and his descendants would possess the land in a future Kingdom
 - While these refugees were telling themselves they would possess the land by themselves in their own lifetime
 - So now the Lord tells the exiles that they should not expect those left behind to succeed in their folly
 - He reminds the people that these refugees were just as ungodly as the rest of Israel
 - And therefore, they would not receive God's mercy, though they remained in the land
 - Remember, earlier the Lord told Israel that any who refused to go willingly into exile would die
 - Only by submitting to Nebuchadnezzar's army could they expect to live

- So the Lord says in v.27 that all who remain in the waste places, meaning in the rubble of the city, or in the fields or in caves will die
 - In the course of events the Lord will sovereignly ensure that these people will die one at a time
 - Until His word has been fulfilled and the land is free of Jews as promised
- But then the Lord tells Ezekiel that the group in exile aren't much better

Ezek. 33:30 “But as for you, son of man, your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses, speak to one another, each to his brother, saying, ‘Come now and hear what the message is which comes forth from the LORD.’

Ezek. 33:31 “They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain.

Ezek. 33:32 “Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but they do not practice them.

Ezek. 33:33 “So when it comes to pass — as surely it will — then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst.”

- The citizens of Israel in exile will tell Ezekiel what he wants to hear
 - After years of listening to him and seeing prophecies come to pass, the people are showing him a measure of respect
 - But the Lord warns the prophet that they are saying nice things about him in the public areas, as they meet and talk
 - The word goes out, “Ezekiel is talking again...let's go listen to what he will say this time”
 - They treat him as a spectacle, a side-show at the circus
 - But as they come, Ezekiel needed to know that they were listening for reasons other than obedience
 - They sat before him to hear the word
 - Yet they went away and did the very same lustful things they had always done
 - This generation which has come out of Israel hasn't turned from their ways
 - And in fact, until they stand before the Lord in judgment, they won't get it, the Lord says
 - They see Ezekiel like one sees a carnival performer
 - Ezekiel's mysterious prophecies were like a sensual song
 - It excited the people so they listened, just as someone listens to a musician singing or playing a musical instrument

- But like a performance, when it was over, they went away having been entertained but essentially unchanged
- This is how the Lord thinks about His people sitting under the word of God without actually putting that word into practice
 - The Lord is not impressed
 - He doesn't reveal himself for the purpose of our entertainment
 - He speaks to us to move our hearts into obedience for His glory
- That prophecy serves as an interesting introduction to the prophecies of restoration
 - It's as if the Lord is saying that the generation of Israel who are listening to Ezekiel are not those who will heed the message
 - We know historically that this generation didn't return to Israel for the most part
 - They die in Babylon, and it falls to later generations to return to the land
 - So it would seem that this prophecy was a footnote for those who left the land
 - The Lord would now present them with His promises of restoration, but these things would not come to this generation
 - They would hear these things, but they would not be the ones to see these promises fulfilled
 - Nor should they receive these good things, since their lustful hearts were responsible for the exile in the first place
 - And they were not repenting even now
 - So now we move into the first area of restoration: leadership or shepherds
 - Beginning with a brief reminder of the problems that poor leaders have created among God's people

Ezek. 34:1 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 34:2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?"

Ezek. 34:3 "You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock.

Ezek. 34:4 "Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them.

Ezek. 34:5 "They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered.

Ezek. 34:6 "My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them.'""

- The principle sin of Israel's corrupt leaders was self-serving hearts, a desire to accumulate comfort and riches at the expense of the people
 - Leading God's people in any capacity is an inherently self-sacrificial role
 - And once again, a shepherd is a good analogy
 - A shepherd sacrifices a lot to care for a flock of defenseless sheep
 - A shepherd stays outside in the weather with the sheep, exposed to the elements
 - He moves away from his own source of food in the farmhouse so he can direct the the sheep to their food source in the field
 - He exposes himself to thieves, wild animals and other dangers to keep the flock safe
 - He can't spend time on his own interests and pursuits because the demands of caring for the flock are 24/7
 - And the same things are generally true for anyone who leads or shepherds God's people
 - Or at the every least the person is expected to have a heart that is willing to do these things
 - It's part of the job to be a servant to God's people, but you can't serve people and take advantage of them at the same time
 - In Israel's day, the shepherds saw their positions of power as opportunity for wealth and comfort
 - They were taking advantage of the sheep, consuming them, and taking their wool, so to speak
 - Those who were sick were not being healed, those who were broken were not bound and those scattered were not brought back
- In terms of the analogy, the Lord is saying that as the people wandered away from the Lord and were harmed by their sins, the leadership did nothing to rescue God's people
 - They didn't chase after them, correct their mistakes, counsel them on better ways and lead them in a better direction
 - Instead, they manipulated the people, became rich from them and ultimately used them
 - They treated them without care or love, dominating the sheep rather than protecting them
 - Without a true shepherd, the flock of Israel became food for beasts and were scattered
 - That was an apt description of Israel in exile
 - They were scattered from the land, consumed by violence and disease because their shepherds mistreated them
 - And even now the Lord says there was no one to search for them
 - It's even remarkable that the people of God survive, it's a miracle actually

- They are outside their land, isolated and in captivity and without leadership
- Under those circumstances they shouldn't survive, yet by God's power they will
- And now, in the first message of restoration, the Lord begins to tell His people that they won't be without a shepherd forever

Ezek. 34:7 Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:

Ezek. 34:8 "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "surely because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock;

Ezek. 34:9 therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:

Ezek. 34:10 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them."'"

Ezek. 34:11 For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.

Ezek. 34:12 "As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day.

Ezek. 34:13 "I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land.

Ezek. 34:14 "I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.

Ezek. 34:15 "I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 34:16 "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment.

- First, before the Lord may raise up a better shepherd, He must dispense with the corrupt shepherds
 - So in v.10 the Lord begins to tell Israel's corrupt leaders what they can expect
 - The Lord is the ultimate Shepherd of His people, so that even when corrupt men lead His people, the Lord remains concerned
 - And more than concerned, He remains engaged in their care
 - He will oppose the corrupt leadership, whether the kings or elders or priests of Israel
 - And rather than raising up better leaders over His people, the Lord says He will

personally take over leading His people

- He says in v.11 that He will search for His sheep and regather them
- The Lord says that He will bring all Israel back, and as they return they will find a land that will care for them in a new way
- In v.13 the Lord says He will feed them on the mountains of Israel
 - And He will give them rich pastures
 - Unlike the bad leaders, the Lord will heal the sick, bind up the broken, strengthen the sick
 - And He will bring judgment to the corrupt who profited off the people
- We know that these prophecies are looking ahead to the 1,000 year reign of Christ, Who is the Shepherd
 - At Jesus' return, Israel gains a righteous shepherd Who finally serves God's people as God intended
 - And we can see this clearly by looking at internal references in this passage
 - First, the passage sets these events in the time of Tribulation
 - In vs.12 we see that reference to a cloudy, gloomy day
 - That's an allusion to the seven years of Tribulation that precedes the start of the Kingdom

Zeph. 1:14 Near is the great day of the LORD,
Near and coming very quickly;
Listen, the day of the LORD!
In it the warrior cries out bitterly.

Zeph. 1:15 A day of wrath is that day,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of destruction and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloom,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,

Zeph. 1:16 A day of trumpet and battle cry
Against the fortified cities
And the high corner towers.

Zeph. 1:17 I will bring distress on men
So that they will walk like the blind,
Because they have sinned against the LORD;
And their blood will be poured out like dust
And their flesh like dung.

- And earlier Ezekiel gave us the same description

Ezek. 30:2 “Son of man, prophesy and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,
“Wail, ‘Alas for the day!’

Ezek. 30:3 “For the day is near,
Even the day of the LORD is near;
It will be a day of clouds,
A time of doom for the nations.

- The day of the Lord, a reference to the Tribulation, is a day of clouds and gloom
- That’s the time we’re talking about here in Chapter 34
- In the day of Tribulation, Israel’s scattering will be brought to an end
- Secondly, notice in v.11 the Lord says that He will do it in a personal way, not through a human leader

Is. 40:9 Get yourself up on a high mountain,
O Zion, bearer of good news,
Lift up your voice mightily,
O Jerusalem, bearer of good news;
Lift it up, do not fear.
Say to the cities of Judah,
“Here is your God!”

Is. 40:10 Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might,
With His arm ruling for Him.
Behold, His reward is with Him
And His recompense before Him.

Is. 40:11 Like a shepherd He will tend His flock,
In His arm He will gather the lambs
And carry them in His bosom;
He will gently lead the nursing ewes.

- The return of Christ is described as a Shepherd coming to tend to a lost flock of Israel
- Isaiah is speaking of the same moment as Ezekiel, when the Lord returns to give Israel what the Lord has promised
- So we cannot see this prophecy as fulfilled in some earthly leader of Israel that has come since Ezekiel’s prophecy
 - Nor can this prophecy be said to be fulfilled in Jesus’ first coming
 - Remember in Matthew 9 we studied that the Lord looked upon Israel as a flock without a shepherd
 - That’s Matthew’s way of telling us that Jesus’ first coming wasn’t a fulfillment of Ezekiel 34
 - Israel’s flock must await for Jesus’ return to set up the Kingdom

- Furthermore, the Lord says in v.12 that He will gather the people of Israel from *all* the places where they were scattered
 - Once again, this promise cannot be understood to be fulfilled in days after the captivity or even in our day today
 - This promise means that all Jews on earth will be present in the land with their Shepherd at the same moment

Is. 11:9 They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,
 For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
 As the waters cover the sea.

Is. 11:10 Then in that day

The nations will resort to the root of Jesse,
 Who will stand as a signal for the peoples;
 And His resting place will be glorious.

Is. 11:11 Then it will happen on that day that the Lord
 Will again recover the second time with His hand
 The remnant of His people, who will remain,
 From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath,
 And from the islands of the sea.

Is. 11:12 And He will lift up a standard for the nations
 And assemble the banished ones of Israel,
 And will gather the dispersed of Judah
 From the four corners of the earth.

- Isaiah says that at the start of the Kingdom, the root of Jesse, a reference to Christ, will rest in a glorious place in Jerusalem
 - And at that time, the Lord will seek and find all Israel
 - All dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth, will return
 - Obviously, the earth is round and doesn't have corners
 - So this phrase is a euphemism meaning every part of the entire earth
- In other words, Isaiah confirms that the regathering at the start of the Kingdom will be a complete return of all Israel from everywhere
 - But also notice this will be the "second time" that a regathering happens
 - We know there have been multiple minor re-gatherings over history
 - But in prior re-gatherings, like the one that followed the exile to Babylon, the return was limited in range and in the number of people
- But Isaiah says there will be two *worldwide* re-gatherings of Jews back into their land, the greater coming at the end of Tribulation
 - The one we see happening today is the first worldwide regathering
 - It's the first time that Jews from all over the world have come back into the land

- This regathering started at the end of the 19th century and continues today
- Ezekiel told us earlier that this regathering would happen in preparation for Israel to experience Tribulation

Ezek. 20:33 “As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you.

Ezek. 20:34 “I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out;

Ezek. 20:35 and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face.

Ezek. 20:36 “As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you,” declares the Lord GOD.

- The Lord promised to regather His people from their worldwide scattering for the purpose of bringing them under judgment
- This time is approaching, and the present regathering of Israel is a sign that the Tribulation is coming
- But after that period of judgment, the second regathering happens
 - A new regathering will be necessary after the turmoil of the Tribulation scatters Israel outside the land again
 - Some end up in places like Petra, others are hiding outside the land
 - And still others are in Heaven with Jesus awaiting His Second Coming
 - But after the Second Coming, the Lord brings all Jews together

Matt. 24:29 “But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Matt. 24:30 “And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.

Matt. 24:31 “And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

- So the present-day regathering of Israel that we are witnessing now is merely a warm up act to the event Ezekiel is describing
 - But even today, notice that the people of God are choosing to return to their land without a single human leader prompting it
 - So even now we see the hand of God acting as a Shepherd of His people rather than

human leaders drawing the people back

- But then the Lord tells those leaders of Israel who have misbehaved, that there will be an accounting one day

Ezek. 34:17 “As for you, My flock, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats.

Ezek. 34:18 ‘Is it too slight a thing for you that you should feed in the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pastures? Or that you should drink of the clear waters, that you must foul the rest with your feet?

Ezek. 34:19 ‘As for My flock, they must eat what you tread down with your feet and drink what you foul with your feet!’”

Ezek. 34:20 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them, “Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.

Ezek. 34:21 “Because you push with side and with shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns until you have scattered them abroad,

Ezek. 34:22 therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another.

- Notice that the Lord says that even within the sheep and the goats there will be a judgment
 - He says He will judge between the sheep and another (non-sheep)
 - Between a ram (sheep) and a male goat
 - In v.18 the Lord asks, is it a small thing that Israel’s leaders would enjoy the best of the land that the Lord gave to His people?
 - Yet at the same time, they made it impossible for God’s people to enjoy it themselves
 - By their misdeeds, they led Israel into idolatry and other sin – leading the nation to suffer exile
 - So the Lord says He will ultimately judge between the lean sheep, that is the people who suffered, and the fat sheep, their corrupt leaders
 - This is a sober reminder that the Lord is aware of how men and women in leadership deal with His flock
 - And when leaders fail to take that responsibility seriously, when they fail to shepherd the flock properly, they are accountable to God
 - That accounting may not happen in this age, but it will happen
 - And better that it happen in the next age, when the consequences are even more severe
 - The first moment of this accounting happens at the Lord’s Second Coming, as Matthew describes

Matt. 25:31 “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

Matt. 25:32 “All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;
Matt. 25:33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

Matt. 25:34 “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Matt. 25:41 “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;
Matt. 25:42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink;

- In that parable, the Lord uses the quality of care provided to His people as a measure of whether someone loved Him
- This is another reference back to Ezekiel, where the Lord says that those who refuse to care for the flock will be judged like goats
- Finally, the Lord says He will put an end to improper leadership over His flock one day

Ezek. 34:23 “Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.

Ezek. 34:24 “And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the LORD have spoken.

Ezek. 34:25 “I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods.

Ezek. 34:26 “I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing.

Ezek. 34:27 “Also the tree of the field will yield its fruit and the earth will yield its increase, and they will be secure on their land. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them.

Ezek. 34:28 “They will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid.

Ezek. 34:29 “I will establish for them a renowned planting place, and they will not again be victims of famine in the land, and they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore.

Ezek. 34:30 “Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 34:31 “As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are men, and I am your God,” declares the Lord GOD.

- In that future day the people of God will receive a new shepherd who will care for them as God intended
 - That shepherd will be David
 - This is not a reference to Jesus...this is a literal reference to King David resurrected to rule over Israel again as God promised to him
 - Notice in v.24 we're told that David will be prince over the people of God
 - In his earlier day, David was the king, but in this Kingdom age Jesus is the King
 - So the Lord calls David prince reflecting that he occupies a role under Jesus
 - David rules as prince over the people of Israel in the Kingdom as part of the government that Jesus establishes on the earth
- Furthermore, the Lord will establish a new covenant with Israel, a peace covenant
 - Notice in v.25, the Lord will remove all harmful beasts from the land during the Kingdom
 - So the people will live in peace and security in the wilderness
 - And in v.26 the lands around the mountain of God in Jerusalem will be a blessing for the people
 - The land will always get rain in the proper season, meaning no more drought and famine as a result of judgment
 - All the plants of the field will produce abundantly and without fail
 - Furthermore, the people of Israel will not be victim to oppression or attack, as they will have no enemies
 - Because of the glory and peace of that time, the people of God will all know the Lord and be His people
 - And the sheep of that field will be God's people in a true and loving sense
 - And they will finally have a Shepherd who cares for them
 - That's just a taste of the glory that's coming for Israel
 - When we get back next week, we'll come back to this description to fill in some details

- Last week I mentioned that the restoration chapters of Ezekiel roughly parallel the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant
 - Israel's sins under the Old Covenant had brought about their banishment and loss of peace and prosperity
 - But it was God's faithfulness under the Abrahamic Covenant that would provide for Israel's restoration
 - And that restoration would address the same three areas of blessing that were lost in the Old Covenant
 - First, the restoration starts with a new shepherd who would lead God's people properly under a new peace covenant
 - We studied that last time in Chapter 34
 - Secondly, Israel will return to their land in peace and dwell there securely
 - Thirdly, the people would see their city restored and enjoy unparalleled prosperity in the land
 - Collectively, these blessings fulfill God's promises to His people
 - Last week I also promised an overview of the upcoming chapters, and here it is:

Ezekiel 33	Commanding prophet and people to obey God
Ezekiel 34	Promising Israel a Good Shepherd
Ezekiel 35	Ending competing claims for Israel's land
Ezekiel 36	Delivering Israel's promised land inheritance
Ezekiel 37	Resurrecting a united, peaceful, obedient Israel
Ezekiel 38	Defending Israel's peace from her enemies
Ezekiel 39	Making God's glory known among the nations
Ezekiel 40 ↓ Ezekiel 48	God's glory dwelling among Israel

- These chapters have a pairing to help us see how the Lord is progressively restoring what the people have lost
 - The first two chapters (33-34) describe restoring leadership according to the Davidic Covenant
 - The next two chapters (35-36) deal with the land promise
 - Then chapters 37-38 show God establishing the people in peace in their land
 - Chapter 39 shows how the Lord makes His glory known among the nations
 - And Chapters 40 and beyond describe how God's glory dwells in Israel
- This week we're looking at the the land restoration, beginning with the Lord ending any competing claim to the land in Chapter 35
 - Now at first glance this chapter will sound a lot like a continuation of the judgments against Israel's enemies
 - And it is a judgment against one particular enemy, Edom

- But the reason the Lord has this prophecy appearing here in the narrative is because it directly relates to the issue of the land

Ezek. 35:1 Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 35:2 “Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it

Ezek. 35:3 and say to it, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,

“Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir,
And I will stretch out My hand against you
And make you a desolation and a waste.

Ezek. 35:4 “I will lay waste your cities

And you will become a desolation.

Then you will know that I am the LORD.

Ezek. 35:5 “Because you have had everlasting enmity and have delivered the sons of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of the punishment of the end,

Ezek. 35:6 therefore as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “I will give you over to bloodshed, and bloodshed will pursue you; since you have not hated bloodshed, therefore bloodshed will pursue you.

- In this chapter the Lord is denying any competing claims to the land of Israel in the days of the Kingdom
 - Historically, Israel has been in conflict with all its neighbors for its land
 - But in the Kingdom, Israel will have no enemies and the land will be theirs exclusively
 - And to illustrate that coming blessing, the Lord first judges the nation with the longest history of conflict over Israel’s birthright
 - Edom was the nation occupying present-day Southern Jordan
 - The people of Edom descended from Esau, who was Jacob’s twin brother
 - Esau was the older son, being born first, and as such he had the initial birthright claim in Isaac’s family
 - Earlier, the Lord had given Abraham and Isaac a promise of a great inheritance in the land of Canaan
 - That promise wouldn’t be fulfilled in Abraham’s day or even Isaac’s day
 - It would be fulfilled in a future day after the resurrection
 - So in the meantime, the promise itself was passed down as a birthright, and those holding the birthright received the promise
 - As you probably know, Esau being first born to Isaac initially held that birthright
 - But in the course of time, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew
 - That birthright included the promise that Esau and his descendants would receive the land of Canaan as an inheritance

- So why would Esau sell something so valuable for so little?
 - The only reasonable answer is Esau didn't understand its value
 - Genesis tells us this:

Gen. 25:31 But Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.”

Gen. 25:32 Esau said, “Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?”

Gen. 25:33 And Jacob said, “First swear to me”; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.

Gen. 25:34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

- Jacob suggests that Esau sell his birthright for the stew
 - Esau readily agrees to the ridiculous exchange
 - He says, what use is a birthright to a dying man
- Those statements tell us everything about why he was willing to sell
 - First, he says he was about to die from lack of lunch – which was hyperbole
 - Esau was being flippanant and cavalier about an unmatched, solemn, eternal blessing from God
- Even more telling, Esau suggested selling the birthright was reasonable because he couldn't benefit from his birthright if he died of hunger
 - He's exactly wrong...the birthright of Abraham & Isaac could *only* be fulfilled in a future day following death and resurrection
 - So in reality, death didn't put an end to God's birthright...Esau had to die to experience his birthright
- Therefore, by his own words we know Esau didn't have faith in the promises of God contained in that birthright
 - He only saw it in earthly terms, as like any other inheritance
 - So Jacob used his ignorance against him and obtained the birthright through a legitimate, if one-sided, agreement

Heb. 12:15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

Heb. 12:16 that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.

Heb. 12:17 For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

- Esau later realized that there was real value to this birthright, but by then the die was cast and he couldn't change the deal
 - So he could not inherit the blessing at Isaac's death since it had been bought by his brother
 - Yet ever since, Esau has resented Jacob and viewed his loss of a birthright as a trick or fraud
 - Esau and his descendants have forever claimed that they have right to that land, not Jacob
- So in Chapter 35, the Lord says He will put those competing claims to rest once and for all
 - In v.2 the Lord tells Ezekiel to set his face against Mt Seir
 - Mt Seir was the range of mountains in Edom
 - So this is an oracle against Edom
 - But earlier in this book we saw another oracle for Edom
 - Notice this time it's against a feature of the land, not the nation, per se
 - That's because this time the emphasis is on land
 - In other words, because Edom didn't respect God's grant of land to Israel, they will forfeit their own land too
 - In v.3 the Lord says He will make the land desolate
 - And in v.4, He says He will devastate the cities so they might know He is the Lord
 - All this is coming to Edom because they have had an everlasting enmity against Israel
 - Esau's hatred for Jacob lasted their entire lifetime, pausing only for the time they came together to bury Isaac
 - And that hatred continued into later generations even until the time of the Babylonian captivity
 - The people of Edom assisted Babylon in attacking Israel and rounding up the refugees
 - In short, they didn't hate bloodshed of their closest relatives, so the Lord says they will know bloodshed

Ezek. 35:7 "I will make Mount Seir a waste and a desolation and I will cut off from it the one who passes through and returns.

Ezek. 35:8 "I will fill its mountains with its slain; on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those slain by the sword will fall.

Ezek. 35:9 "I will make you an everlasting desolation and your cities will not be inhabited. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

Ezek. 35:10 "Because you have said, 'These two nations and these two lands will be mine, and we will possess them,' although the LORD was there,

Ezek. 35:11 therefore as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “I will deal with you according to your anger and according to your envy which you showed because of your hatred against them; so I will make Myself known among them when I judge you.

Ezek. 35:12 “Then you will know that I, the LORD, have heard all your revilings which you have spoken against the mountains of Israel saying, ‘They are laid desolate; they are given to us for food.’

Ezek. 35:13 “And you have spoken arrogantly against Me and have multiplied your words against Me; I have heard it.”

Ezek. 35:14 ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “As all the earth rejoices, I will make you a desolation.

Ezek. 35:15 “As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate, so I will do to you. You will be a desolation, O Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”’

- As we’ve seen in the prior oracle, the land of Edom would lay desolate for the time of the Kingdom
 - Ironically, Esau was crying over the loss of Israel’s land when he should have been worried about his own family’s land
 - The land would be an eternal desolation
 - And this situation comes to pass because they sought to have both their own land and Israel’s land
 - Edom’s attitude toward Israel wasn’t unique, but they were the first tracing back to Esau
 - And in that way Edom becomes the poster child for Israel’s lack of security in their land
 - Enemies like Edom constantly sought to take the land away though Israel had received it from God
 - This continues today, of course, as Israel’s Arab neighbors still seek to displace Israel and take her land
 - So Edom’s envy and anger becomes opportunity for the Lord to judge the nation and demonstrate that His decrees cannot be challenged
 - Receiving this prophecy in Ezekiel’s day would have sounded particularly encouraging if a bit hard to believe
 - Because at this moment the nation of Edom was saying that the land of Israel was desolate, so now they could take it
 - So in v.12 the nation was saying that Israel was theirs for the taking as spoil
 - But they were arrogant and they have multiplied their words against God, and He hears them
 - To multiply their words means that all that previous generations had said and done against Israel were not being compounded

- This generation was taking advantage of Israel when they were down at God's hand
 - And therefore the Lord would deal with them according to their own words
- The Lord sums it up in v.15, saying they rejoiced over seeing Israel's inheritance made desolate
 - So the Lord will do the same to them
 - Notice the Lord uses the term inheritance in that verse just to emphasize that this land belonged to Israel
 - Regardless of whether Israel was in her land or outside the land, it was Israel's inheritance
 - So Chapter 35 makes clear that the land belongs to Israel, not her enemies
 - And that ownership doesn't change regardless of whether Israel is occupying it in a given day
 - In Ezekiel's day, Israel was outside her land, and yet Israel's prophet was declaring that the land was Israel's inheritance
 - Later we see Israel scattered following other invasions, yet this statement of the Lord still stands
 - The people of Israel have an inheritance in the land regardless of whether the people of God are living there or not
 - But of course, the promises of God indicate that eventually the people of God will have that land
 - Which leads us to Chapter 36...

Ezek. 36:1 “And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say, ‘O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD.

Ezek. 36:2 ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Because the enemy has spoken against you, ‘Aha!’ and, ‘The everlasting heights have become our possession,’

Ezek. 36:3 therefore prophesy and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “For good reason they have made you desolate and crushed you from every side, that you would become a possession of the rest of the nations and you have been taken up in the talk and the whispering of the people.””

Ezek. 36:4 ‘Therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD. Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes and to the forsaken cities which have become a prey and a derision to the rest of the nations which are round about,

Ezek. 36:5 therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Surely in the fire of My jealousy I have spoken against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who appropriated My land for themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and with scorn of soul, to drive it out for a prey.”

- Once again, the Lord speaks to the land itself, which indicates that the land is the point in this chapter
 - And the Lord opens by explaining to Israel's land why it would be left desolate and vulnerable to Israel's enemies
 - The Lord acknowledges what the enemies of Israel have been thinking, that the land was not available to them
 - But the Lord tells Ezekiel to explain that the land was left desolate for good reason
 - The reason was Israel's disobedience, of course, but the point was it wasn't a sign that Israel neighbors should rejoice or expect to receive the land
 - Despite the Lord's actions against His people, they were still going to receive that land in a day to come
 - In vs.4-5 the Lord says in jealousy He took offense to their gleeful possession of His Land which He has reserved for Israel
 - This would have been a source of great encouragement to Israel
 - Hearing the Lord declare that the land was His and that He had given it to Israel
 - Sitting in exile they could be sure that nothing had changed in the big picture
 - The land would not be lost forever...only for a time

Ezek. 36:6 'Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel and say to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I have spoken in My jealousy and in My wrath because you have endured the insults of the nations.'

Ezek. 36:7 "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, 'I have sworn that surely the nations which are around you will themselves endure their insults.

Ezek. 36:8 'But you, O mountains of Israel, you will put forth your branches and bear your fruit for My people Israel; for they will soon come.

Ezek. 36:9 'For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you will be cultivated and sown.

Ezek. 36:10 'I will multiply men on you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities will be inhabited and the waste places will be rebuilt.

Ezek. 36:11 'I will multiply on you man and beast; and they will increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited as you were formerly and will treat you better than at the first. Thus you will know that I am the LORD.

Ezek. 36:12 'Yes, I will cause men — My people Israel — to walk on you and possess you, so that you will become their inheritance and never again bereave them of children.'

Ezek. 36:13 "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Because they say to you, "You are a devourer of men and have bereaved your nation of children,"

Ezek. 36:14 therefore you will no longer devour men and no longer bereave your nation of children,' declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 36:15 “I will not let you hear insults from the nations anymore, nor will you bear disgrace from the peoples any longer, nor will you cause your nation to stumble any longer,” declares the Lord GOD.”

- To the land the Lord declares that He will avenge the insults of the nations against Israel
 - In effect, every time a nation has spoken an insult against Israel or made a claim on the land, it's only reinforced the Lord's determination
 - The Lord will defeat those lies and presumptuous claims by making Israel's claim to the land that much more sure
 - In v.7 He says that He swore that the nations around will endure their own insults
 - What Israel's enemies wished upon God's people the Lord will use against them so that they suffer the same
 - Not only will Edom and other enemies be judged, but God's faithfulness to His promises will come to pass all the more certainly
 - In v.9 the Lord says the land will be cultivated and sown, meaning it will once again blossom to provide for the people of God
 - And it will need to blossom, because the land will be filled again with all the house of Israel
 - In v.11 the Lord says He will multiply the people and they will increase in the land so that the land will be inhabited as before
 - But this time the land will treat Israel better than before, which is a clear reference to the Kingdom life
 - Life in the Kingdom, while in the land, will be entirely different for Israel than it was when Israel occupied it originally
 - In a sense, we can say that Israel occupied the Promised Land in the same way Abraham did in his day
 - It was a temporary and partial fulfillment of the promises God gave
 - Only in the Kingdom will the fullness of the land be delivered to Israel
- Notice in v.12 the Lord says the people of Israel – God's people – will walk on and possess the land
 - It will be a complete possession and it will be their inheritance
 - And never again will the land be bereaved of its children
 - The reference to children here isn't a reference to human children
 - It's spoken metaphorically where the Land is the parent and the people of Israel are the children
 - You can see that clearly in v.13 as the Lord repeats what Israel has been saying about the land
 - The people say the land of Israel devours its children

- Israel's enemies saw Israel's history of attack and defeat, experiencing displacements and calamities of various kinds
- Of course, those events are the direct result of their sin against the Lord
- Nevertheless, the Lord says the land will no longer devour its people
 - Moreover, the people won't hear the insults of neighbors or suffer disgrace any longer
 - And the land will no longer cause the people to stumble
 - Again, another reference to the amazing difference of life in the Kingdom
- Let's take a look at some of those changes written elsewhere

Is. 65:17 “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;
And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.

Is. 65:18 “But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;
For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing
And her people for gladness.

Is. 65:19 “I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people;
And there will no longer be heard in her
The voice of weeping and the sound of crying.

Is. 65:20 “No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days,
Or an old man who does not live out his days;
For the youth will die at the age of one hundred
And the one who does not reach the age of one hundred
Will be thought accursed.

Is. 65:21 “They will build houses and inhabit them;
They will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

Is. 65:22 “They will not build and another inhabit,
They will not plant and another eat;
For as the lifetime of a tree, so will be the days of My people,
And My chosen ones will wear out the work of their hands.

Is. 65:23 “They will not labor in vain,
Or bear children for calamity;
For they are the offspring of those blessed by the LORD,
And their descendants with them.

Is. 65:24 “It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.

Is. 65:25 “The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent's food. They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain,” says the LORD.

- Isaiah speaks of a “new heavens and earth” which at first draws our mind to Revelation 21 where John uses a similar phrase

- But the details and context of Revelation 21 vs. Isaiah 65 are very different
 - Which tells us that they were talking about different times
 - John was describing what happens after the 1,000 Kingdom comes to an end
 - While Isaiah was describing life for Israel during that 1,000 period
- So why does Isaiah use the phrase new heavens and earth?
 - Because it will be new in several ways
 - First, the heavens and earth were greatly damaged by the events of the Tribulation
 - Stars fell, sun and moon were changed, all the land and seas of the earth were destroyed
 - So these things (heaven and earth) must be made new
 - But they are still the same universe we see now, whereas John describes an entirely different kind of world to follow this one
- Secondly, even though the Kingdom is on this earth, it's still a very new, different experience
 - And we can see some of those differences here
 - Note in v.17 that Isaiah says that the former things will not be remembered
 - He means that the pattern of life for Israel will have changed completely
 - What Israel knew before will no longer be their reality
 - Just as Ezekiel said that the land would no longer treat Israel as it once did
- In v.18, we hear the the land would be made for Israel's rejoicing now
 - The people would exist in the land in perpetual gladness
 - What a contrast from Israel's typical experience
 - The Lord too would be glad in His people
 - And there would no longer be any sound of Israel crying or weeping
 - Can you contemplate how different that kind of life will be?
 - Now think about how far we are from that reality most days today
 - And in that difference you can see the effect of sin on the quality of life
 - God created us to know the experience of the Kingdom, which mirrors the experience of Eden
 - And today our lives are so defined by sin that we literally can't imagine what life would be like without it
 - Yet that's what's coming for Israel and for us in a Kingdom soon to appear
 - In v.20 we're told that infants won't die and there won't be death from old age
 - Instead, youth will die at age 100 because they are thought accursed
 - In other words, death will be limited to a single age, 100, and only for those who

are accursed for unbelief (*see Revelation Lesson 20C*)

- The everyday life of the Kingdom will still be recognizable to us
 - People will build houses and plant fields and eat the produce
 - No one will worry about building or planting only to have it taken away by someone else
- In other words, Israel will experience perfect security in their land
 - That's the promise Ezekiel has been giving to God's people: they will finally have their land unchallenged
 - They will finally get the benefits of living in that land without worry that someone will take that blessing from them
- Notice again that people will live out their days in the kingdom like the lifetime of a tree
 - They live so long they wear out the work of their hands (v.22)
 - Your houses and possessions won't outlast you and be handed down to another
 - When you live forever, you outlast your things and not because they are made cheaply
- More over, no one will worry about reproducing in vain or giving birth only to see the death of your children on some future day
 - Simply put, there is no reproducing since we are all the offspring of the Lord at that point
 - For the glorified who live in the Kingdom, all the producing has been done
 - And now we need not worry about that process much less the possibility that it might result in another loss
 - All loss has been eliminated and all that remains is enjoying what God has created
 - We live in a place and time when life is fully, completely and unendingly satisfying
 - And at the end of v.23, the Lord assures Israel that all her descendants would be with her too
 - Perhaps this is one of the greatest comforts of the Kingdom age to come
 - All those who share our faith will be there on Day 1, which means we lack nothing and no one
 - Finally, notice our spiritual state of mind: in v.24 Isaiah says that even as we call out to Christ, He will hear us and answer us instantly
 - Even as we're still speaking to Him, we get our response
 - Though Christ won't be physically with us wherever we are on the earth, nevertheless in our glorified state we communicate freely
 - He hears us instantly, responds immediately and we understand Him perfectly
 - This will be how the Lord works through His government communicating His rule to those who carry it out worldwide

- And not only will the people be fundamentally different in the Kingdom, so will nature itself
 - The Lord will restore the world back to a state similar to what existed during the time of Adam and Woman in the Garden
 - Before sin entered the world, there was no cause for death
 - So man didn't die nor did animals
 - Which means that animals weren't eating other animals in predator-prey relationships
 - All animals ate vegetation, like Man himself
 - But after the Fall sin entered, and with sin came death, Paul tells us in Romans
 - And it wasn't long after that, that God permitted animals and man to eat meat
 - But in the Kingdom to come, the Lord removes the predator-prey relationships that define life in nature today
 - Instead, in v.25 Isaiah says that the wolf and lamb will graze together
 - Obviously, wolves don't normally eat grass
 - And if a lamb was within sight of wolf, both would be running, one after the other
 - Instead, they will simply graze together with no regard for the other
 - Predator-prey relationships will end, which means animals don't kill each other or us
 - Notice at the end of that verse we're told that these animals will do no harm in all God's mountain
 - That refers to the entirety of God's Kingdom
 - Elsewhere in Isaiah we hear something similar

**Is. 11:6 And the wolf will dwell with the lamb,
And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little boy will lead them.**

**Is. 11:7 Also the cow and the bear will graze,
Their young will lie down together,
And the lion will eat straw like the ox.**

**Is. 11:8 The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,
And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.**

**Is. 11:9 They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
As the waters cover the sea.**

- Once again, Isaiah says that animals will no longer fear nor attack one another

- And even a young child could play with a deadly cobra without concern in the Kingdom
- The entire earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
- So that's just some of what we know is coming for Israel and for us in the Kingdom
 - And as reassuring as that may have been for Israel, it was hard for them to understand why God would promise them so much
 - And yet here they were sitting in exile
 - So the Lord felt obligated to explain again that they are in exile for good reasons

Ezek. 36:16 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 36:17 “Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds; their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity.

Ezek. 36:18 “Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols.

Ezek. 36:19 “Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them.

Ezek. 36:20 “When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.’

Ezek. 36:21 “But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went.

- So as background, the Lord explains that the reason Israel left the land was their offenses against God
 - The Lord is connecting several important cause-and-effect dots here
 - Israel's presence in the land could not continue because security and prosperity gave a sinful Israel opportunity to magnify their sin
- They were living in the land and it was while they were in the land that they began to engage in so much sin
 - They put idols throughout the land and so they defiled it
 - The Lord had called them and sanctified them, and so when they worshipped idols, it brought shame to the name of the Lord
- So the Lord knocked them outside the land
 - But while they were outside the land, the Lord suffered even greater indignity among the nations
 - In v.20 the Lord says the nations witnessed His banishing Israel and ridiculed the Lord for not protecting His people
 - Also, Israel profaned the Lord as well by continuing to sin while in exile
- So those dots all lead to an unavoidable dilemma – if Israel being in the land contributed

to their opportunity to sin...

- And if sinning in the land caused the Lord to disperse them from the land, then how can the Lord restore them into the land in the future?
 - Won't that simply repeat the cycle over again?
 - Won't Israel return to the land, begin sinning again, and then be sent out again?
 - What will prevent that?
- The Lord says in v.21 that because He has concern for His holy name, He will act to stop this cycle once and for all

Ezek. 36:22 “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.

Ezek. 36:23 “I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.

Ezek. 36:24 “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.

Ezek. 36:25 “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

Ezek. 36:26 “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Ezek. 36:27 “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Ezek. 36:28 “You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.

- This passage has obvious parallels to Jeremiah 31, where we commonly go to find the promise of the New Covenant
 - But God spoke similar things through Jeremiah's contemporary here
 - This turn of events is not deserved on Israel's part
 - Rather, the Lord has determined to act to preserve Israel for His name's sake
 - The Lord is taking action to stop the cycle of Israel profaning the name of the Lord
 - Because the Lord had placed His name in the people of God
 - The word Israel includes a reference to God (*e*)
 - Moreover, He had associated Himself with this people publicly, and the world knew that Jehovah was the God of Israel

- So the Lord says He is acting to make sure that Israel represented Him properly
 - As someone looked at Israel, they could see the character of God
 - Whereas in the past, people looked at Israel and saw the opposite of God's character
 - And in that way God's name was profaned
- Obviously, Christians share the same obligation, even if we don't necessarily share the same fate as Israel
 - We must recognize that what we say and do is a reflection on Christ
 - And if we act as Israel did, profaning the name of the Lord, the Bible says the Lord may act to correct our behavior
 - That acting vindicates Him in the eyes of the world, because to fail to act would make it appear as if the Lord is content with sin
 - And that does damage to His reputation
 - So He doesn't condemn a believer nor do we risk the promise we have of eternal life in Christ
 - No, it's because we have eternal life in Jesus and have become His child by faith that we would know God's discipline
 - And therefore He acts to make clear we are not living in keeping with His character and in that way His name is vindicated
 - But to the larger question...how does the Lord stop the bad pattern, the Lord explains beginning in v.24
 - He says the process begins with a great regathering, which we discussed last time
 - There is a regathering prior to Tribulation, and that regathering of Israel is underway now
 - And at the conclusion of the Tribulation, a second and permanent regathering will take place in preparation for the Kingdom
 - That's the regathering in view here
- Immediately after that regathering, the Lord will move to change the very nature of His people
 - He will cleanse them, spiritually speaking, so that they will no longer desire to engage in idolatry or sin of any kind
 - All Israel will be cleansed in this way, He says
 - This change happens because the nation will possess a new heart and new spirit
 - Their new heart will not be a heart of stone but of flesh
 - A heart of flesh refers to a heart that is responsive to God; soft, obedient
 - While a heart of stone is the hard heart of unbelief and rebellion
 - So the Lord is pouring out His Spirit on Israel, like water, to bring about this national spiritual rebirth

- Obviously, this process is no different than what we've all experienced personally
 - Except this is a promise of national regeneration
 - An entire nation of people will receive this mercy, the Lord says
- The effect of this spiritual revival will be a nation that will follow the Lord's statutes and commandments
 - We're talking about perfect, sinless, living by an entire nation of people
 - The only way something like this could happen is if the people were glorified, sinless
 - And that's what the Lord is promising here, of course
 - The Israel that exists in the Kingdom will be sinless and glorified, just as we will be as well
- Those believers among Israel (the remnant) who die prior to the Kingdom will enter just as any Church believer enters
 - They will have been resurrected and received their new bodies before the start of the Kingdom
 - And so they simply walk into the Kingdom already having been brought to this point of perfect obedience
 - Daniel tells us about that resurrection in Chapter 12:

Dan. 12:1 "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.

Dan. 12:2 "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.

Dan. 12:3 "Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

- The Old Testament saints are resurrected at the end of Tribulation ("at that time")
 - They are those who slept in the ground
 - The saints are raised to everlasting life in the Kingdom, shining in their righteousness
- So why does the Lord need to make this promise in Ezekiel? Why pour out His Spirit on Israel in this way if all Old Testament saints are raised perfect?
 - Because there is another group of Jews who are included in the Kingdom but who haven't died yet at the start of the Kingdom
 - These are the "sheep" of Matthew 25 that Christ separates from the goats

- They are Jewish men and women who live through the Tribulation and are rescued by Christ's Second Coming
- As Christ returns, they are now invited into the Kingdom

Matt. 25:31 “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

Matt. 25:32 “All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;

Matt. 25:33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

Matt. 25:34 “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

- And Paul says that all those who are Jewish and alive at Christ's return will be included in this national salvation

Rom. 11:25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery — so that you will not be wise in your own estimation — that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;

Rom. 11:26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,

“THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,
HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.”

Rom. 11:27 “THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,
WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.”

- All Israel will be saved, Paul says
- And it's this national conversion of all Jews at the end of Tribulation at Christ's Second coming that Ezekiel is describing
 - The Lord says He will pour out a cleansing water, His Spirit, to bring a national conversion
 - And following that national conversion He glorifies all Israel to ensure perfect obedience in the land
- And in that way He ensures they can never sin against Him again and be removed from their land again
 - Nor will they suffer under curses or discipline again

Ezek. 36:29 “Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you.

Ezek. 36:30 “I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations.

Ezek. 36:31 “Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations.

Ezek. 36:32 “I am not doing this for your sake,” declares the Lord GOD, “let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel!”

Ezek. 36:33 ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt.

Ezek. 36:34 “The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by.

Ezek. 36:35 “They will say, ‘This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited.’

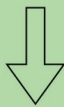
Ezek. 36:36 “Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it.”

Ezek. 36:37 ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them: I will increase their men like a flock.

Ezek. 36:38 “Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the waste cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they will know that I am the LORD.””

- The sum effect will be a people dwelling securely in the land, without fear of reprisals or attack – and all of it will glorify the Lord
 - The Lord acts in these ways for His own name’s sake, so that all the world will declare that God is a covenant-keeping God
 - And everyone will marvel at how much better Israel has it now
 - And how much the Lord has done to restore their fortunes
 - And Israel will learn something too
 - They will see the before-and-after and recognize how much they sinned against the Lord
 - And He says they will loathe themselves for all they did to injure the God Who called them and saved them
 - That’s the Lord’s promise to provide Israel the land
 - Israel will return, they will have the land, and no one else will ever take it back
 - Israel will be at peace with their neighbors and with the Lord
 - And everyone on earth will know that the God of Israel is Lord

- We're studying the Lord's promises to Israel to restore them to the glory promised to Abraham
 - The promises God gives Israel run through the rest of the book
 - But they can be grouped into four general areas that connect back to the Abrahamic covenant and Davidic covenant
 - God promised Abraham's descendants a king to rule
 - And inheritance in the land
 - Many descendants living in peace and prosperity
 - And their God dwelling among them
 - Those four themes guide our understanding of the prophecies found in the chapters

Ezekiel 33	Commanding prophet and people to obey God
Ezekiel 34	Promising Israel a Good Shepherd
Ezekiel 35	Ending competing claims for Israel's land
Ezekiel 36	Delivering Israel's promised land inheritance
Ezekiel 37	Resurrecting a united, peaceful, obedient Israel
Ezekiel 38	Defending Israel's peace from her enemies
Ezekiel 39	Making God's glory known among the nations
Ezekiel 40	 God's glory dwelling among Israel
Ezekiel 48	

that follow

- Last week we studied the restoration of Israel's inheritance in the land in Chapters 35-36
 - In Chapter 35 the Lord promised Israel He would invalidate any competing claims for the promised land
 - To make His point, the Lord pronounced judgment on the people who had the oldest competing claim to the land – Edom
 - Edomites came from Esau, who fought with his brother Jacob over the land inheritance from the beginning
 - But the Lord promised that Edom would not have a share in the land and that Israel would receive it as promised to Jacob
- Then in Chapter 36 we studied what Israel's inheritance in the land will be like in that future day, and it was very different than today
 - The Lord will regather Israel into their land so that all Jews on earth are living in the land promised to Abraham
 - Secondly, the nation will be fully committed to obedience to the Lord and will never sin, which tells us they are all glorified
 - The return of Christ will be accompanied by a national salvation of Israel at the

end of Tribulation

- Then we studied in Isaiah how life in this Kingdom time will be different from today
 - Death will operate differently
 - Nature would be different and the fruitfulness of life would be unending
 - Those small details alone were enough to explain why the Bible says our life to come will be full of joy
- Tonight we finish Chapter 36 and move into the next major category of restoration: descendants living in the land in peace
 - The final passages of Ezekiel 36 continue to explain how glorious the land inheritance will be for God's people

Ezek. 36:29 “Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you.

Ezek. 36:30 “I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations.

Ezek. 36:31 “Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations.

Ezek. 36:32 “I am not doing this for your sake,” declares the Lord GOD, “let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel!”

- In this chapter, the Lord promises Israel they will receive their land inheritance and with it comes a very new life
 - Altogether, the Lord gives Israel seven details for how this fulfillment will take place
 - In the section we studied last week, we studied five of these seven
 - First, the Lord said He would regather Israel to the land
 - Secondly He would purify them from sin so that they would not bring their sinful nature into the Kingdom
 - Thirdly, He would give them a new heart and a new spirit to obey Him fully
 - Fourth He would put the Holy Spirit in them so they would know Him intimately
 - Fifth, He would be their God and they would be His people
 - In v.29 we reach the sixth detail
 - The Lord says the land will give the people an abundance of harvest and famine will never occur
 - In contrast to past history, Israel would never again wonder if famine will come or if pestilence would rob them
 - The fields would always produce reliably
 - Notice the pattern the Lord is establishing here...first He cleanses His people of sin,

then leads them into righteous living

- And from righteous living, the people come to enjoy the comforts and privileges of an intimate walk with the Lord
- At its core, sin is any attempt to obtain the comforts and privileges of God's provision without giving God our obedience
- The first sin began that way and every sinful intention since has been exactly the same
- Then finally, the seventh detail of the land restoration is found in vs.31-32
 - The Lord says that after the nation has received all these things, they will remember their past history as a nation
 - They will remember how their nation in the past was disobedient, sinful
 - And they will loathe themselves in their own sight for those inequities
 - To loathe yourself "in your own sight" means to see yourself as God saw you during those past moments
 - So while everyone in Israel will marvel at how much better things are now, they will also recall how bad they made life for themselves
 - And that contrast will only serve to bring God more glory
 - And in v.32 the Lord says these promises revealed in Ezekiel's day would only serve to make Israel ashamed for their sin now
 - The Lord was promising these acts of faithfulness for Israel for His name's sake
 - They didn't deserve these things...that's why they were grace
 - The Lord wants the world to know, even now, that He is a covenant-keeping God
 - Moreover, the Lord's faithfulness to His covenant only serves to highlight the people's rebellion to their covenant
 - So upon hearing how much goodness the Lord has planned for His people Israel, they will feel all the more shame for what they've done
 - The Lord was speaking of the Israel of Ezekiel's day that heard these promises and then recognized their God was still on their side
 - And they could then reflect on how sinful they had been to Him and loathe themselves in their own sight
- Then we have a final summary of Israel living in the land one day

Ezek. 36:33 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt.

Ezek. 36:34 "The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by.

Ezek. 36:35 "They will say, 'This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden;

and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited.'

Ezek. 36:36 "Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it."

Ezek. 36:37 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them: I will increase their men like a flock.

Ezek. 36:38 "Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the waste cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they will know that I am the LORD.'""

- Last week we studied how the changes to nature and life on earth in general were a step-by-step return to the way of life in the Garden
 - Before the fall of Adam, the world operated in ways very similar to what Isaiah and Ezekiel are promising for the Kingdom
 - And here we see the Lord confirming that He will restore life in ways similar to the Garden of Eden
 - And the Lord says the way in which He will make this happen will be so miraculous that it will clearly point to Him
 - Great desolation will turn into great blessing – a transformation that could only be done supernaturally by a caring and purposeful God
 - It will point to the Lord in the sense that He will be seen as the Actor bringing it to pass
 - And it will point to Him by glorifying Him for His faithfulness to bring it to pass for Israel
 - If you step back from our little period of Biblical history to see the whole of it, you can see that great miracles are soon to start again
 - Apart from the Creation moment itself, God has relied on great public displays of supernatural power only three times in human history
 - First at the Exodus, He brought Israel out of bondage with great power so that Egypt and all the nations would know His name

Ex. 7:5 "The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst."

- Secondly, in the days of Elijah and Elisha, the Lord performed miraculous signs routinely through these prophets
 - They called fire down from heaven, raised dead bodies, and held back the rain
 - The Lord was using these men to demonstrate His power and authority to an apostate Israel
 - Their ministries have parallels to Jesus, and in that way their miraculous work foreshadows Christ's work

- Finally, miracles were common in Jesus' day and in the years immediately following as the church was established
 - And once more, the purpose in God acting in such public ways through miraculous displays of His power is to prove Jesus' claims
 - That men might know the Lord and glorify Him for His word of redemption
 - First through Jesus in Person and secondly through the ministry of His Church
 - So to date the world has seen three periods of regular, public miracles, and we know a fourth is coming
 - In the very last days the Lord will once more bring great signs and wonders to the world, the greatest displays ever
 - And these wonders will once again be targeted at showing the world the true God
 - But as we await the resumption of such displays, consider we are living in a period of history when the Lord has suspended such displays for the most part
 - So having known only this period, these promises will sound strange and almost fairly tale-like
 - But that's about to change soon
 - We will soon enter into a long period of history when supernatural displays of God's authority will be common
 - Beginning with the Tribulation and continuing into the Kingdom
 - But as impressive as such things are to us, they are not the preferred way in which God makes Himself known to us
 - Above all, our God is a God of resurrection...He brings dead things back to life
 - And that's the way He prefers to make Himself known
 - Notice the final verse of this chapter, when He says that filling dead, desolate land with living people will testify to His name
 - That's a God of resurrection
 - He takes what has been made desolate by sin and brings it back to life to His glory
 - He's doing that in your own life and in nations of people
- With that let's transition to His promises for peaceful inhabitation by a people of Abraham
 - And in Chapter 37 we see another vision to explain a work of God for Israel

Ezek. 37:1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones.

Ezek. 37:2 He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry.

Ezek. 37:3 He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, You know.”

Ezek. 37:4 Again He said to me, “Prophecy over these bones and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.’”

Ezek. 37:5 “Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, ‘Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life.’”

Ezek. 37:6 ‘I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.’”

Ezek. 37:7 So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone.

Ezek. 37:8 And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them.

Ezek. 37:9 Then He said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.”’”

Ezek. 37:10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

- This chapter of Ezekiel is fairly well-known by most Bible students, but like most of Ezekiel it’s studied in isolation
 - It may also be the most abused section of the book, since the range of interpretations you can find span from misinformed to ridiculous
 - Let’s start by explaining the illustration that God gives Ezekiel and then we can look at the interpretation the Lord provides
 - The Lord gives the prophet a vision of a wide valley, scattered with human bones everywhere
 - Notice Ezekiel says “the” valley, not a valley meaning, this is a valley he had seen before
 - The last time Ezekiel mentions a valley in a vision it was in Chapter 3

Ezek. 3:22 The hand of the LORD was on me there, and He said to me, “Get up, go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you.”

Ezek. 3:23 So I got up and went out to the plain; and behold, the glory of the LORD was standing there, like the glory which I saw by the river Chebar, and I fell on my face.

- The word translated “plain” in v.22 is the same Hebrew word as used here for valley
- This is the same place where the Lord’s glory had appeared to Ezekiel at the beginning of his prophetic ministry
- The Lord directed Ezekiel to walk around the valley taking in the sight of so many bones

- Ezekiel noticed the bones were very dry, which meant they had died long ago
- So after so long, the Lord asked Ezekiel if these bones could live again
- Instead of giving a yes or no answer, Ezekiel defers to the Lord
 - Ezekiel was saying this is a question that only the Lord could answer
 - Or another way of expressing it, only the Lord could resurrect the lives of these people
 - Therefore, only the Lord could say if it would happen
- So then the Lord says that Ezekiel must prophesy over these bones to declare what would happen to them
 - In vs.5-6 the Lord says He will bring these bones back to life
 - The description involves the physical life of a human body being restored, as if in a factory
 - One part of the body is repaired at a time until the entire body has been restored
 - After the Lord tells Ezekiel what to say, then he speaks in vs.7-8
 - And as Ezekiel speaks, the bones take life, move and assemble themselves in the valley
 - And then the flesh returns in steps until human bodies are assembled, but without life
 - Finally, the Lord breathes on the bodies giving them life again and they stand up
 - And after coming to life, the bodies are united in a single army
 - They have become part of a larger, single organization ready to serve
- So what does the image reveal to us? Before we look at the next passage, take note of some of the details we've seen
 - The fact that the restoration of these "bodies" happens in such an unrealistic fashion tells us that this is an illustration of something
 - It's not predicting a literal resurrection of human beings
 - This can't describe a human body coming to life, because God doesn't resurrect human bodies in this way
 - The resurrection of a person happens in an instant according to 1 Corinthians 15
 - We must be careful not to make the details of a metaphor into literal details of the thing pictured
 - Instead, we must "translate" each detail of the picture into the intended reality
 - In this illustration we're seeing stages of restoration of some entity
 - Also notice the prominence of the word breath
 - The word appears eight times in this short passage
 - And the number eight stands for new beginnings in Scripture, indicating that the Lord is restarting something

- And the word for breath in Hebrew is also the word for spirit, which suggests that the Spirit is working to bring about this restoration
- Finally, we have to consider the context of Ezekiel 37
 - We know this chapter fits into a larger narrative of how God restores Israel in the promises of the Abrahamic covenant
 - So that leads us to consider that the dry bones are a picture of the scattering and apparent “death” of the nation
 - Based on how Israel was scattered from her land, the nation appears to have died
 - Not the people themselves, since Jews continued to exist through the time of Israel’s dispersion
 - But the nation itself was said to have ceased to exist on the world stage
 - But if the Lord is to fulfill the promise of His people dwelling securely and peacefully, they must have a nation to call their own
 - And so this is the Lord’s vision to show that one day a people, a nation will be restored
 - And that restoration will appear as if Israel has returned from oblivion, a nation coming back to life
 - Furthermore, that restoration process will take place in stages rather than all at once
 - And as it happens, it will be evident to anyone watching just as it was evident to Ezekiel that bones were being reassembled
 - And the final step of that restoration will be the Lord breathing life back into the nation by His Spirit
 - We know this to be the national salvation of Israel at the end of Tribulation
- So let’s see how that interpretation lines up with what follows in this chapter

Ezek. 37:11 Then He said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.’”

Ezek. 37:12 “Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel.”’

Ezek. 37:13 “Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people.”

Ezek. 37:14 “I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it,” declares the LORD.”

- In v.11, the Lord confirms our interpretation...the bones represent the whole house of

Israel

- They do not represent members of the house of Israel, as in certain Jews that live at a certain point in time or even across time
 - Rather, all the bones are a collective picture of a single entity: the house of Israel
 - And the term house could also mean the nation or dwelling place of a certain people
 - So it's a picture of the restoration of the nation of people of Israel
- Also notice in v.12 that the people of Israel are said to lament the loss of their nation since they have been cut off
 - To be cut off refers to being cut off from access to the land of Israel
 - That phrase speaks to the period of history when Israel is outside her land and unable to return and possess it
 - Israel existed in that state for many years over periods of history beginning with the exile in Ezekiel's day and continuing until about 100 years ago
- At the turn of the last century, Jews finally saw opportunity to begin to return to their land
 - That return has taken place over time, like bones and bodies being reassembled slowly
 - The Lord says in v.12 that this is like the graves opening up and people rising up and reentering the land
- At this point we must be careful not to move out of the illustration and into a literal view
 - We're still in the vision, so the bones coming out of graves is not a literal description of resurrection
 - It's still a way of illustrating the nation coming back to life, as were the bones in the valley
- In v.14 the Lord says the sum effect of His work will be to place the nation back in its land with life and security
 - Which leads to the next illustration

Ezek. 37:15 The word of the LORD came again to me saying,

Ezek. 37:16 "And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, 'For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions'; then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.'

Ezek. 37:17 "Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand.

Ezek. 37:18 "When the sons of your people speak to you saying, 'Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?'

Ezek. 37:19 say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.”’

- Another well known moment in Ezekiel, when the prophet writes on two sticks and then lashes them together into one bundle
 - One stick says Judah and the other says Ephraim
 - Judah is a reference to the southern kingdom after Solomon
 - Ephraim is a reference to the northern kingdom
 - These two tribes were representative of the two kingdoms because each was the largest tribe within its kingdom
 - According to the same thinking, the continental United States should be called Texas
 - The Lord interprets the illustration to mean He will bring these two groups back together by His hand
 - Obviously, this illustration works off the earlier one and reinforces our interpretation
 - If the earlier one was speaking about the re-emergence of the nation of Israel on the world stage, then this must also picture a nation
 - Specifically, it pictures the separate histories of these two kingdoms merging into a common history
 - After the kingdoms split, they went separate ways
 - One was destroyed by Assyria, the other was captured by Babylon
 - One never returned to her land, not as a group, while the other did
 - But in the future, these two kingdoms would be reunited into a single kingdom, a single nation again

Ezek. 37:20 “The sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes.

Ezek. 37:21 “Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land;

Ezek. 37:22 and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms.

Ezek. 37:23 “They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God.

- This is exactly the interpretation we would expect given the details of the text
- A new nation will form out of the ashes of the former kingdoms
- And it will dwell in the land as one with their God

Ezek. 37:24 “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them.

Ezek. 37:25 “They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons’ sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever.

Ezek. 37:26 “I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.

Ezek. 37:27 “My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.

Ezek. 37:28 “And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.””

- As we read a few chapters earlier on the topic of leadership, the Lord promises that the nation’s greatest king would also return with them
 - That only makes sense, since David is certainly counted among the righteous in Israel
 - And David will return to rule over Israel as king
 - Earlier in Chapter 34 he was called prince, and yet here he is called king
 - The reason for the difference stems from the difference in purpose in both chapters
 - In Chapter 34 the subject was leadership, and the Lord’s main point was that He would be a Good Shepherd over His people
 - So in that chapter, the Lord acknowledges that David returns to rule as prince
 - But then the Lord quickly follows that statement by adding the Lord would be their God and David would be the Lord’s servant
 - The point is that all shepherding in Israel will be under the watch of the Lord to ensure it will be done properly
 - Now in this chapter the topic is the restoration of the people as one nation in the land, in peace
 - So to emphasize the oneness of the people, the Lord says they will all have the same human leader, David
 - In that context, the Lord calls David king to reinforce the fact of one nation/one ruler just as it was in David’s day
 - Still, the Lord will be over David as we already learned in Chapter 34

- In fact, notice at the end of v.25 the Lord uses the term prince again to remind us of that fact
- Furthermore, the Lord will make a covenant of peace as we've heard before, and this is an essential detail
 - Remember, the Lord promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...

Gen. 12:2 And I will make you a great nation,
 And I will bless you,
 And make your name great;
 And so you shall be a blessing;

Gen. 15:18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying,
 “To your descendants I have given this land,
 From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:

Gen. 22:15 Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven,

Gen. 22:16 and said, “By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son,

Gen. 22:17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.

Gen. 28:13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants.

Gen. 28:14 “Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

- These are the promises that the Lord is promising to fulfill in Chapters 37 and 38
 - The Lord promised Abraham a nation, an uncountable number of people living as one nation in the land
 - And He promised this nation would be blessed and would be a blessing
 - And finally, He promised that this nation would possess the gates of its enemies
 - That is a way of saying no enemy of Israel will be able to stand against the nation in the day the Lord places it in the land
- So all these promises imply that Israel will dwell in peace in her land without threat that any enemy could take that peace away
 - And here we see the Lord promising to fulfill that aspect of the Abrahamic covenant

with a peace covenant

- This will be a new covenant established at the outset of the Millennial Kingdom
- And this covenant will guarantee Israel the peace it was promised long ago and it will last forever
- Never again will Israel not know peace
- Furthermore, the presence of the Lord will never cease to dwell with Israel
 - This too is an important detail, especially since Ezekiel was the prophet to also reveal that the glory of the Lord would depart Israel
 - In earlier chapters we studied the movement of the glory of God out of the temple in Jerusalem
 - And the departure of the glory of God foreshadowed Israel's judgment and destruction by Babylon
 - Now the Lord says His glory will never depart, which implies that the nation of Israel will never be conquered or destroyed again
 - This must be the ultimate fulfillment of the peace covenant
 - That God never abandons Israel to her enemies again
 - And that's an important distinction...God is not saying Israel will have no enemies in the future Kingdom
 - The Lord isn't promising never to bring His wrath against Israel...that's already assured
 - Israel will be at peace with God forever because they have His Spirit and they will obey Him and He will dwell among them
 - This peace covenant is God promising to prevent Israel's enemies from ever taking Israel's peace again
 - In fact, a peace covenant would be a hollow gesture if there was nothing or no one remaining who could take peace away
 - But there will be enemies of Israel in the Kingdom
 - So this peace covenant is directed at protecting Israel from any enemy who might try to take that peace away
- Take note of what Zechariah says will be happening in the Kingdom between Israel and other nations

Zech. 14:9 And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.

Zech. 14:10 All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin's Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses.

Zech. 14:11 People will live in it, and there will no longer be a curse, for Jerusalem

will dwell in security.

- First, we see that Israel will be in the Kingdom, dwelling in security
 - Here again, the promise to dwell securely only matters if there remains some enemy who might threaten that peace
 - And in the Kingdom there will be those who would oppose Israel and Christ the King

Zech. 14:16 Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Zech. 14:17 And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them.

Zech. 14:18 If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the LORD smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Zech. 14:19 This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

- Even though the world is ruled by Christ, nevertheless sin remains among some because natural human beings continue to live in the Kingdom
 - And once in a while, a family or a tribe or maybe a nation won't want to honor Israel and Christ
 - So they will disobey the command to come to Israel to celebrate the continuing observance of the Feast of Booths
 - That's the feast in the Jewish calendar that recognizes God dwelling among His people
- When a nation refuses to participate, the Lord will bring that nation drought
 - This is a clear indication that opposition remains alive in the nations
 - Yet that opposition will never take Israel's peace, the Lord promises
- So in Chapter 37 the Lord tells Israel how He will fulfill His promise to Abraham to bring a nation of Abraham's descendants into the land to live securely
 - But as we just learned with the peace covenant, the only way to know that the Lord is fulfilling His promise to keep Israel secure is when something tries to take that security away
 - It's similar to the dilemma of light and dark
 - Without darkness, you couldn't understand the concept of light or even know what it is
 - So unless someone tries to take Israel's peace, the people of God wouldn't know that the Lord is keeping His covenant of peace

- So the next chapter tells a prophecy of a day when nations will try to take Israel's peace
 - And the Lord will permit that uprising just long enough so that He might respond to it in defense of Israel
 - And by His response He will demonstrate His faithfulness to His peace covenant
- We will start our study of Chapter 38 tonight...
- This chapter, and the one that follows, begins a well-known section of Ezekiel often called Ezekiel's war
 - Before we dive into the text, it's worth a moment of background about the curious interpretations that circulate these chapters
 - And probably the greatest disagreement in those interpretations concerns when in history this event will take place
 - And we basically have four options, four periods of history when Bible students have said this war takes place
 - I'm going to list those four options now, but I'm not going to try to resolve them yet
 - First, some claim this war never happens – in the sense that it's not literal but merely symbolic, representing God's ultimate victory over Satan and Israel's enemies in general
 - A second view is that the war happens in this age before the start of Tribulation
 - A third view says it happens in the time of Tribulation and is part of the destruction of that period
 - A fourth view says it happens near the end of the Kingdom period
 - As we move through the text, we will come upon details that I believe will rule out all but one of the four options
 - So we will see the final answer in time, as a result of our observations and interpretation
 - Let's look at the actors involved in this war

Ezek. 38:1 And the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 38:2 “Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him

Ezek. 38:3 and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal.

Ezek. 38:4 “I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords;

Ezek. 38:5 Persia, Ethiopia and Put with them, all of them with shield and helmet;

Ezek. 38:6 Gomer with all its troops; Beth-togarmah from the remote parts of the north with all its troops — many peoples with you.

Ezek. 38:7 “Be prepared, and prepare yourself, you and all your companies that

are assembled about you, and be a guard for them.

Ezek. 38:8 “After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them.

- This is the sixth and last message that Ezekiel received as part of the group of prophecies given to him the day before the exiles from Jerusalem arrived
 - So this message is coming to the exiles one day before they learned that their city was gone and the temple had been destroyed
 - What an interesting pairing of events that must have been
 - On the one hand, they hear that their nation has essentially been wiped off the map
 - And on the other hand, they have just heard from God that they have a glorious future in the land in a day to come
 - Including the prospect that they will never be threatened by an enemy again
 - So in the beginning, the Lord tells Ezekiel that the Lord wants him to speak against certain nations and leaders
 - The Lord will use these leaders and nations to engage in an attack against Israel
 - Before we look at the names listed, don't overlook the most important actor in this entire chapter: the Lord
 - The Lord says plainly that He will instigate the battle
 - He will put hooks in the jaws of these nations and leaders, leading them to do the Lord's will
 - So whatever else we say about this war, we know it will be caused by the Lord
 - And that becomes a fundamental question we have to answer as we arrive at our determination of timing
 - Specifically, whatever time period we select for this battle, we must also arrive at an explanation for why the Lord wanted it to happen then
 - The Lord does nothing except for specific reasons, so we need to understand the reason that this battle needs to happen
 - And that reason will drive us to the proper time period in our interpretation
- Moving to the names of the people, we find a set of strange names and a few more familiar names
 - First, Ezekiel is told to look toward the land of Magog
 - Many of the place names in this list trace back to the names given in the Table of Nations from Genesis Chapter 10
 - Noah's son, Japheth, walked off the ark and eventually settled in Eastern

Europe starting with present day Turkey

- Among Japheth's sons to settle in that region were Magog, Mechech, and Tubal
- And the land settled by these three sons, plus the land of Rosh, are collectively ruled by a man called Gog, who is also called the prince of Rosh
 - The word Gog is a title, not a specific name, similar to Pharaoh or Caesar
 - So the oracle is spoken against some world leader with the title Gog, who rules a vast land located in the region of present-day Turkey
 - But because these place names are so general, the entire region north of Israel could be involved and under a common leader
 - That includes nations today like Syria, Georgia, Armenia, Russia and perhaps others
- This king will be joined by allies from Persia, Ethiopia and Put
 - Persia is the name for present-day Iran
 - Ethiopia includes the nation of that name now but historically it also includes neighboring Somalia and Eritrea
 - So altogether, this army consists of people from the north, south and east of Israel
 - Since the Mediterranean Sea sits directly to Israel's west, this means that nations are coming against Israel on land only
 - And they are coming from every possible direction surrounding Israel
- Next, notice that the Lord causes these peoples to assemble a great army to come up against Israel – yet the army is equipped in a very rudimentary way
 - First, the army will rely on horses
 - And we know these are not symbolic mentions because later in the description we get more specifics about the use of the horses
 - If the army only has horses for transportation, then this would explain why the forces approach by land only and not by sea
 - Secondly, the weaponry is very rudimentary by current standards
 - We see helmets and shields mentioned here
 - But in Chapter 39 we learn that they carry into battle wooden clubs, wooden spears, wooden shields, wooden helmets, wooden bows and wooden arrows
 - In fact everything used in the battle will be made of wood, not metal
 - This detail will help us date the prophecy
 - In v.7 the Lord directs them to first prepare for battle for some period of time
 - And during this time they are on guard against discovery or someone stopping them
 - But then after many days, the Lord will summon this vast army into action
 - Once again, notice the Lord is the one selecting the timing of this attack so that

it happens when He desires to suit His purposes

- And finally, notice that the attack will come against a land that has been restored from the sword
 - The word for restored is the Hebrew word *shuv*, which has many shades of interpretation
 - In this context, the best interpretation would be “turned away from” or “to have put away”
 - In other words, it’s a defenseless land, a land without military weaponry for none was needed
 - And why was none needed? Because v.8 goes on to say that the inhabitants of the land of Israel are living securely
 - They had no need for weaponry because they had no expectation of attack
 - Nothing threatened their security
 - Furthermore the inhabitants have been placed in their land from many nations, referring to the regathering of Israel
 - And they are all living on the mountains of Israel, which is an interesting reference we will come back to later
 - And before they returned, the land was a continual waste before it was restored to something great and useful for Israel
 - Finally, notice the small phrase at the very end of v.8...”all of them”
 - All of Israel is dwelling in this place, not just some Jews but all Jews
 - Here again, that’s another important clue to the timing of these events
- We come back to this next time...

- Let's dive back into our study of the section of Ezekiel commonly known as Ezekiel's war
 - These chapters are part of a structure I gave us a few weeks back
 - In that structure I proposed that there was a pattern of revelation built on the promises of the Abrahamic & Davidic Covenants
 - Those covenants promised Israel a king from the line of David, who shepherded God's people properly
 - An eternal inheritance of land that would be free of competing claims and would bless Israel with great fruitfulness
 - A nation of descendants to fill the land and inhabit it in peace from her enemies
 - And the Lord dwelling among His people
 - Chapters 33-48 explain this glorious future in great detail
 - And in the midst of these chapters we find a fascinating description of a coming war in the land of Israel
 - That war, commonly called Ezekiel's War, occurs in Chapters 38-39
 - According to my structure, Chapter 38 is part of the peaceful inhabitation promise
 - While Chapter 39 is part of God's description of His glory dwelling among His people
- Last week we looked at the opening verses, including the four competing views of the timing of these events
 - Once again, I'll list these four options, but we're going to allow the text to guide us to a timeline
 - First, some claim this war never happens – in the sense that it's not literal but merely symbolic representing God's ultimate victory over Satan and Israel's enemies in general
 - A second view is that the war happens in this age before the start of Tribulation
 - A third view says it happens in the time of Tribulation and is part of the destruction of that period
 - A fourth view says it happens near the end of the Kingdom period
 - And finally, by way of introduction, let's take a second look at the actors involved in this war

Ezek. 38:1 And the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 38:2 “Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him

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great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords;

Ezek. 38:5 Persia, Ethiopia and Put with them, all of them with shield and helmet;

Ezek. 38:6 Gomer with all its troops; Beth-togarmah from the remote parts of the north with all its troops — many peoples with you.

Ezek. 38:7 “Be prepared, and prepare yourself, you and all your companies that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them.

Ezek. 38:8 “After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them.

- Our first actor in this drama is from the land of Magog
 - We know from the table of nations, this area is, widely-speaking, Eastern Europe including present day Turkey
 - Among Noah’s grandsons’ sons to settle in that region north of Israel included men named Magog, Mechech, and Tubal
 - This land, plus the land of Rosh in the same region, are all collectively ruled by a man called Gog, who is also called the prince of Rosh
 - The word Gog is a title, not a specific name, similar to Pharaoh or Caesar
 - So the oracle is spoken against some world leader with the title Gog, who rules a vast land located in the region of present-day Turkey
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 - So altogether, this invading army consists of people from the north, south and east of Israel
 - Since the Mediterranean Sea sits directly to Israel’s west, this means that nations are coming against Israel on land only
 - And they are coming from every possible direction surrounding Israel
- Next, notice that the Lord causes these peoples to assemble a great army to come up against Israel, yet the army is equipped in a very rudimentary way
 - First, the army will rely on horses, literally not symbolically
 - Secondly, the weaponry is very rudimentary by current standards
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 - And before they returned, the land was a continual waste before it was restored to something great and useful for Israel
- Finally, notice the small phrase at the very end of v.8..."all of them"
 - All of Israel is dwelling in this place, not just some Jews but all Jews
 - Here again, that's another important clue to the timing of these events
- Now let's move to the invasion itself

Ezek. 38:9 "You will go up, you will come like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your troops, and many peoples with you."

Ezek. 38:10 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "It will come about on that day, that thoughts will come into your mind and you will devise an evil plan,

Ezek. 38:11 and you will say, 'I will go up against the land of unwallled villages. I will go against those who are at rest, that live securely, all of them living without walls and having no bars or gates,

Ezek. 38:12 to capture spoil and to seize plunder, to turn your hand against the waste places which are now inhabited, and against the people who are gathered from the nations, who have acquired cattle and goods, who live at the center of the world.'

Ezek. 38:13 "Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish with all its villages will say to you, 'Have you come to capture spoil? Have you assembled your company to seize plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to capture great spoil?'"

Ezek. 38:14 "Therefore prophesy, son of man, and say to Gog, 'Thus says the Lord

GOD, “On that day when My people Israel are living securely, will you not know it?

Ezek. 38:15 “You will come from your place out of the remote parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great assembly and a mighty army;

Ezek. 38:16 and you will come up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land. It shall come about in the last days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me when I am sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog.”

- In v.9 we read about the movement of a vast army of people so great that it covers the ground like a cloud
 - But that verse serves as an overview statement or introduction to the details of the invasion
 - Beginning in v.10 we see how this invasion unfolded in detail
 - First, as always, a thought enters into the mind of evil men, specifically the mind of Gog
 - He devises a plan to invade Israel and that plan takes shape based on opportunity and greed
 - Gog sees opportunity because he notes that the land of Israel is entirely unguarded
 - Gog notes that the land is at rest, which means quiet, unsuspecting
 - The land is also unwallled; no bars, no gates
 - By their nature, walls are the most basic of protective measures intended to defend against an enemy attack
 - So unwallled villages indicates a complete lack of concern over enemies
 - It would be like building a house without a front door
 - It says you have no concerns about someone taking your possessions
 - So Gog sees opportunity to invade unchallenged against an unsuspecting people
- Secondly, Gog’s greed gives him reason to seize upon that opportunity
 - In v.12 Gog notices the abundance of the land, the cattle and goods amassed in the land
 - This chapter comes immediately after a series of chapters describing the abundance of the land in the Kingdom
 - If we allow that context to inform our thinking, we can make better sense out of these nations’ interests
 - The abundance of Israel in the Kingdom will be second to none, the Bible says
 - The land will produce without equal and the people of Israel will be blessed above all other nations in that time period

- So in that context, Gog's desire for the spoil makes good sense
- Furthermore, the text notes that Israel was previously a waste place and that it was inhabited by people taken from all the other nations
 - Some would argue that is an accurate description of present day Israel, and it is to a degree
 - For many years, Israel was largely wilderness and today it is flourishing
 - And the nation has been repopulated by Jews coming from around the world to settle back in the land
- But it's that question of degree that drives our interpretation in a different direction
 - Yes some of Israel live in the land today
 - But in this chapter we're told at the time of the evasion that all of Israel is living in the land (v.8)
 - Yes, the land of Israel is prosperous today
 - But in this chapter we're told that Gog is so attracted by Israel's wealth that it causes him to invade
 - The wealth of Israel today is substantial, but it's not so substantial that it compels nations like Russia or Turkey or Iran to invade
 - In fact those nations collectively possess far more wealth than Israel today
 - An invasion by six nations to split up the limited resources of modern day Israel simply doesn't make strategic sense
- Beyond these issues, there are other details that tell us this can't be a war of our age and time
 - First, there's the issue of Israel being completely unguarded, without walls and without any defenses
 - This is completely opposite of the truth in present-day Israel
 - First, they have walls...massive walls running miles
 - If anything, Israel is famous for its walls
 - Secondly, Israel's defense forces are the envy of the world
 - No nation would dare invade Israel in our current day for fear of the reprisals, up to and including nuclear retaliation
 - In short, Israel is one of the most defensively fortified nations on earth
 - Thirdly, Israel of today is not dwelling in quiet and peace in their land as described in this passage
 - Yes, they have established a degree of security but it's certainly not a peaceful, quiet existence in the land
 - The people of Israel are conspicuously aware of how tenuous their security is
 - And that tension and worry over security is exactly the opposite of the situation described in this chapter

- So in terms of timing, all indications are pointing to a time in history very different to the one we are in now...to the time of the Kingdom
- Fourthly, we're told that Israel is considered the center of the world in v.12
 - Certainly Israel lies at the center of the Bible's geography
 - And it's also the focus of the Christian's world
 - Nevertheless we can hardly say Israel is the center of the world today by most measures
- Today, we would say China or the U.S. or maybe the E.U. lies at the center of the world in terms of power, wealth, or attention
 - But in the Kingdom, the Bible says Israel is by all definitions the center of the world

Zech. 8:20 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'It will yet be that peoples will come, even the inhabitants of many cities.

Zech. 8:21 'The inhabitants of one will go to another, saying, "Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts; I will also go."

Zech. 8:22 'So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.'

Zech. 8:23 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."'"

- This is a picture of Israel atop the world and without peer, but that is not the case today
- Finally, it's worth noting that not one of the nations invading with Gog is Arab
 - If an alliance formed in our day to invade Israel, we should expect Arabs to readily join in the battle, yet none are mentioned
 - On the other hand, their absence makes perfect sense if the context of the invasion is the Kingdom period
 - Ezekiel has already promised Israel that in the Kingdom Arab nations will never again threaten or harm Israel
- Back to the passage, in v.13 we're told that other nations will inquire of the invaders as they gather on Israel's border
 - Sheba and Dedan describe northern Arabia, directly to the east of Israel
 - While the merchants of Tarshish probably refers to ships sailing across the Med from Spain
 - We can't tell the exact reason they ask the question except perhaps out of surprise and disbelief at the unfolding events
 - If so, then v.13 indicates to us how out of the ordinary this action is given the circumstances of that day
 - Then in v.14, we hear the Lord's challenge to Gog, and that challenge lies at the

heart of my interpretation

- The Lord asks rhetorically, will Gog disrupt the peace that God has given to His people Israel?
- Remember last week I told you that the Lord promised that Israel would have peace in the land as part of His covenant with them
- In fact, the Lord establishes a peace covenant with His people Israel to inaugurate the Kingdom period
- But I also told you that if God is to be understood to be faithful to that promise, then there must be an enemy or threat to Israel
 - Without a threat to Israel's peace, there is no way for God to demonstrate His faithfulness to that peace covenant
 - It's like God promising He will cure you of cancer – but until you contract cancer, God can't show Himself faithful to that promise
 - Likewise, God has said He will protect Israel from her enemies, but to show Himself faithful, Israel needs an enemy to invade
- So the Lord said He will call Gog to invade, and now in v.14 the Lord says to Gog will you, indeed, disturb the peace of my people Israel?
 - And of course, the answer to Gog and to Israel is no
 - The Lord will ensure that His people will be preserved and saved just as the Lord promised
- So here again, the invasion serves an important purpose in the Kingdom
 - It gives opportunity for the Lord to show Himself faithful to the peace covenant
 - As He says at the end of v.14, will Gog (and Israel) not know that they are living securely in the land?
 - By how the Lord defends Israel against Gog's invasion, everyone will come to see just how securely the people are dwelling in the land
- Next, look at the nature of warfare in this coming day
 - In v.15 the Lord describes the invasion as many peoples all riding horses
 - The Hebrew word translated as horse means...horse
 - There is nothing in the text to indicate this is a symbolic reference to something else
 - The text is speaking plainly and literally
 - Which means we must imagine a day of warfare in which the horse has once again become a chief means of transportation
 - Once more, if we suppose this battle happens in the present day, then we have a very difficult time explaining this reference
 - Certainly, the modern nations mentioned in this prophecy could not possibly expect to prevail against Israel riding horses
 - The Israeli Defense Forces are among the most modern and sophisticated in the

world

- Moreover, the armies of Russia, Turkey, Iran, Libya, and even Ethiopia possess tanks, armored vehicles, aircraft, etc.
- It's foolish to assume they would abandon all these tools in favor of horses
- So either our interpretation must retreat far back in time to pre-industrial revolution times, or advance far forward into the Kingdom age
 - First, the Kingdom age seems to be marked by a simpler life

Is. 66:18 “For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory.

Is. 66:19 “I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations.

Is. 66:20 “Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the LORD, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem,” says the LORD, “just as the sons of Israel bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD.

- Notice again the mention of some of the same nations as we've seen mentioned in Ezekiel, and these nations will know the Lord's glory
- And they will come to the holy mountain of God in horse-drawn chariots
- Animals will be the mode of transportation in the Kingdom
- Secondly, Isaiah confirms that the Kingdom age will not possess technology for warfare whatsoever

Is. 2:2 Now it will come about that

In the last days

The mountain of the house of the LORD

Will be established as the chief of the mountains,

And will be raised above the hills;

And all the nations will stream to it.

Is. 2:3 And many peoples will come and say,

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

To the house of the God of Jacob;

That He may teach us concerning His ways

And that we may walk in His paths.”

For the law will go forth from Zion

And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Is. 2:4 And He will judge between the nations,

And will render decisions for many peoples;

And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will not lift up sword against nation,

And never again will they learn war.

- In this age, the people will be guided by the Lord's rule, which is so perfect and absolute that sin will not be able to run far
 - The Lord will render decisions in such a way that conflict never goes far enough to invite physical violence
 - Therefore, there is no need to prepare for war, and all creative energy will be spent elsewhere
 - The people will turn swords into farming equipment and no one will train for war
- This detail helps explain better a couple of things we've already heard so far
 - First, it explains the defenselessness of Israel in this day
 - There would be no reason for Israel to take defensive measures in a day when no warfare takes place or is even planned
- Secondly, it explains the curiosity of the other nations as they ponder over Gog's invading army
 - Truly, such an invasion would be unprecedented and altogether unfamiliar to the people of the Kingdom
 - No one has even contemplated such a thing during this period, according to Isaiah...no one even trains for war
 - So it makes more sense that these other nations would marvel at Gog's audacity
- But if the Lord's rule prevents such uprisings, how is this war even possible?
 - Remember how the chapter started?
 - In v.4 the Lord said this was His war...He is starting it by bringing these armies out to attack Israel
 - He instigates it so that He can defeat the invasion and thereby demonstrate His faithfulness to protect Israel's peace
 - But the Bible also tells us that the Lord never tempts anyone to sin

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

James 1:15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

- The Lord has taken credit for instigating Gog to undertake a sinful act, but we know the

Lord does not tempt us into sin

- So the Lord is saying He appointed these events by His sovereign will and set the timing of their occurrence
- But then how did the Lord bring them to pass without being the direct cause of Gog's sin?
- I believe Revelation 20 gives us the answer:

Rev. 20:7 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,

Rev. 20:8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.

Rev. 20:9 And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

- The Lord determines the manner and timing of this war by deciding the timing of Satan's release
 - Satan is bound for 1,000 years in the abyss during the Kingdom
 - His absence make possible the peaceful existence of Israel and all nations in this age
- But at the end of the age, the Lord releases Satan for a time
 - Have you ever wondered why the Lord lets him go to start a war?
 - Now we see why...Ezekiel tells us that the Lord is using Satan to accomplish His purpose in displaying His faithfulness to Israel
 - And to reveal His glory to the other nations who watch how the Lord defends Israel and glory Him for it
- It's also worth noting that the only two places in the Bible where the leader Gog of Magog is mentioned is in Ezekiel 38 and Revelation 20
 - That connection all by itself demands our attention and an explanation
 - Those who say this battle happens in our age rather than in the Kingdom believe the connection is a foreshadowing
 - The Gog of Ezekiel foreshadows the Gog of the Kingdom, but there is nothing in the text to suggest that connection
- On the contrary, given the similarities of the situation, the more obvious and logical connection would be these are the same individual
 - In fact, John mentions the name Gog with no explanation as if to refer to the earlier prophecy
 - He seems to expect his readers to know who Gog is
- Which brings us to the second major purpose the Lord has in bringing this war to pass

- Notice in v.16 the Lord says that through His defense of Israel from Gog's attack, the nations may know the Lord
 - The Lord will be sanctified, or set apart as holy, by the other nations when they witness how the Lord defends Israel
 - Taking another look at our chart, notice that Chapter 39 shows how the Lord will be gloried among the nations
 - That chapter leads us into Chapters 40 and beyond, which show how the Lord is gloried in Israel
- So now we know how the Lord intends to be glorified among the nation in the Kingdom
 - He will orchestrate this conflict so that as the nations ponder over Gog's invasion, much as Dedan and others did, they will sanctify the Lord
 - His response will remind the nations of God's power and His faithfulness to His people Israel
- So all signs (in my estimation) point to this invasion happening during the Kingdom, which brings us to the Lord's response

Ezek. 38:17 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Are you the one of whom I spoke in former days through My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for many years that I would bring you against them?"

Ezek. 38:18 "It will come about on that day, when Gog comes against the land of Israel," declares the Lord GOD, "that My fury will mount up in My anger.

Ezek. 38:19 "In My zeal and in My blazing wrath I declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel.

Ezek. 38:20 "The fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all the creeping things that creep on the earth, and all the men who are on the face of the earth will shake at My presence; the mountains also will be thrown down, the steep pathways will collapse and every wall will fall to the ground.

Ezek. 38:21 "I will call for a sword against him on all My mountains," declares the Lord GOD. "Every man's sword will be against his brother.

Ezek. 38:22 "With pestilence and with blood I will enter into judgment with him; and I will rain on him and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire and brimstone.

Ezek. 38:23 "I will magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the LORD."

- The Lord reminds Gog that the Jewish prophets predicted his destruction for many years, so that causes us to ask which prophets?
 - We could say that these words were being spoken as if during the Kingdom
 - In which case, then we would say that "the prophets" refers to Ezekiel himself
 - But that conclusion seems recursive in a way we rarely see in prophetic

Scripture

- So a better conclusion is that other prophets prior to Ezekiel predicted this same calamity
 - And if we look for parallels we do find some examples

Psa. 110:1 The LORD says to my Lord:

“Sit at My right hand

Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”

Psa. 110:2 The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying,

“Rule in the midst of Your enemies.”

Psa. 110:3 Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power;

In holy array, from the womb of the dawn,

Your youth are to You as the dew.

Psa. 110:4 The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind,

“You are a priest forever

According to the order of Melchizedek.”

Psa. 110:5 The Lord is at Your right hand;

He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath.

Psa. 110:6 He will judge among the nations,

He will fill them with corpses,

He will shatter the chief men over a broad country.

Psa. 110:7 He will drink from the brook by the wayside;

Therefore He will lift up His head.

- Psalm 110 seems to describe a war in the time of Christ’s rule over the nations
 - If so, then it would be a prophet speaking of Gog’s destruction
 - There are other examples we could find, but the point is made...
 - The Lord has been indicating there would be a battle at the end of the Kingdom period
- So then the Lord displays His might in defeating Gog
 - His wrath begins with an earthquake in the land of Israel
 - The earthquake will be so severe that the entire earth will shake
 - Every living thing on the earth will be shaken
 - Mountains will fall to the ground the world over
 - Every wall (presumably referring to the structures of homes and the like) will fall down too
 - This is truly a calamity of biblical proportions (by definition)
 - Some see the scale of these events as evidence that this battle takes place during the Tribulation period

- Obviously, we do see similar catastrophes in that time of history
 - So the connection seems plausible, but we will look at the question of that theory in Chapter 39
- The earthquake is planet-shaking, but it's just a prelude to the army's destruction
 - The Lord then turns the swords of the invading army against themselves
 - Remember, these invaders are the only ones on the planet with swords
 - So when swords are met by swords, we're talking about the army being confused by God so that they attack one another
 - We've seen the Lord do similar things in defense of Israel during the time prior to kings
- Finally, the Lord settles the matter entirely by bringing hailstones and fire from heaven to destroy the entire army
 - The Lord fights this battle on behalf of Israel
 - The people of Israel are defended and do nothing of their own to defeat their enemy
 - The Lord supernaturally does all the fighting for Israel
 - For the first time in the entire 1,000 years of the Kingdom, warfare and bloodshed has come to pass
 - It will no doubt be stunning to the Kingdom inhabitants to watch unfold
- The effect of this move is that the Lord magnifies Himself and sanctifies Himself and makes Himself known to all nations
 - All the world now knows the Lord is the only one
 - Now if this is the Kingdom, why would the Lord need to make this known?
 - Wouldn't the entire world know that the Lord is the only One?
 - Remember, in earlier nights we learned that this age will include unbelief
 - While there will be those glorified citizens (like the Church) who know the Lord and others who come to faith in the Kingdom
 - There will also be some (many?) who do not believe that Jesus is Lord
 - And that unbelief is possible for the same reason it's always been possible
 - Jesus won't be personally visible...as we learn later in Ezekiel, He dwells in the temple out of sight
 - Secondly, faith is still required – and faith is confidence in things unseen
 - So though the world will operate differently, to someone born into that world these differences will seem “normal” to them
 - And so once again they must put their trust in the word of God
 - The only difference between unbelievers in the Kingdom day verses unbelievers today is where we are in the program of God
 - Today, we show unbelievers the word of God and tell them they sit between

Christ's first coming and second coming

- But we have no proof we can offer of either event outside the testimony of the word of God itself
- In the Kingdom, we will tell unbelievers that they sit after Christ's first and second comings
 - But again, we will have no proof to offer them apart from the testimony of the word of God
 - The only difference is that in their day we will sit further along the path of God's plan than we do today
- So in Chapter 38 the Lord brings the war to an end abruptly and dramatically
 - It serves His purposes to show the people His power and to demonstrate to Israel His faithfulness
 - It also brings the entire Kingdom period to an end in dramatic fashion

Rev. 20:7 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,

Rev. 20:8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.

Rev. 20:9 And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

Rev. 20:10 And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Rev. 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

Rev. 20:12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

Rev. 20:13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.

Rev. 20:14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

Rev. 20:15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

- The events that end the Kingdom serve a greater purpose in the narrative of God's plan for the earth

- The final event of this earth before the heavens and earth are destroyed is the conquering of Satan
 - And with Satan's end comes the end of death
 - And the end of judgment for sin, which is personalized by Hades – the holding place for the dead sinner
- Paul explains the purpose in these events in 1 Corinthians

1Cor. 15:24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

1Cor. 15:25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

1Cor. 15:26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

1Cor. 15:27 For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him.

1Cor. 15:28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

- In this passage, Paul has been explaining the order of resurrections in the land of God, and at v.24 Paul says "then comes the end"
 - In my English translation, we also see the word "comes" inserted in the text, but in the original Greek that word is not there
 - The actual phrase in Greek is "then the end"
 - Paul is brushing over some details in this discussion for the sake of brevity
 - But elsewhere in Revelation 20 we learned what specifically happens "at the end"
 - According to Revelation 20, the Kingdom of Christ will last on Earth for 1,000 years, but it must come to an end
 - Then in v.24 Paul says the end of the Kingdom means Christ handing all authority back to the Father
 - The Father abolishes all power and authority in His Creation apart from His own
 - This is a fascinating insight into the distant prophetic plan for Creation
 - After Christ's Second Coming to earth, He sets up a kingdom to rule over humanity on earth
 - Christ presides over a world that still exists in sin, though resurrected saints will not possess sin
 - Yet natural men and women in the kingdom will still have sin, necessitating Christ's judgment and our ruling with Him
- The final and greatest enemy of God is death itself, and the author of death who is Satan
 - So Christ must rule until that final enemy is conquered

- The moment Satan and death are conquered comes at the very end of the Kingdom
- For if it came any sooner, then the Kingdom would end at that point
- Once death and the source of death has been judged, there is no longer a point in Christ ruling in any capacity
- The need for “rule” ends when opposition to God ceases
- Once the victory is won, the purpose of the Kingdom has been fulfilled
 - And at that point Jesus hands back authority to the Father
 - In v.27 Paul quotes from Psalm 8
 - The pronouns cause some confusion at first, but if we replace them with proper nouns, it makes easier reading

1Cor. 15:27 For [the Father] HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER [Christ’s] FEET. But when [the Spirit] says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that [the Father] is excepted who put all things in subjection to [Christ].

- Paul says that the goal of the Kingdom is to put everything under Christ’s rule
 - But of course, the Father Himself is not to be subjected to Christ’s rule
 - Therefore, once the final enemy is gone, the Son obediently returns all authority to the Father
- At that point, v.28 says the Son obediently subjects Himself to the Father once again, and Paul says God returns to being “all in all”
 - It’s not clear what this moment means for the Godhead
 - But the simplest explanation is that the manifestation of the Godhead into the Creation becomes a singular expression
 - The Three Persons of the Godhead still exist, of course, as they always have existed
 - But they no longer express themselves into Creation separately
 - Instead, the Godhead expresses itself as One, in a manner similar to the way God existed at the beginning of Creation
 - When the Godhead said “Let Us make man in Our image”
 - In other words, Christ came to earth as a man to die and resurrect and rule so that as a man, He could conquer all the enemies of God in Creation
 - And once He completes this mission, His purpose to exist in the form of man is met
 - And then He will return to the Oneness with the Father that He has enjoyed since before the beginning



Ezekiel - Lesson 39

Chapter 39

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- Let's return to Ezekiel's War, as some refer to Chapters 38-39 of Ezekiel
 - We're endeavoring to study these chapters according to an understanding of what the Lord is revealing overall in this section
 - To understand that structure, I've provided a chart as you've seen in past weeks
 - The chart relates each chapter to the fulfillment of God's covenants with Israel
 - In the covenant with Abraham and later with David, the Lord promised a king of power, a land of prosperity, a people of peace, and a God living among them
 - As my chart shows, the Lord addresses each of these promises in two parts
 - The first two chapters covered the promise of a king
 - The next two chapters covered the land of prosperity
 - The next two chapters address the people of peace
 - And then we move into the final section, a God dwelling among His people
 - This section is the longest section but it too has two parts
 - The first part, a single chapter, shows how God makes Himself known to the Gentile nations of the earth
 - And the second part, which is nine chapters by itself, explains how God will dwell among Israel
- Last week in Chapter 38 we studied the first half of Ezekiel's War, but that chapter was also the second part of the section on the people of peace
 - And when we overlay this organization to the text, we gain a better understanding of both the timing and purpose of these events
 - At the start of the kingdom, the Lord establishes a new peace covenant with the people of Israel
 - The Lord promises that nothing will disturb the peace of the Kingdom age for His people

Ezek. 37:25 "They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever.

Ezek. 37:26 "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.

Ezek. 37:27 "My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.

Ezek. 37:28 "And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever."'''

- This is a fulfillment of what God has promised in earlier covenants
 - Like all covenants, the Lord will show Himself faithful to His promise to protect

Israel from enemies

- To do that the Lord allows His enemies to attack the nation at the end of the Kingdom, so that He might defend the nation
- So the timing of the war and the purpose of the war both point us to a period of fulfillment at the end of the 1,000-year kingdom
 - The Lord defends Israel from her enemies to show Himself faithful to His peace covenant to Israel
 - And He accomplishes it at the end of the Kingdom period so that He may put all enemies under Jesus' feet
 - As David wrote describing Jesus' rule in the Kingdom:

Psa. 110:1 The LORD says to my Lord:

“Sit at My right hand

Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”

Psa. 110:2 The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying,

“Rule in the midst of Your enemies.”

Psa. 110:3 Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power;

In holy array, from the womb of the dawn,

Your youth are to You as the dew.

- Jesus rules a Kingdom that still includes enemies, until the end of that period when the enemy is finally crushed
 - That final moment gives God opportunity to be seen as faithful to Israel
 - But this way also serves the purpose of revealing the Lord to all nations in the Kingdom

Ezek. 38:16 and you will come up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land. It shall come about in the last days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me when I am sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog.”

Ezek. 38:23 “I will magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the LORD.”

- By His defense of Israel, the Lord reveals Himself to the nations on earth in a new and mighty way
- The Lord is among the peoples of the earth, and through His defense of Israel He makes Himself known to the world
- So looking at our chart, the Ezekiel War accomplishes two purposes
 - It shows God faithful to His peace covenant (Chapter 38) and to making Himself known to the nations of the earth (Chapter 39)
 - We studied Chapter 38 last week, where we saw the invasion begin and come to an abrupt end

- The events certainly demonstrate God’s faithfulness to His peace covenant
- He promised to defend Israel from her enemies and ensure that no one took the nation’s peace in the Kingdom
- And certainly, the Lord shows Himself faithful to that promise by destroying the invading armies before they ever reach their targets
- That leaves us in the second half of the war tonight, which is the first part of the last section of the chart
 - We now move into the final part of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Lord’s promise to dwell among His people
 - And this promise is also addressed in two parts
 - The first part is the second half of the Ezekiel War, as the Lord reveals Himself to the Gentile nations of the earth
- So in Chapter 39 the Lord brings the war to an end, but in the way He does it, He produces a testimony to all Gentile nations

Ezek. 39:1 “And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal;

Ezek. 39:2 and I will turn you around, drive you on, take you up from the remotest parts of the north and bring you against the mountains of Israel.

Ezek. 39:3 “I will strike your bow from your left hand and dash down your arrows from your right hand.

Ezek. 39:4 “You will fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you as food to every kind of predatory bird and beast of the field.

Ezek. 39:5 “You will fall on the open field; for it is I who have spoken,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 39:6 “And I will send fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands in safety; and they will know that I am the LORD.

- The first part of the chapter restates material from Chapter 38
 - And before we look at the text itself, we should ask why does the Lord repeat Himself here in that way?
 - The logical conclusion is that there must be a division taking place in the narrative between Chapters 38 and 39
 - And therefore, as we move into Chapter 39 the Lord takes a moment to remind us of the circumstances of the battle
 - So that then He may move the narrative in a new direction
 - And that new direction is the final topic of our outline, the Lord dwelling among His people
 - Beginning with this chapter, the Lord now describes how He will fulfill His promise to live among Abraham’s descendants
 - And by His relationship with Abraham’s family, He brings a blessing to all

nations on earth

- And since He gives a great deal more detail to Israel's situation, He saves Israel for last
- So this chapter is God revealing Himself to the Gentile nations
- And the circumstances of that revelation is a great war that ends the Kingdom period
 - And the Lord reminds us of how that war ended
 - The Lord sets Himself against Gog of Magog and the surrounding regions
 - In v.2 the Lord says He turns against this leader, and drives him on into war
 - The Lord takes the man and his army up from the remotest parts of the north and brings them against Israel's mountains
 - But even as this vast army invades, the Lord defeats them easily and quickly even before they reach their objective
 - In v.3 the Lord says He will strike the bow and arrows from their hands
 - This reminds us of what we learned in Chapter 38, that the war is executed in very rudimentary ways
 - The warfare involves horses, spears, bow and arrows
 - This is not modern warfare, which means the events do not happen in our present age of sophistication
 - Nor do they happen in the past, since these events have no parallel in history
 - So they must happen in the future, in a simpler time, a time when warfare has returned to a very crude form
 - And as we saw in Isaiah last week, the time of the Kingdom is a time of ignorance when it comes to war
 - So as Gog has determined to go up against Israel and has recruited a vast army, his army must rely on the simplest of tools
 - They ride horses and they bring bows and arrows to battle
 - Why do they think they can win with such simple tools?
 - Simply because no one has anything better in this day and age
 - The art of war and the implements of war have become lost in the 1,000 years of the Kingdom
- But for the same reason, the spectacle of millions and millions of people rising up to conquer Israel using only wooden tools highlights their powerlessness
 - It's reminiscent of the people of Babel building a tower to reach to the heavens
 - At a point the Lord "came down" to see what mankind has built
 - That tower was so far from reaching Heaven it served to mock mankind's arrogance and impotence
 - Likewise, an uncountable army carrying wooden armaments invading an Israel protected by God Himself is hopeless folly
 - And as this army invades and attacks, they are struck down en mass
 - The bodies of so many people will be left exposed so that vultures will be

enlisted by God to clear the earth

- Now this reference causes some to draw a connection between this war and the one mentioned in Revelation 19

Rev. 19:17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, “Come, assemble for the great supper of God,

Rev. 19:18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.”

Rev. 19:19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.

Rev. 19:20 And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.

Rev. 19:21 And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

- This passage describes a war that concludes the seven years of Tribulation when the Antichrist is defeated by Christ’s return
 - We commonly call this war Armageddon, and it’s a culminating event of Tribulation
 - This moment has parallels to the one we’re studying in Ezekiel 39
 - Both involve a massive loss of human life at the hand of God alone
 - Both result in a land covered by dead bodies and birds feasting on the remains
- So for that reason perhaps more than any other, some believe this prophecy is another view of the war of Armageddon
 - But that interpretation fails to address the overall context of Ezekiel
 - Specifically, why would Ezekiel break out of his Kingdom prophecies to engage in a two chapter discussion about a war of the past?
 - The war of Armageddon has no contextual connection to the rest of Ezekiel at this place in the book
 - And beyond the contextual problem, there are timing issues in the rest of the chapter which we will see soon enough
- Notice in v.6 the first of what will be multiple references in this chapter to the Lord’s purpose in these events
 - He says He destroys Magog, and those who come with that army, with fire so that they will know the Lord
 - The reason for the war and the reason the Lord destroys these invaders in such a visible, dramatic fashion is to make a point

- And He explains that point in the next two verses

Ezek. 39:7 “My holy name I will make known in the midst of My people Israel; and I will not let My holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel.

Ezek. 39:8 “Behold, it is coming and it shall be done,” declares the Lord GOD. “That is the day of which I have spoken.

- The Lord says that this war will serve several purposes
 - First, the Lord will make Himself known in the midst of Israel
 - Now at first that may seem a strange goal if this is the Kingdom period
 - After all, we’re told that all Israel will know the Lord dwells among them during this time

Jer. 31:31 “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

Jer. 31:32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

Jer. 31:33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Jer. 31:34 “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

- During the time of the Kingdom, all Israel will know the Lord in the New Covenant
 - None will need to be taught about the Lord
 - Everyone will know Him among Israel
 - Therefore, why does the Lord need this war to make Himself known in the midst of Israel
- Take a look at your chart for the answer...the audience the Lord is playing to is not Israel but the other nations of the world
 - Notice the phrasing of v.7...the Lord will make Himself known in the midst of my people
 - It’s not the people of Israel that need to know the Lord...He’s already in their midst just as He promised
 - The problem is that the other nations have not recognized that the Lord resides in Israel
- But how is it possible that other nations would not acknowledge the Lord is residing in the Kingdom?

- Doesn't the whole world see and know Jesus as Lord? Not at all
 - As we've already established in earlier lessons, there is a world of unbelievers born in the time of the Kingdom
 - And these unbelievers do not acknowledge Jesus as King
- Moreover, as we will learn in a future chapter of Ezekiel, Jesus will not be visible in the Kingdom
 - He is not a suffering prophet walking the earth or riding a donkey
 - In the Kingdom Jesus will be a conquering King, residing in the temple at all times
 - No one will see Him, so as it is today, the world must have faith in Jesus according to the word of God
- Under those circumstances, the Lord's statement makes good sense – and for that matter, so does the war
 - After 1,000 years the world has been repopulated and many are unbelievers
 - These unbelievers are the ones Satan deceives who come up against Israel to attack
 - This is the first and only act of war and violence during the entire 1,000 year Kingdom
 - And in this moment, the Lord displays His power and might in protecting Israel
- As a result, the world will know without a doubt that the Lord dwells amidst His people Israel
 - This is the day the Lord has spoken about, the day He's spoken about throughout Scripture
 - This is day that Psalm 110 promised when Jesus would put all His enemies under His feet
 - This is the day Isaiah spoke of, when the purpose of the Kingdom would be fulfilled for Israel's sake

Is. 9:2 The people who walk in darkness

Will see a great light;

Those who live in a dark land,

The light will shine on them.

Is. 9:3 You shall multiply the nation,

You shall increase their gladness;

They will be glad in Your presence

As with the gladness of harvest,

As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

Is. 9:4 For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders,

The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian.

Is. 9:5 For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult,

And cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire.

Is. 9:6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;

**And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.**

Is. 9:7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
**On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.**

- Notice v.5 of Isaiah 9 speaks of a battle in the midst of Christ ruling
 - And interestingly, Isaiah also mentions that the debris of the war will become fuel for a fire
 - Which leads us into the next section of the chapter

Ezek. 39:9 “Then those who inhabit the cities of Israel will go out and make fires with the weapons and burn them, both shields and bucklers, bows and arrows, war clubs and spears, and for seven years they will make fires of them.

Ezek. 39:10 “They will not take wood from the field or gather firewood from the forests, for they will make fires with the weapons; and they will take the spoil of those who despoiled them and seize the plunder of those who plundered them,” declares the Lord GOD.

- After the Lord has vanquished the invading armies, the wasteland of dead leave behind an almost endless supply of fuel
 - And the people of Israel come out to scavenge from these weapons
 - Notice the people of Israel weren’t involved in the battle at all since the Lord did the fighting
 - They stayed securely in their unwallled villages while the Lord fought the battle for them out in the plain
- The people of Israel collect weapons of all kinds, including shields, bows, arrows, war clubs, and spears
 - And for seven years Israel will use these tools as fuel for fire
 - This is confirmation that the tools used by the invading army are made of wood
 - Wood burns, obviously, but steel does not
- In fact, in v.10 the Lord says that the people won’t even bother to take wood from the field or gather firewood from the forest afterward
 - They have enough wood from these implements to satisfy their needs for fuel
 - The tools will become spoil for Israel
 - So this detail confirms that the invaders use wood tools only and that the age in which this event takes place is rudimentary
 - Wood is the primary fuel of the Kingdom age

- And therefore, the chance to collect so much wood is a great advantage to the people of the Kingdom
- Also, notice that there were enough invaders that the materials collected keep all Israel supplied with wood for burning to last seven years
 - That's a huge quantity of wood, and it tells us how vast this invading army must have been
 - But this reference to seven years of burning is a critical detail in the overall account for other reasons
 - It eliminates another option for interpreting the timing of these events
 - You remember I said that there are four primary interpretations for when this war takes place in history
 - First, some claim this war is only symbolic representing God's ultimate victory over Satan and Israel's enemies in general
 - A second view says the war happens during our present age before the start of the seven-year Tribulation
 - A third view says the war happens at the end of the Tribulation
 - A fourth view, which you see me advocating, says this war is the Gog and Magog war at the end of the Kingdom period
 - The details of seven years of burning would appear to rule out option #3
 - If the burning of the wood requires seven years, then the aftermath of the battle would extend far beyond the years of Tribulation
 - Tribulation itself is only seven years and the battle at the end takes place on the very last day of that period
 - So then how could we find time for an additional seven years of burning
 - That detail would appear to eliminate that possibility
- Now some might make a similar argument against my view, option #4
 - They would ask how can these events fit within the Millennial Kingdom if they are the last events of the 1,000 years?
 - The answer is found in Revelation 20

Rev. 20:7 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,

Rev. 20:8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.

- The events of this war take place after the end of the 1,000 years
- In other words, the Kingdom overall lasts longer than 1,000 years, but the time of peace without Satan is 1,000 years
- After that 1,000 years is complete, then Satan is let loose, Revelation says
 - And then the war follows after that point, which means we're off the clock

- There is no time limit for the war or the burning that follows
- Only after the events of this war have concluded do we move beyond the Kingdom time
- But we can't say the same thing about the end of Tribulation
 - Daniel 12 teaches that the destructive events of Tribulation come to an end within 75 days following the war of Armageddon
 - That leaves no room for the seven years of burning
- But for that same reason, we can't put these events in our time
 - We wouldn't expect an army in our day to fight with wooden weapons
 - Furthermore, even if such an event took place today, people in modern Israel wouldn't collect the spoil of the army to burn them
 - Modern Israelis don't forage in forests for fuel
 - Modern homes are heated with natural gas and lit by electricity generated in modern plants
 - Cars run on gasoline, aircrafts use jet fuel
 - There's simply no way to see the nation finding interest in burning wooden tools for any length of time, much less for seven years
 - Clearly we're looking at a time of history very different than the one we have today
 - And that argues for the Kingdom more than any other detail in this account
 - And the next passage continues to make that case

Ezek. 39:11 “On that day I will give Gog a burial ground there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea, and it will block off those who would pass by. So they will bury Gog there with all his horde, and they will call it the valley of Hamon-gog.

Ezek. 39:12 “For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them in order to cleanse the land.

Ezek. 39:13 “Even all the people of the land will bury them; and it will be to their renown on the day that I glorify Myself,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 39:14 “They will set apart men who will constantly pass through the land, burying those who were passing through, even those left on the surface of the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search.

Ezek. 39:15 “As those who pass through the land pass through and anyone sees a man's bone, then he will set up a marker by it until the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamon-gog.

Ezek. 39:16 “And even the name of the city will be Hamonah. So they will cleanse the land.”

- Gog and all his multitude of army will be buried in the land of Israel where they fell
 - The location of burial will be in a valley east of the sea

- The sea is the Mediterranean Sea, and the most prominent valley east of the Med. is the Jordan River valley
- So more than likely, that's the valley in mind here
- And the bodies in that area will be so numerous that the burial ground will block the passage of people through the valley
 - Remember, a Jew may not traverse over graves, so the number of bodies buried in this region is so great that it makes passage impossible
 - They will rename the valley Hamon-gog
 - Hamon means multitude or uproar
 - So the valley is called the multitude of Gog
- The dead will be so numerous that the burial process will require seven months
 - Israel will go through the land meticulously looking for unburied bones of the fallen so they might cleanse the land
 - And as they find a bone, they will mark it carefully to prevent a Jew from stumbling across it and becoming defiled
 - Then having marked the bone, it will then be buried in the valley where no one may go
- So why is Israel intent on these burials? Notice the Lord gives a reason in v.13
 - The Lord says that all the people of Israel will bury their oppressors
 - And the care by which Israel takes to dispose of the bodies of the slain will be to the renown of Israel
 - Israel will make a name for itself among all the nations by how they respond to these circumstances

Jer. 33:7 'I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and will rebuild them as they were at first.

Jer. 33:8 'I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned against Me and by which they have transgressed against Me.

Jer. 33:9 'It will be to Me a name of joy, praise and glory before all the nations of the earth which will hear of all the good that I do for them, and they will fear and tremble because of all the good and all the peace that I make for it.'

- Jeremiah says that when the fortunes of Israel are restored and their iniquity cleansed that He will give them praise among the nations
 - That praise comes knowing all that God does for Israel and all the peace they receive
 - This is a description of the Kingdom situation of Israel

**Zeph. 3:17 "The LORD your God is in your midst,
A victorious warrior.
He will exult over you with joy,**

**He will be quiet in His love,
He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.**

**Zeph. 3:18 “I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feasts —
They came from you, O Zion;
The reproach of exile is a burden on them.**

**Zeph. 3:19 “Behold, I am going to deal at that time
With all your oppressors,
I will save the lame
And gather the outcast,
And I will turn their shame into praise and renown
In all the earth.**

**Zeph. 3:20 “At that time I will bring you in,
Even at the time when I gather you together;
Indeed, I will give you renown and praise
Among all the peoples of the earth,
When I restore your fortunes before your eyes,”
Says the LORD.**

- The Lord is a victorious warrior in the Kingdom
 - And He will deal with Israel’s oppressors, turning Israel’s shame into praise and renown
 - The promise to bring Israel renown in her day in the Kingdom is completed at the end when they are renown for grace in victory
- Once more, what’s the point of this chapter? Showing the nations that God is the God of Israel, dwelling among His people Israel
 - And as the battle is won supernaturally, the Lord shows Himself strong
 - And as the people of Israel burn wood for seven years without foraging, the nations see that the Lord is on Israel’s side
 - And as Israel patiently spends seven years burying their enemies’ bodies, the world praises Israel’s name
 - All of these details support the overall purpose of the chapter and the war as a whole...to sanctify the Lord among the nations
- Turning back to the text, the Lord adds one more detail to help us understand how the Lord cleansed the land

Ezek. 39:17 “As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Speak to every kind of bird and to every beast of the field, “Assemble and come, gather from every side to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood.

Ezek. 39:18 “You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, as though they were rams, lambs, goats and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan.

Ezek. 39:19 “So you will eat fat until you are gluttoned, and drink blood until you are drunk, from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you.

Ezek. 39:20 “You will be gluttoned at My table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all the men of war,” declares the Lord GOD.

- In the Bible, the Lord directs people to make a sacrifice of animals
 - Our sacrifices of bulls and goats were intended to remind us of our sin and the need for a covering of blood
 - Now in this final act of war the Lord turns the tables
 - Remember, this event is the final moment of this world – the last event of human history on planet earth
 - And in that final moment, the Lord makes humanity a sacrifice to the animals
 - The animals gain the benefit while man pays the price
 - And God is the One making the sacrifice
 - The message is that the need for sacrifice of any kind has come to an end
 - The Lord Himself conducts the final sacrifice and the final offerings are those who oppose Him
 - And that final act of judgment to close the age gives opportunity for the Lord to be glorified

Ezek. 39:21 “And I will set My glory among the nations; and all the nations will see My judgment which I have executed and My hand which I have laid on them.

Ezek. 39:22 “And the house of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God from that day onward.

Ezek. 39:23 “The nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity because they acted treacherously against Me, and I hid My face from them; so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and all of them fell by the sword.

Ezek. 39:24 “According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I dealt with them, and I hid My face from them.”””

- To end the chapter the Lord summarizes His purpose in the war and in defending Israel
 - First, He is setting His glory among the nations
 - Those who observed this battle will not see the judgment that the Lord executed
 - They see the result of the battle and the way the Lord handled the aftermath and they glorify Him for it
 - Secondly, the house of Israel will know the Lord is their God
 - This isn't to say that the people of Israel didn't know their Lord prior to this moment
 - The Lord is summarizing the entire Kingdom period, culminating in the final battle

- The Lord says in v.23 that when the people of Israel see how easily the Lord defeated the invading army, they will realize that the Lord has always had this power
 - And if the Lord has always had the power to defeat Israel's enemies, then when those enemies prevailed it must mean God permitted it to happen
 - Therefore, the time Israel spent in exile under Babylon's authority were appointed times
 - The Lord was still in control and He continued to watch over Israel even while in exile
 - But they were there for good reason, ultimately because of their sin
- This is the consequence of appreciation for God's sovereignty
 - We come to understand that even the tragedies in our life are God-ordained for good purposes
 - And when you understand that the "bad" things in life were appointed by God, then you make an effort to understand how God intended these things to bless us
 - We search for the meaning, and in that search we come to understand the lesson
- That's what the Lord wanted Israel to do in Ezekiel's day

Ezek. 39:25 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name.

Ezek. 39:26 "They will forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their own land with no one to make them afraid.

Ezek. 39:27 "When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations.

Ezek. 39:28 "Then they will know that I am the LORD their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then gathered them again to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer.

Ezek. 39:29 "I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I will have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord GOD.

- This is the Lord's summary of how His grace will manifest in the hearts of His people as they see what He does for them in the Kingdom
 - Once they see how the Lord provides for them in the Kingdom to preserve them as a people, they will understand His previous judgments
 - Notice v.28...they will know the Lord is their God because they were taken through exile and then back into the land
 - In other words, with the benefit of hindsight, the people of God will see the undeniable wisdom of all that God did for them

- And in that understanding, they will know He always acted out of love for them
 - But in the end, the Lord will not hide His face from them, having poured out His spirit upon them
- So to summarize the war in Chapters 38-39...
 - The Lord instigates an attack from among the unsaved on the earth at the end of the 1,000 year kingdom
 - Using Satan as His instrument for deception, the Lord causes Gog to assemble an uncountable army
- That army consists of men and women who have never seen warfare before nor have ever contemplated it
 - But because of Satan's influence, they come to desire Israel's wealth and believe the people of Israel to be vulnerable since they are unguarded
 - They fashion rudimentary weapons from wood and the sea of people advance upon the nation of Israel from all sides (on land)
- But the Lord has purposed this attack so that He might demonstrate His might and faithfulness to protect Israel
 - So as they approach, they are struck down with fire from heaven
 - They are a sacrifice of God, made for the sake of Israel, and they become a feast for birds
- In the end the attack accomplished two purposes to conclude the Kingdom
 - First, the battle serves to demonstrate the Lord's faithfulness to His promise concerning peace in Israel
 - He promised Abraham that his descendants would find peace in their land
 - And He promised Israel in the Kingdom a peace covenant
 - So this battle serves to demonstrate the Lord's faithfulness to that covenant
 - Secondly, the Lord makes Himself known throughout the earth as the God Who dwells in the midst of Israel
 - As Psalm 110 says, Christ rules until all enemies are put under His feet by the Father
 - This is the final act of rebellion against Christ and therefore it is the final battle where Christ prevails and destroys His enemies
 - And now that He has defeated all foes, everyone on earth glorifies and sanctifies the Lord

- Tonight we begin the most fascinating part of Ezekiel: the visions of the Kingdom temple
 - Before we dig into this complex topic, let's get our bearings
 - Let's remember my outline of the second half of the book
 - We are now entering part 2 of a section of prophecy devoted to revealing how God will dwell among men in the Kingdom
 - Part 1 in Chapter 39 explained how God would reveal Himself to the Gentile nations
 - The Lord shows Gentiles that He is the God Who dwells among Israel by protecting the nation when under Gentile attack
 - He defeats the invaders and makes a seven-year spectacle of the army's defeat
 - And as we read in 39 last week, the Lord declares that His supernatural response to the invasion will make an impression

Ezek. 39:21 “And I will set My glory among the nations; and all the nations will see My judgment which I have executed and My hand which I have laid on them.

Ezek. 39:22 “And the house of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God from that day onward.

- Both Israel and the Gentile nations will end the 1,000-yr Kingdom understanding Israel's God is the only God
- And in that way, His dwelling place among men is clear to all
- But beyond that display, the Lord will manifest Himself to Israel in a special manner consistent with how He has done so in the past
 - Specifically, the Lord will set His dwelling place among His people in a temple that dominates Jewish life in the Kingdom
 - Just as the Lord dwelled in a tabernacle in the desert and later a temple in the Promised Land, so He will do again
 - But as is typically the case, the Lord's earlier manner is a small taste of His ultimate plan for His people in a day to come
 - So while Solomon's temple and even Herod's temple were impressive, they pale in comparison to the temple of the Kingdom
 - Chapters 40-48 offer virtually the only description of the Kingdom temple in all Scripture, and it's filled with details
 - Ezekiel begins with a physical description of the temple complex in Chapters 40-42
 - Then in the first half of Chapter 43 the Lord's glory returns to dwell in that temple, the first time since the Babylonian exile
 - In the second half of 43 through 46 we learn how worship at the temple will operate in the Kingdom
 - Finally, in Chapters 47-48 we learn about Israel's geography and borders to accommodate the massive new temple complex

- In effect, the Lord gives Ezekiel a nine-chapter, guided tour of the future temple, and we accompany the prophet on that tour
 - The length of this section tells us something about the importance of the material
 - The Lord considers His presence dwelling among men to be the ultimate demonstration of His glory
 - And the fact He chooses to make Israel His home communicates how special that nation is to Him
- Therefore, the nation sitting in exile hearing the prophet's testimony had every reason for hope in the future
 - The Lord had not forsaken His people nor was He set to destroy them
 - Instead, the Lord would fulfill His promises for a glorious future
 - And the pinnacle of that glory would be God dwelling in His house
- Let's begin with an introduction, as Ezekiel presents it:

Ezek. 40:1 In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was taken, on that same day the hand of the LORD was upon me and He brought me there.

Ezek. 40:2 In the visions of God He brought me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, and on it to the south there was a structure like a city.

Ezek. 40:3 So He brought me there; and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze, with a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand; and he was standing in the gateway.

Ezek. 40:4 The man said to me, "Son of man, see with your eyes, hear with your ears, and give attention to all that I am going to show you; for you have been brought here in order to show it to you. Declare to the house of Israel all that you see."

- This is Ezekiel's final dated prophecy, which corresponds to April 19, 573 BC
 - That's 12 years since the last message Ezekiel gave the exiles
 - This is the final prophecy Ezekiel wrote in his book, but it was the next-to-last vision he received
 - The final prophecy was against Egypt which came two years after this one
 - But notice the date of this prophecy is also tied to the fall of the city of Jerusalem
 - On the very same day that the city of Jerusalem fell for the third time to Nebuchadnezzar, the Lord gave Ezekiel this vision
 - So as the temple in Jerusalem was being burned and knocked to the ground, the Lord was showing Ezekiel the next temple
 - It's a clear statement of hope in the midst of judgment

- Also, the date of this prophecy was significant in the Jewish calendar
 - The prophecy comes on the Day of Atonement according to the civil calendar of Israel
 - That makes this vision so fitting
 - The old temple's destruction and the vision of the new temple occur on the same day, a day appointed for cleaning Israel's sin
- Next, notice the vision Ezekiel receives is centered on a very high mountain
 - Israel has plenty of mountains including at least one very high mountain
 - But this high mountain is something altogether different
 - According to Isaiah, it will be the highest mountain on the earth in that day

Is. 2:2 Now it will come about that

In the last days

The mountain of the house of the LORD

Will be established as the chief of the mountains,

And will be raised above the hills;

And all the nations will stream to it.

Is. 2:3 And many peoples will come and say,

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

To the house of the God of Jacob;

That He may teach us concerning His ways

And that we may walk in His paths.”

For the law will go forth from Zion

And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

- Already, we can see that the Kingdom temple and surrounding area will be dramatically changed from today
 - And yet as tall as this mountain will be, it will also be broad enough to support a large city at the very top
 - Ezekiel says on the south end of the mountain will be a structure as large as a city
 - That is the temple itself, and as we'll see in coming chapters, it's massive
- In v.3 Ezekiel says the Lord brings him to that city and in that city he meets a “Man”
 - The man will be Ezekiel's guide for this tour
 - His appearance is like bronze, which indicates strength and a glowing fire of glory
 - Because the description of the man is so brief at this point, we can't know for sure who He is
 - But He may be the same visitor Daniel received in Babylon (at the same time in history (Daniel 10)
- The man holds a line of flax cord and a measuring rod

- These were the measuring tapes of Ezekiel's day, the cord for longer lengths and the rod for shorter lengths
- Obviously, Ezekiel's tour will include the need to take measurements along the way
- The man wants Ezekiel to pay close attention to details so he can relate what he sees to his readers with proper perspective
- And as you will see, the distances measured give us a whole new appreciation for what Ezekiel sees
- From here Ezekiel begins a detailed description of the Millennial Temple moving from the outer court inward toward the Holy of Holies
 - That description culminates with the return of the Lord's glory to His sanctuary
 - But before we look at these details, the mere existence of a temple raises important questions
 - First, why does a temple exist? What is its purpose? And how do we reconcile it with New Testament teaching on Jesus' sacrifice
 - Over the centuries, many theologians have recoiled at the prospect of a return of a sacrificial system of worship in the Kingdom
 - As a result, many have rejected Ezekiel's book from the canon or simply ignored it
 - Even the rabbis prior to Jesus struggled with Ezekiel
 - The Kingdom sacrificial system differs so much from the Mosaic system which the rabbis held to be eternal, that they couldn't believe it was from God
 - Of course, for Christians the greatest concern is with the idea of sacrificing for sin
 - We remember the teaching of Hebrews

Heb. 10:10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Heb. 10:11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;

Heb. 10:12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,

Heb. 10:13 waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET.

Heb. 10:14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Heb. 10:15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying,

Heb. 10:16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD:
I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART,
AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM,"
He then says,

**Heb. 10:17 “AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS
I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.”**

Heb. 10:18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

- **Basic New Testament theology holds that the substitutionary atonement of Jesus on the cross satisfies the wrath of God**
 - And not just for one person or for one time, but for all who place their trust in Jesus and for all time
- Therefore, why should God re-institute a temple and sacrificial system in the Kingdom?
 - It seems to negate Christ's work or at least contradict New Testament teaching
 - So before we look at the temple itself, let's do some homework on the question of why this temple even exists
 - And to understand the Millennial Temple, we first must understand temples and sacrifices historically
 - Starting with the effects of sin on the human condition

Gen. 3:7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

- Adam and Woman were alone on earth, enjoying the Garden, without sin and without need for clothing
 - Then they disobeyed the word and sin entered their hearts
 - At that point, though they were married and were comfortable together without clothes, suddenly that changed
 - As soon as they sinned, they sought to cover themselves physically
 - Who were they hiding from? Who else could see them? Only each other
 - So we see that sin resulted in an immediate loss of fellowship between God's people
 - Sin fundamentally changed the couple's relationship with one another
 - Where before they were innocent and in perfect fellowship, now they were suspicious of each other
 - Now the couple had something to conceal, something to hide from one another
 - No longer could they be fully known nor fully know each other as they once did
 - Secret thoughts, sinful desires, shameful things entered their minds, and they recoiled from one another seeking cover
- But as serious as the physical effects of sin, the spiritual effects were even more serious

Gen. 3:8 They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

- Spiritually, the couple were suddenly vulnerable before God and instinctively they hid from His presence
 - Mankind could no longer feel safe before God, because sin exposed them to God's wrath
 - Their spirits within them sensed their vulnerability so they lost the opportunity for fellowship with God
 - Where once they knew God intimately, now they could not even be in His presence
- And God could no longer dwell among men openly because their sin demanded His judgment
 - So not only must man hide from God, but God must shield Himself from man
 - That's why God made noise as He entered the Garden, to alert Man of His presence to give Adam opportunity to seek shelter
- So the effects of sin on the human condition are two sides of the same coin
 - Spiritually, sin separates us from God by making us enemies of His holiness
 - And physically, sin separates us from one another by making us enemies of one another by our selfish hearts
 - Sin has made us spiritual enemies of God and sin has made us physical enemies of one another
- And throughout history, God has offered provision to correct for both of these problems, beginning here in the Garden
 - First, the Lord corrects for our spiritual separation with a spiritual covering which we receive by faith

Gen. 3:15 And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel.”

- The Lord promised to send Adam and Woman a “Seed” Who would rectify the enemy's deception
- The Seed was Christ, Who would reconcile mankind to God through His perfect life and sacrificial death
- This covering was spiritual in nature because it depended upon faith
 - The sacrifice wasn't made in Adam's day, but it was promised, so in that moment Adam didn't receive the sacrifice

- He received the promise of it, and by his faith in that promise, Adam was credited with that covering in advance
- How do we know Adam believed in God's promise of a spiritual covering?
 - We see Adam's faith reflected in v.20 when he calls his Wife by a new name, Eve
 - Previously she was named Woman, which means "of Man"
 - But now having heard God's promise Adam renames his wife Eve, which means "mother of living"
 - Her new name was evidence of Adam's faith in God's promise to bring life to all mankind through the seed of Woman
- Then later, the Lord brought His promised Messiah into the world on a certain day to make the once-for-all sacrifice for sin
 - Jesus' sacrifice is the focal point of faith throughout all history
 - Old Testament saints like Adam looked forward to that day, while New Testament saints look backward to that moment
 - But regardless, all saints receive their spiritual covering by faith
- But Adam and Woman also required a physical covering to restore fellowship between each other
 - Their sin had not only ruptured their relationship with God, but it had also destroyed their intimacy with one another
 - So in v.21 the Lord killed an animal (probably a lamb) and used the skin to clothe the man and woman
 - That sacrifice was physical, not spiritual, and it came in addition to the spiritual provision
 - It was necessary to restore physical fellowship between God's people, Adam and Eve
 - Without it, they would have continued to feel shame in their nakedness
 - Their physical discomfort reflecting an inward mistrust toward one another
 - But once covered, they experienced a degree of restoration and comfort again
 - Moreover, the physical sacrifice offered an object lesson on the meaning of the spiritual sacrifice
 - Since the spiritual covering was by faith alone, it was invisible and hard to appreciate in abstraction
 - But a physical sacrifice in which an animal loses its life makes clear the price of sin and the need for blood atonement
 - So physical sacrifice also becomes a picture of the sacrifice of Christ for our sake
 - So the physical covering is both a means of restoring human fellowship and a way to teach us about Christ's sacrifice
 - But also notice, God must officiate over our physical sacrifice
 - The Lord was present as the animal was sacrificed in the Garden, so that He

presided over the ritual

- Had Adam or Woman killed and skinned an animal on their own, it wouldn't have sufficed
- Only if the Lord ordains and sanctifies the sacrifice does it serve His intended purpose
- So, sin makes necessary a spiritual covering and a physical covering
 - Spiritual covering comes by a spiritual sacrifice, which is faith in the promised provision of Christ
 - And it restores our fellowship with God
 - Physical covering comes by a physical sacrifice ordained by the presence of God
 - And it restores fellowship between the children of God and teaches us about Christ
- It's also critical to note the order of these events
 - First came the spiritual covering of faith to restore fellowship with God (v.20)
 - Then came the physical covering of an animal sacrifice in the presence of God to restore and maintain human fellowship (v.21)
 - This moment establishes a pattern for all time
 - First, we must come to God by faith in the provision of His Son
 - Then having done so, we make physical sacrifices in the presence of God by which we maintain fellowship with God's children
 - This pattern continues throughout the Bible
 - Noah believed in God and his faith found favor with God
 - Yet Noah practiced animal sacrifice at altars before the Lord to restore fellowship
 - Likewise, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were righteous by faith
 - Yet when sin required, they also participated in God-ordained physical sacrifices as the Angel of the Lord attended in the moment
 - Then when Israel became a nation under Moses' leadership, the Lord codified physical sacrifices in a formal way
 - Faith remained the spiritual covering for God's people, but now the Lord instituted strict and regular patterns for physical sacrifice
 - He placed His spirit in a specific vessel, first the tabernacle and then the temple
 - And in that place, He commanded that Israel bring regular physical sacrifices
 - The Law treated Israel as a nation, a single entity
 - So the physical sacrifices served to maintain fellowship between the nation and their God
 - Spiritual fellowship with God was still by faith on an individual basis
 - But animal sacrifices provided for physical fellowship between the Jewish

people and God and pictured Christ's sacrifice

- Any Jew who refused to participate in the physical sacrifices of the Law would be cut off from the commonwealth of Israel
- Now let's jump to the Church period of history
 - Do we still find these same two sacrifices at work? Yes!
 - Of course, we too are reconciled to God by faith in Christ, which is our spiritual covering, but we also need a physical covering
 - It's also for the purpose of restoring earthly fellowship and teaching us about Christ
 - And our physical sacrifice is also performed in the presence of God
 - So where and how do these physical sacrifices happen today?
 - The key to understanding our physical sacrifice is to first recognize where God dwells during this period of history
 - In Genesis 3, God dwelled directly with Man and Woman in the Garden, so the physical sacrifice happened in the Garden
 - During the period of the patriarchs, the Lord attended as the Angel of the Lord (pre-incarnate Christ)
 - So sacrifices happened at altars set up wherever the Angel of the Lord appeared or directed
 - And in Moses' time the Lord dwelled in a physical building, so Israel gathered there to make sacrifices
 - Today, the presence of the Lord is not located in a certain place nor does He come and go
 - The Bible says that the Spirit of God is resident inside every believer and remains there forever

1Cor. 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

- If our body is the temple and the Spirit resides within us, then our physical body must be the place of our physical covering
- Our body is the place where God presides over our physical sacrifices
- Paul describes how we perform the physical sacrifices of this age, in Romans:

Rom. 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Rom. 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that

which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- We present our bodies as living sacrifices to God, in His presence, as our service of worship
 - Just as the Israelites brought animals to God in the temple and sacrificed for physical covering, so we do something similar
 - Except in this age there is no physical temple nor are we under the Law Moses which demanded animal sacrifice
 - Instead, we are under the Law of Christ which demands personal sacrifices, as Paul said
- We sacrifice our flesh's desires and comforts to obey Christ and serve His body, and in that way we obtain physical covering
 - The structure of Romans reinforces this interpretation
 - In the structure of Romans Chapters 12-16 contain a list of ways the Church is called to sacrifice the flesh in service to Christ
 - Which is why Paul opens Chapter 12 with a call to perform the physical sacrifice required in worship of God
- In effect, Romans 12-16 describes a sacrificial system for the New Testament believer
 - Our system looks very different from the system of the Old Testament
 - But that's because the house of God in our day is so different than the one He lived in during Israel's day
 - Nevertheless, the physical sacrifices made in their day accomplish the same purpose that ours do today
- As we sin against one another, we are called to make sacrifices in God's presence to atone and restore fellowship with one another
 - By traveling to a certain building and taking the life of a valuable animal, a Jew made a sacrifice of time and money
 - This reminded the Jew of the cost of sin and gave incentive to not repeat the mistake
 - Likewise, we are called to sacrifice our own fleshly desires in the presence of God
- So that by our sacrifice of pride and self-interest for the love of others, we may restore fellowship truly within the body
 - That's why we are all called priests in the New Testament
 - Because we all have the Spirit God dwelling inside us, therefore we are all qualified to make sacrifices before the altar of our heart
 - Those physical sacrifices are how we worship God, and they are not contradictory to our spiritual dependence upon Christ
 - On the contrary, they are modeled on Christ's own ministry, and in that way our sacrifices are also picturing Christ

- As Paul explains

Phil. 2:3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

Phil. 2:4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Phil. 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

Phil. 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

Phil. 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Phil. 2:8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- Though He had no sin of His own, Christ made Himself a physical sacrifice to serve the interests of the body of Christ
 - Likewise, though we have been declared righteous by faith in Christ, we still make physical sacrifices to establish fellowship in the body
 - We do this even as we rely on Christ's sacrifice for our spiritual covering
 - Our dependence on the one does not invalidate the need for the other
 - As long as sin exists both will also exist
- With that, let's consider what we already know of life in the Kingdom
 - First, as we learned in earlier lessons, sin will continue to exist within the Kingdom world
 - Those saints who have been resurrected prior to the Kingdom (i.e., the Old Testament saints, Church saints, & Tribulation saints) will not possess sin since we are glorified
 - But the natural believers who enter the Kingdom following Tribulation will bring sin with them
 - These believers will reproduce and in time their offspring will repopulate the earth with sinful humanity for 1,000 years
 - Since sin still exists, then the need for a spiritual covering for sin remains as well
 - Once again, faith in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross will be the spiritual cover that restores fellowship with God
 - Just as an Old Testament saint's faith looked forward to a future day in this age when the provision would be made
 - And a New Testament saint's faith looks back to a prior moment in this age when that fulfillment took place
 - So a Kingdom saint's faith will look back to that moment in an earlier age
 - For that same reason, however, a physical covering for sin will also be required

- Sin in the Kingdom will still require a physical covering to restore fellowship among God's people
- And these physical sacrifices will picture the spiritual sacrifice of Christ
- But the nature of the Kingdom sacrifice reverts back to the Old Testament style of sacrifice because God's dwelling place became a temple again
 - God has always reserved a physical temple for His people Israel only
 - After the people of Israel were established as a nation, the Lord promised that they alone would be His people eternally
 - Therefore, the Lord only ever sets up His physical temple in Israel
 - During the Church Age, Israel is placed under judgment until the return of Christ (i.e., the Age of the Gentiles, according to Daniel)
 - So the Lord is not tabernacling with Israel at this time
 - Instead, He is tabernacling with a people who are not His people, He says, meaning with the Gentile Church
 - But there is not "one" Gentile nation... *all* non-Jewish nations are Gentile!
 - So instead, the Lord dwells within every Gentile individually, so that in effect the Lord dwells in every Gentile nation at once
 - But in the Kingdom age, Israel will no longer be under judgment so they are restored as the chief nation on earth under God's protection
 - Consequently, in keeping with His promises, the Lord will once again dwell among Israel and nowhere else
 - Therefore, a temple will be rebuilt and God's presence will return to live within it
 - And since the Lord's presence dwells in a building again, then all physical sacrifices must happen at that one place again
 - Once again, people will stream to the temple regularly to sacrifice animals as the Lord directs
 - These sacrifices accomplish exactly the same things the earlier physical sacrifices covered
 - They serve to restore fellowship among God's people and teach about the meaning of Christ's sacrifice
 - If the people do not participate in these sacrifices, they are cut off from fellowship with God's people
 - For example, here's what the Lord says will happen to any people who refuse to engage in the physical sacrifices:

Zech. 14:16 Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Zech. 14:17 And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up

to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them.

Zech. 14:18 If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the LORD smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Zech. 14:19 This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

- All the nations on the earth will be required to go up to the temple regularly to participate in worship of various kinds, including feasts
- And if a nation refuses to participate, then the nation will experience drought and plague in the Kingdom
- One final note...sacrifices are covering for sin, so this system is only used by those who have sin
 - Those of us who are glorified will have no sin, and therefore we will not make sacrifices
 - Our role will be limited to governing it seems, though perhaps some of us may be priests

Is. 66:18 “For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory.

Is. 66:19 “I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations.

Is. 66:20 “Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the LORD, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem,” says the LORD, “just as the sons of Israel bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD.

Is. 66:21 “I will also take some of them for priests and for Levites,” says the LORD.

- The Lord will take some of the Gentile nations and make them priests for this temple
- It’s possible that only the natural citizens of the Kingdom will play this role, however
- So with that background, let’s return to Ezekiel’s tour of the temple structure

Ezek. 40:5 And behold, there was a wall on the outside of the temple all around, and in the man’s hand was a measuring rod of six cubits, each of which was a cubit and a handbreadth. So he measured the thickness of the wall, one rod; and the height, one rod.

- The outer wall running around the temple is measured first in cubits and a handbreadth, which is about 21 inches
 - Altogether, the wall is ten feet high and ten feet thick
 - And the outer wall has gates

Ezek. 40:6 Then he went to the gate which faced east, went up its steps and measured the threshold of the gate, one rod in width; and the other threshold was one rod in width.

Ezek. 40:7 The guardroom was one rod long and one rod wide; and there were five cubits between the guardrooms. And the threshold of the gate by the porch of the gate facing inward was one rod.

Ezek. 40:8 Then he measured the porch of the gate facing inward, one rod.

Ezek. 40:9 He measured the porch of the gate, eight cubits; and its side pillars, two cubits. And the porch of the gate was faced inward.

Ezek. 40:10 The guardrooms of the gate toward the east numbered three on each side; the three of them had the same measurement. The side pillars also had the same measurement on each side.

Ezek. 40:11 And he measured the width of the gateway, ten cubits, and the length of the gate, thirteen cubits.

Ezek. 40:12 There was a barrier wall one cubit wide in front of the guardrooms on each side; and the guardrooms were six cubits square on each side.

Ezek. 40:13 He measured the gate from the roof of the one guardroom to the roof of the other, a width of twenty-five cubits from one door to the door opposite.

Ezek. 40:14 He made the side pillars sixty cubits high; the gate extended round about to the side pillar of the courtyard.

Ezek. 40:15 From the front of the entrance gate to the front of the inner porch of the gate was fifty cubits.

Ezek. 40:16 There were shuttered windows looking toward the guardrooms, and toward their side pillars within the gate all around, and likewise for the porches. And there were windows all around inside; and on each side pillar were palm tree ornaments.

- Gates in walls were more than swinging doors to keep out intruders
 - They were elaborate chambers built within the wall itself and extending inward for use in guarding the entrance and conducting business
 - Altogether there are three gates in the outer wall, and Ezekiel begins with the East gate
 - That gate is in line with the entrance of the temple building itself which faced East
 - The entrance to the gate has seven steps and leads to a 10 foot deep threshold
 - The gate has three guard rooms on each side that are 10x10 in size and separated by

5 ft walls

- Finally past the guard rooms is a porch
- In this case, the gate is elaborate and includes guard rooms
- The doors of this gate are 100 ft high, which is not unusual for important buildings
- The entire structure is reminiscent of the Solomonic gates discovered from that king's day

- Last week we studied the reason there is a temple in the Kingdom
 - And then we dipped our toes into a study of the temple itself
 - And tonight, we start our tour of the temple in detail
 - But before we do that, let's remember what we learned last week
 - And I need to prepare you a little for what we do tonight
 - Remember, we're looking at the period of history between this age and the New Heavens and Earth to be created in the future
 - The Kingdom is a 1,000 period that ends this age
 - For that period, Ezekiel tells Israel that they will have a new and better temple
- Let's go back to our main question of last week, why a temple?
 - There were three reasons, generally speaking
 - First, sin always requires a spiritual sacrifice and a physical sacrifice
 - The spiritual sacrifice comes from God in the form of Jesus Christ, Who died spiritually in our place on the cross
 - Our physical sacrifice takes place on earth in the presence of God
 - Our spiritual sacrifice of Christ happened once, in a certain moment of history, and it suffices for all saints of all time
 - Before and after that moment, believers place faith in that historic act done on their behalf
 - Through our faith in Jesus' sacrifice, God credits us with Christ's righteousness
 - We receive a spiritual covering for our sin which reconciles us to God
 - And in addition to that one-time spiritual sacrifice, the saints have always engaged in physical sacrifice as well
 - Our physical sacrifices happen repeatedly throughout our lifetime for as long as we possess sin
 - The physical sacrifices must be done in the presence of the Lord so that they may be sanctified
 - And their purpose is two-fold
- First, they reconcile us with the community of God's people
 - By making sacrifices in the presence of God, we are acknowledging our sin (repentance)
 - And we are making personal sacrifice to reconcile us with our brothers and sisters before God
 - Remember what Jesus taught in Matthew

Matt. 5:23 “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,
Matt. 5:24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to

your brother, and then come and present your offering.

- Jesus is making the point that the primary purpose in bringing offerings to the temple was to reconcile with God's people
 - Coming before God's presence without true repentance defies the purpose in the sacrifice
 - In a simple sense, I compared it to going to the judge to pay your traffic fine
 - It puts you back in good standing with society and the law for a time
- But in order for this to be true, we must perform these sacrifices in the presence of God
 - In the same way that you can't pay your traffic fine to the policeman who tickets you
 - Nor can you give money to your neighbor and consider your fine paid
 - You must go before the judge, admit to your crime and pay your fine there
 - That's how physical sacrifices work...they bring us back into good standing with the community of God's people
- Secondly, physical sacrifices teach us about the spiritual sacrifice of Christ
 - The very idea that blood must be spilled to pay our price for sin is demonstrated in the reality of Christ on the cross, once for all time
 - Our minimal sacrifices of time, or money or property can't compare to a perfect life given on our behalf
 - And the fact that our sacrifices are repeated routinely remind us that we need a solution for our sin that's greater than our own efforts can provide
 - So the physical sacrificial system is a daily reminder of the greater spiritual sacrifice of Christ that we can't see
- Now, it's easy to see that process working in the Old Testament times when Israel had the Law and the temple
 - And we're learning that this process also exists in the Millennial Temple when Israel is again a nation and a temple returns
 - But where was it during the Church age? Did it exist?
 - How do we perform physical sacrifices in the presence of God?
 - As we learned in Romans 12 last week, God is dwelling among Gentiles in this age, while Israel is under judgment for a time
 - But there are multiple Gentile nations, so the Lord can't set up His temple in just one Gentile nation
 - That would make it appear as if the Lord had selected one Gentile above the rest
 - But only Israel has the special status among nations
 - So instead, the Lord set up His residence in every believer individually so that the Lord is equally present in every nation

- This is a special dispensation for this age, made necessary by Israel's scattering and the lack of a physical temple on earth
- And therefore our physical sacrifices must be made in our person, the temple of God, where God dwells
- Paul explains that these physical sacrifices are acts of self-sacrifice which we perform in the name of Christ to bring Him glory
 - Romans 12-16 is Paul's explanation of what those sacrifices will look like in various realms of daily life
 - In that sense, we can say that the commands Paul gives in Romans 12-16 constitute a New Testament sacrificial system
 - They are acts of love that restore us in fellowship to our fellow believer and direct us away from sinning in the future
 - And of course, our sacrificial system also teaches us about Christ's sacrifice
 - Like us, Christ sacrificed His own interests for the needs of the Church
 - His sacrifice ultimately meant giving His life for us, and we boast about that sacrifice by making our life a living sacrifice for Him
 - So no matter when in history a saint lives, there is always a need for spiritual sacrifice and physical sacrifice for sin
 - And the Kingdom age will be no different
 - Since there will be sin in that time, therefore the citizens who sin in that age will engage in physical sacrifice before the Lord
 - And because Israel has returned to glory and is regathered in her land, the Lord's presence will now be located there only
 - He will dwell in a temple in the midst of His people, Israel
 - And therefore, physical sacrifice must once again be made in that place
- Now we turn again to the description of the temple in the Kingdom, and as I said last week, it's largely a description of the architecture of that place
 - Since that is very dry and even confusing in written form, it's best experienced visually
 - So tonight we will take a tour by pictures
 - I will read the text and then we will look at artist conceptions of the space
 - The images accompanying this lesson are available for download from the VBVM website like all our materials
 - The tour starts outside the temple and moves inwardly one step at a time
 - Chapter 40 is the temple walls, gates and courts
 - Chapter 41 is the temple building itself
 - Chapter 42 is the priests' quarters
- So with that background, let's return to Ezekiel's tour of the temple structure

Ezek. 40:1 In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was taken, on that same day the hand of the LORD was upon me and He brought me there.

Ezek. 40:2 In the visions of God He brought me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, and on it to the south there was a structure like a city.

Ezek. 40:3 So He brought me there; and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze, with a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand; and he was standing in the gateway.

Ezek. 40:4 The man said to me, "Son of man, see with your eyes, hear with your ears, and give attention to all that I am going to show you; for you have been brought here in order to show it to you. Declare to the house of Israel all that you see."

Ezek. 40:5 And behold, there was a wall on the outside of the temple all around, and in the man's hand was a measuring rod of six cubits, each of which was a cubit and a handbreadth. So he measured the thickness of the wall, one rod; and the height, one rod.

>> Images 1-4

- A high mountain dominates the landscape of Israel in that day
 - It will rise up from a plain, as Zech. 14 describes
 - It will be the highest mountain on the earth
 - And Ezekiel is met by a tour guide angel with a measuring rod and string in his hand
 - Which he uses to measure the temple's outer-most walls
- The angel measures with a long cubit, almost 2 feet in length
 - We can get a good idea of distance in feet by multiplying cubits by two (or 1 cubit ≈ 45cm)
 - So this is a low wall running around the perimeter of the temple compound

>> Image 5

Ezek. 40:6 Then he went to the gate which faced east, went up its steps and measured the threshold of the gate, one rod in width; and the other threshold was one rod in width.

Ezek. 40:7 The guardroom was one rod long and one rod wide; and there were five cubits between the guardrooms. And the threshold of the gate by the porch of the gate facing inward was one rod.

Ezek. 40:8 Then he measured the porch of the gate facing inward, one rod.

Ezek. 40:9 He measured the porch of the gate, eight cubits; and its side pillars, two cubits. And the porch of the gate was faced inward.

Ezek. 40:10 The guardrooms of the gate toward the east numbered three on each

side; the three of them had the same measurement. The side pillars also had the same measurement on each side.

Ezek. 40:11 And he measured the width of the gateway, ten cubits, and the length of the gate, thirteen cubits.

Ezek. 40:12 There was a barrier wall one cubit wide in front of the guardrooms on each side; and the guardrooms were six cubits square on each side.

>> Images 6-9

- The angel enters the complex from the east and ascends 7 stairs into a large opening in the next wall called a gate
 - And there he starts to measure the dimensions of this multi-chambered gate
 - Included are guardrooms along both sides, 10x10 in size
 - What does it say that a temple entrance has guardrooms?
 - It says that this is a place that sinners frequent
 - The backside of the gate leading into the outer court has a porch held up by pillars (v.9)
 - So you enter through a large gate that leads you to an outer courtyard
 - It's "outer" in the sense that there is a second inner wall around the temple building itself, but it's inside the first wall and gates

Ezek. 40:13 He measured the gate from the roof of the one guardroom to the roof of the other, a width of twenty-five cubits from one door to the door opposite.

Ezek. 40:14 He made the side pillars sixty cubits high; the gate extended round about to the side pillar of the courtyard.

Ezek. 40:15 From the front of the entrance gate to the front of the inner porch of the gate was fifty cubits.

Ezek. 40:16 There were shuttered windows looking toward the guardrooms, and toward their side pillars within the gate all around, and likewise for the porches. And there were windows all around inside; and on each side pillar were palm tree ornaments.

>> Images 10-12

- Here we have the full dimensions of the gate
 - It's 100ft long, 50ft wide and has a 100ft door and a 120ft porch
 - This is a large space
 - Notice that in the measurements the recurring numbers are 5 and 6 (the 5 found in the .5 cubit walls separating spaces)
 - The number 5 is the number of grace, while the number 6 is the number for

sinful man

- So symbolically, this gate reminds people that this is a place where sin meets grace
 - The spaces of sin (6 cu) where people congregate are divided or broken up by the walls of grace (.5 cu)
 - The symbolic sense is that sin will be broken here
- Finally, the guardrooms have shuttered or thin gaps to see in all directions
 - And the outside of the gate is part of a covered porch running along the inside perimeter of the wall
 - The posts holding up the porch are decorated with palm trees so that the gates can be easily spotted along the wall

Ezek. 40:17 Then he brought me into the outer court, and behold, there were chambers and a pavement made for the court all around; thirty chambers faced the pavement.

Ezek. 40:18 The pavement (that is, the lower pavement) was by the side of the gates, corresponding to the length of the gates.

Ezek. 40:19 Then he measured the width from the front of the lower gate to the front of the exterior of the inner court, a hundred cubits on the east and on the north.

>> Images 10-12

- This outer court rings the temple building proper
 - And along the inner side of the outer wall are thirty chambers, which seems to limit them to three of the four walls
 - They may serve as meeting areas like Solomon's Porch did in the Second Temple
 - The span between the outer wall and the inner wall is about 200ft
 - Then the gates on the north and south walls are also measured

Ezek. 40:20 As for the gate of the outer court which faced the north, he measured its length and its width.

Ezek. 40:21 It had three guardrooms on each side; and its side pillars and its porches had the same measurement as the first gate. Its length was fifty cubits and the width twenty-five cubits.

Ezek. 40:22 Its windows and its porches and its palm tree ornaments had the same measurements as the gate which faced toward the east; and it was reached by seven steps, and its porch was in front of them.

Ezek. 40:23 The inner court had a gate opposite the gate on the north as well as the gate on the east; and he measured a hundred cubits from gate to gate.

Ezek. 40:24 Then he led me toward the south, and behold, there was a gate toward the south; and he measured its side pillars and its porches according to those same measurements.

Ezek. 40:25 The gate and its porches had windows all around like those other windows; the length was fifty cubits and the width twenty-five cubits.

Ezek. 40:26 There were seven steps going up to it, and its porches were in front of them; and it had palm tree ornaments on its side pillars, one on each side.

Ezek. 40:27 The inner court had a gate toward the south; and he measured from gate to gate toward the south, a hundred cubits.

>> Image 13

- These gates are identical to the east gate
- There is no gate on the west side of the outer wall
- Now Ezekiel describes the inner complex of the temple

Ezek. 40:28 Then he brought me to the inner court by the south gate; and he measured the south gate according to those same measurements.

Ezek. 40:29 Its guardrooms also, its side pillars and its porches were according to those same measurements. And the gate and its porches had windows all around; it was fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide.

Ezek. 40:30 There were porches all around, twenty-five cubits long and five cubits wide.

Ezek. 40:31 Its porches were toward the outer court; and palm tree ornaments were on its side pillars, and its stairway had eight steps.

Ezek. 40:32 He brought me into the inner court toward the east. And he measured the gate according to those same measurements.

Ezek. 40:33 Its guardrooms also, its side pillars and its porches were according to those same measurements. And the gate and its porches had windows all around; it was fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide.

Ezek. 40:34 Its porches were toward the outer court; and palm tree ornaments were on its side pillars, on each side, and its stairway had eight steps.

Ezek. 40:35 Then he brought me to the north gate; and he measured it according to those same measurements,

Ezek. 40:36 with its guardrooms, its side pillars and its porches. And the gate had windows all around; the length was fifty cubits and the width twenty-five cubits.

Ezek. 40:37 Its side pillars were toward the outer court; and palm tree ornaments were on its side pillars on each side, and its stairway had eight steps.

Ezek. 40:38 A chamber with its doorway was by the side pillars at the gates; there they rinse the burnt offering.

Ezek. 40:39 In the porch of the gate were two tables on each side, on which to

slaughter the burnt offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering.

Ezek. 40:40 On the outer side, as one went up to the gateway toward the north, were two tables; and on the other side of the porch of the gate were two tables.

Ezek. 40:41 Four tables were on each side next to the gate; or, eight tables on which they slaughter sacrifices.

Ezek. 40:42 For the burnt offering there were four tables of hewn stone, a cubit and a half long, a cubit and a half wide and one cubit high, on which they lay the instruments with which they slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice.

Ezek. 40:43 The double hooks, one handbreadth in length, were installed in the house all around; and on the tables was the flesh of the offering.

Ezek. 40:44 From the outside to the inner gate were chambers for the singers in the inner court, one of which was at the side of the north gate, with its front toward the south, and one at the side of the south gate facing toward the north.

Ezek. 40:45 He said to me, "This is the chamber which faces toward the south, intended for the priests who keep charge of the temple;

Ezek. 40:46 but the chamber which faces toward the north is for the priests who keep charge of the altar. These are the sons of Zadok, who from the sons of Levi come near to the LORD to minister to Him."

Ezek. 40:47 He measured the court, a perfect square, a hundred cubits long and a hundred cubits wide; and the altar was in front of the temple.

>> Images 14-17

- These gates are the same as the outer gates in design and dimensions, though mirrored to the ones on the outer wall and have 8 steps, not 7
 - Again, there were three of these inner gates leading through the inner wall on the north, west and south sides of the wall
 - The only other difference between the inner and outer gates is that the inner gates have 8 steps instead of 7
 - The number 8 means new beginnings, so inside the temple the worshippers will find a new beginning with God
 - Next, we see the rooms used for preparing sacrifices
 - Two chambers by the doorway were used to rinse animals before sacrifice
 - There were four tables on the outside of the inner gates and four on the inside of the inner gates for a total of eight tables
 - These were used for sacrificing the animals
 - There were also four tables to hold the slaughtering implements
 - Similar dressing tables have been found in ancient temples
- Next, there were spaces in the inner court for singers and priests who lead in worship during the functions of the temple
 - The priests were descendants of the sons of Zadok

- He is the faithful priest who stayed loyal to David and later Solomon
- His sons in the Kingdom will be priests in the temple
- That's a reminder that faithfulness now has a reward in the Kingdom in the form of service to Christ
- Finally, Ezekiel gives us the dimensions of the inner court
 - It's a square, 200ft on each side with an altar standing in front of the temple building itself
 - Finally, there is a wide porch leading up into the temple

Ezek. 40:48 Then he brought me to the porch of the temple and measured each side pillar of the porch, five cubits on each side; and the width of the gate was three cubits on each side.

Ezek. 40:49 The length of the porch was twenty cubits and the width eleven cubits; and at the stairway by which it was ascended were columns belonging to the side pillars, one on each side.

>> Image 18

- The tour of the temple begins with a large entrance
 - It's 40ft long and 22ft across

Ezek. 41:1 Then he brought me to the nave and measured the side pillars; six cubits wide on each side was the width of the side pillar.

Ezek. 41:2 The width of the entrance was ten cubits and the sides of the entrance were five cubits on each side. And he measured the length of the nave, forty cubits, and the width, twenty cubits.

Ezek. 41:3 Then he went inside and measured each side pillar of the doorway, two cubits, and the doorway, six cubits high; and the width of the doorway, seven cubits.

Ezek. 41:4 He measured its length, twenty cubits, and the width, twenty cubits, before the nave; and he said to me, "This is the most holy place."

Ezek. 41:5 Then he measured the wall of the temple, six cubits; and the width of the side chambers, four cubits, all around about the house on every side.

Ezek. 41:6 The side chambers were in three stories, one above another, and thirty in each story; and the side chambers extended to the wall which stood on their inward side all around, that they might be fastened, and not be fastened into the wall of the temple itself.

Ezek. 41:7 The side chambers surrounding the temple were wider at each successive story. Because the structure surrounding the temple went upward by stages on all sides of the temple, therefore the width of the temple increased as it went higher; and thus one went up from the lowest story to the highest by

way of the second story.

Ezek. 41:8 I saw also that the house had a raised platform all around; the foundations of the side chambers were a full rod of six long cubits in height.

Ezek. 41:9 The thickness of the outer wall of the side chambers was five cubits. But the free space between the side chambers belonging to the temple

Ezek. 41:10 and the outer chambers was twenty cubits in width all around the temple on every side.

Ezek. 41:11 The doorways of the side chambers toward the free space consisted of one doorway toward the north and another doorway toward the south; and the width of the free space was five cubits all around.

Ezek. 41:12 The building that was in front of the separate area at the side toward the west was seventy cubits wide; and the wall of the building was five cubits thick all around, and its length was ninety cubits.

>> Images 19-21

- Ezekiel describes the entrance with its tall door posts which were 12ft square
 - That leads through a 12ft high doorway into a 40x80 ft holy place
 - Then the entrance to the most holy place, or the holy of holies is measured in v.3
 - It's 40ft square and empty at this point
 - Then in v.5 we go outside to measure the outside of the temple building

>> Image 22

- In vs.5-7, we find the outside walls narrowing as you go higher [compare #1 to #2]
- There are wooden side chambers built around the outside of the temple building in a 3-story structure for a total of 30 per story [#3]
- As the wall gets narrower, the side chamber gets thicker to keep the outside of the temple structure straight going up [compare #3 to #4]
- But the chambers sit against the wall without being physically attached by nails or bolts
- Then in vs.8-11 Ezekiel describes the platform and walls immediately around the temple
 - In v.8 the foundation was raised 6 cubits off the court level [#5]
 - And the wall surrounding the temple is 10ft thick [#6]
 - That leaves a 10ft walkway according to v.9 [#7]
 - And then in v.10 we find on the outside of that wall a 40ft area called the Separate Place all around the temple [#8]
 - In v.11 we hear of 10ft doors leading into the side chambers [near #7]

>> Image 23

- In v.12 the separate area leads to a west building behind the temple
 - And on either side north and south are the priests' chambers
 - The west building is 180x140ft with 10ft walls, so the total dimensions are 200x160ft
 - Add the separate space in front (directly east) of this building, and you have a perfect 200ft square area
- Then we zoom out for the total dimensions of the temple

Ezek. 41:13 Then he measured the temple, a hundred cubits long; the separate area with the building and its walls were also a hundred cubits long.

Ezek. 41:14 Also the width of the front of the temple and that of the separate areas along the east side totaled a hundred cubits.

Ezek. 41:15 He measured the length of the building along the front of the separate area behind it, with a gallery on each side, a hundred cubits; he also measured the inner nave and the porches of the court.

Ezek. 41:16 The thresholds, the latticed windows and the galleries round about their three stories, opposite the threshold, were paneled with wood all around, and from the ground to the windows (but the windows were covered),

Ezek. 41:17 over the entrance, and to the inner house, and on the outside, and on all the wall all around inside and outside, by measurement.

>> Image 24

- Based on the dimensions given in vs.13-17, you arrive at Image 24
 - Looking at the temple (A) from the entrance to the west of the building you find 5 20s for a total of 200ft (100cu)
 - That separate space plus the west building is another 200ft
 - In v.14 he measured north to south from B for a total of 5 more 20s
 - Then in v.15 he measures the length of the separate spaces at 100cu each
 - And the outside of all these structures is paneled in wood from the ground to the windows
 - Then we go back inside the temple to see the details of the construction

Ezek. 41:18 It was carved with cherubim and palm trees; and a palm tree was between cherub and cherub, and every cherub had two faces,

Ezek. 41:19 a man's face toward the palm tree on one side and a young lion's face toward the palm tree on the other side; they were carved on all the house all around.

Ezek. 41:20 From the ground to above the entrance cherubim and palm trees were carved, as well as on the wall of the nave.

Ezek. 41:21 The doorposts of the nave were square; as for the front of the

sanctuary, the appearance of one doorpost was like that of the other.

Ezek. 41:22 The altar was of wood, three cubits high and its length two cubits; its corners, its base and its sides were of wood. And he said to me, "This is the table that is before the LORD."

Ezek. 41:23 The nave and the sanctuary each had a double door.

Ezek. 41:24 Each of the doors had two leaves, two swinging leaves; two leaves for one door and two leaves for the other.

Ezek. 41:25 Also there were carved on them, on the doors of the nave, cherubim and palm trees like those carved on the walls; and there was a threshold of wood on the front of the porch outside.

Ezek. 41:26 There were latticed windows and palm trees on one side and on the other, on the sides of the porch; thus were the side chambers of the house and the thresholds.

>> Image 25

- We don't know exactly what this looks like, of course, but includes palms, lions and cherubim
 - The cherubim are described as 2-faced, not the four faces of earlier
 - They have the faces of man and lion, but not ox or eagle
 - The palm tree is a symbol of Israel and symbol of life rising up out of barren places
 - The cherub is a guardian of God's glory
 - The interposing of 2-faced cherubim and palm trees offers opportunity for speculation, but the specific meaning isn't clear
 - In the center of the entrance is a small wooded altar (v.22)
 - The doors into the Holy of Holies consists of two swinging leaves each
 - And there were more carvings on the doors
 - The same kind of doors were on the opening of the temple itself
- Then in Chapter 42, we visit the priests' chambers

Ezek. 42:1 Then he brought me out into the outer court, the way toward the north; and he brought me to the chamber which was opposite the separate area and opposite the building toward the north.

Ezek. 42:2 Along the length, which was a hundred cubits, was the north door; the width was fifty cubits.

Ezek. 42:3 Opposite the twenty cubits which belonged to the inner court, and opposite the pavement which belonged to the outer court, was gallery corresponding to gallery in three stories.

Ezek. 42:4 Before the chambers was an inner walk ten cubits wide, a way of one

hundred cubits; and their openings were on the north.

Ezek. 42:5 Now the upper chambers were smaller because the galleries took more space away from them than from the lower and middle ones in the building.

Ezek. 42:6 For they were in three stories and had no pillars like the pillars of the courts; therefore the upper chambers were set back from the ground upward, more than the lower and middle ones.

Ezek. 42:7 As for the outer wall by the side of the chambers, toward the outer court facing the chambers, its length was fifty cubits.

Ezek. 42:8 For the length of the chambers which were in the outer court was fifty cubits; and behold, the length of those facing the temple was a hundred cubits.

Ezek. 42:9 Below these chambers was the entrance on the east side, as one enters them from the outer court.

Ezek. 42:10 In the thickness of the wall of the court toward the east, facing the separate area and facing the building, there were chambers.

Ezek. 42:11 The way in front of them was like the appearance of the chambers which were on the north, according to their length so was their width, and all their exits were both according to their arrangements and openings.

Ezek. 42:12 Corresponding to the openings of the chambers which were toward the south was an opening at the head of the way, the way in front of the wall toward the east, as one enters them.

Ezek. 42:13 Then he said to me, "The north chambers and the south chambers, which are opposite the separate area, they are the holy chambers where the priests who are near to the LORD shall eat the most holy things. There they shall lay the most holy things, the grain offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering; for the place is holy.

Ezek. 42:14 "When the priests enter, then they shall not go out into the outer court from the sanctuary without laying there their garments in which they minister, for they are holy. They shall put on other garments; then they shall approach that which is for the people."

>> Images 26-27

- The priests' chambers sit on the north and south sides of the temple building connected by the separate area
 - Ezekiel is standing in one of these open areas, the one on the north side
 - It had a three story gallery that was tiered
 - The gallery was two sections facing one another
 - One section is half the length of the other so that they are offset by 50cu (100ft) in length
 - In vs.9-12 Ezekiel describes the entrance that leads from the outer court westward into the gallery between the tiered galleries
 - This allowed the priests to enter the galleries without going into the temple

court proper

- In v.13 Ezekiel confirms the galleries on the south were the same
 - And in v.14 he gives us a clue about how these galleries are used
 - The priests must change here and cannot leave into the outer court with their priestly garments
- Now Ezekiel exits the temple compound to measure the outside perimeter

Ezek. 42:15 Now when he had finished measuring the inner house, he brought me out by the way of the gate which faced toward the east and measured it all around.

Ezek. 42:16 He measured on the east side with the measuring reed five hundred reeds by the measuring reed.

Ezek. 42:17 He measured on the north side five hundred reeds by the measuring reed.

Ezek. 42:18 On the south side he measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed.

Ezek. 42:19 He turned to the west side and measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed.

Ezek. 42:20 He measured it on the four sides; it had a wall all around, the length five hundred and the width five hundred, to divide between the holy and the profane.

>> Images 28-29

- From a simple reading of this passage, it seems that Ezekiel finished measuring the inside of the temple and then went out the east gate
 - Then he preceded to measure the perimeter of the temple compound
 - Based on the internal measurements, that should result in a 500cu square measure, or 1,000ft sq, or 3/4 mile circumference
 - But the text says something else at this point
 - Ezekiel says the measurement was five hundred reeds, not cubits
 - The reed was 6cu long, so in effect this measurement says 3,000cu, which is 6,000ft or over a mile in each direction
 - If that's intended, then it must be measuring some unmentioned outer barrier or open land surrounding the temple
 - Notice in v.20 Ezekiel says this area is a barrier between the holy and profane
 - That could refer to a "no man's land" that separates the rest of the earth from the temple compound
 - If so, then the mountain top on which this temple sits is well over a mile square
- What do we learn from these details?

- First, the precision of these measurements and the exactness of all relationships is almost impossible to invent without drafting tools
 - It's hard to believe that Ezekiel could invent these things as fantasy and remain so exact in every detail
 - It also suggests the reality of this building, removing any suggestion that it's a metaphor or symbolic
 - It's clearly a literal description of a real structure but unlike one that has ever existed in Israel
- Secondly, if we had patience to study every dimension and its relationship to every other, we would probably see an incredible layering of meaning
 - Many have poured over the original tabernacle looking over these details and have seen much symbolism
 - But a similar level of study of Ezekiel's temple is uncommon
 - And so there are probably many more discoveries waiting in the details of this building, especially with so many measurement numbers to consider
- Thirdly, the size of this temple reflects the need for some many millions of people to stream to this place from all over the world
 - This temple will save all humanity, not just the Jewish people
 - This reinforces the truth that Israel is the center of the world and all worship and government will center on this nation
- Finally, the reality of an operating temple of this scale, priests, guards and the like remind us of how prevalent sin will be in that world
 - We will be above it all, ruling, but we will still see it all around
 - Because of Christ's perfect rule, the effects of sin will be greatly mitigated and controlled
 - But it will still be in the world, which will make Christ's perfect rule all the more amazing to see operating
- Next time, we study the return of the glory of the Lord and the sacrificial system

- We're going back into a study of the fascinating and somewhat mysterious details of the Millennial temple and the sacrificial system of the Kingdom
 - Last week we took a visual tour of the temple grounds
 - We learned that the Kingdom temple is far different and far more impressive than any that preceded it in Israel's history
 - The mountain, the courts and the buildings are huge
 - In fact, the outer barrier of the temple compound is over a mile square

>> Image 1

- In the next section of Ezekiel, the Lord shows the prophet how this building is to be used, at least in part
 - Chapters 43-46 detail the sacrificial system of that coming time
 - For anyone not intimately familiar with the Mosaic sacrificial system, the Kingdom system will appear to be the same
- But the two systems vary considerably, which means this is a new system and not a continuation of the Mosaic Law
 - That's important because it reaffirms New Testament teaching that the Mosaic Law came to an end in Christ
 - Nothing we find in Ezekiel contradicts that truth, yet that doesn't mean the Kingdom time is without a law
 - There is a law – let's call it the Kingdom Law – and it's in effect for the sinners of that age
- Before we look at that system, we first need to revisit our chart explaining the purpose in these chapters overall

>> Image 2

- Chapters 40-48 explain how God's glory dwells with His people Israel
 - It's the second half of a section that started in Chapter 39
 - The highest goal of the Kingdom is that God dwell with His people, and He fulfills that purpose differently for Jew vs. Gentile
- For the Gentiles, His demonstration of dwelling among Israel is to protect His people against a Gentile invasion at the end of the time
 - We studied that in Chapter 39 with the conclusion of the Ezekiel War
 - But when it comes to showing Himself to Israel, the Lord accomplishes that through His magnificent temple structure
 - That's what we're studying now
- So obviously, if God is to dwell with His people Israel, then He must take up residence in this elaborate home He builds for Himself
 - In the tabernacle and the first temple, the glory of the Lord entered and remained in the Holy of Holies

- There He remained for centuries, even as Israel committed many abominations against Him
- Then at the end of Chapter 11, the glory of the Lord left the temple and city shortly before Babylon destroyed the temple
- That happened around 600BC, and subsequent temples in Israel remained absent the glory of the Lord ever afterward
- But now we're in the Kingdom period, all is well between Israel and the Lord, so it's time for Him to take up residence again in His temple
 - So the first half of Chapter 43 explains the glorious return of God's glory into His house to dwell among Israel
 - And His return will remind us of the way He departed

Ezek. 43:1 Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east;

Ezek. 43:2 and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east. And His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory.

Ezek. 43:3 And it was like the appearance of the vision which I saw, like the vision which I saw when He came to destroy the city. And the visions were like the vision which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face.

- Ezekiel is taken by his angelic escort to the east gate of the outer wall of the temple compound
 - And looking through the open gate, Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord approaching from the east

>> Image 3

- We remember that the last place we saw the glory was on the top of the mountain to the east of the city – the Mt of Olives

Ezek. 11:22 Then the cherubim lifted up their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them.

Ezek. 11:23 The glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city.

Ezek. 11:24 And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God to the exiles in Chaldea. So the vision that I had seen left me.

- Now the Lord's glory returns, beginning at the same point at which it was last seen in Israel
 - Notice this time the cherubim are not present at the return as they were at the departure
 - We know cherubim are protectors of God's glory

- So their absence indicates that the Lord's glory is not under threat of diminishment
- Obviously, the circumstances have changed dramatically from the day He left
- Also, notice how Ezekiel begins to describe the appearance of God's glory – beginning with the sound of His voice
 - It sounded like the sound of standing over Niagara Falls as the water roars below
 - Or the sound of flood waters charging through a canyon
 - That loud rushing sound that communicates immense power
 - And in then v.3 Ezekiel says the Lord's appearance was the same as Ezekiel saw by the river Chebar
 - He's referring to the first vision in which he saw the Lord

Ezek. 1:26 Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man.

Ezek. 1:27 Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him.

Ezek. 1:28 As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.

- The first appearance of the Lord was a radiant, fire-filled, powerful moment that put Ezekiel on his face in fear
 - And Ezekiel says the appearance of the Lord in the Kingdom will be the same
 - And the effect is to cause Ezekiel to fall on his face again, just as he did in Chapter 1
- Obviously, this isn't a description of the Jesus we know from the Gospels, the Jesus Who existed in the Galilee in the first century
 - So perhaps we might assume that this appearance of God's glory in the temple is a different member of the Godhead...the Father perhaps?
 - Scripture tells us otherwise
- First, Scripture tells us that the one who rules and reigns over the Kingdom is the Second Person of the Godhead, not the Father

Psa. 110:1 The LORD says to my Lord:

“Sit at My right hand

Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”

Psa. 110:2 The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying,

“Rule in the midst of Your enemies.”

Psa. 110:3 Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power;

In holy array, from the womb of the dawn,

Your youth are to You as the dew.

Psa. 110:4 The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind,

“You are a priest forever

According to the order of Melchizedek.”

- This passage describes our Lord ruling over His enemies in the Kingdom of power
 - The Father places Our Lord in this position
 - And that Lord will also be our Priest according to the Order of Melchizedek, David says
 - That is an unmistakable reference to Jesus, according to the New Testament writer of Hebrews

Heb. 7:14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.

Heb. 7:15 And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek,

Heb. 7:16 who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.

Heb. 7:17 For it is attested of Him,

“YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER

ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”

- So the member of the Godhead who rules the Kingdom is Jesus
 - And according to Psalms (and many other places), Jesus will rule from Zion – from the temple in Jerusalem
 - So we must conclude that the Glory of God that Ezekiel sees entering the temple here is a reference to Jesus glorified
- And this conclusion is further confirmed by the two descriptions of Jesus in glory that we have in the Bible

Rev. 1:9 I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Rev. 1:10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,

Rev. 1:11 saying, “Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and

to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

Rev. 1:12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;

Rev. 1:13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.

Rev. 1:14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire.

Rev. 1:15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.

Rev. 1:16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

Rev. 1:17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,

Rev. 1:18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

- Here again, we know John is describing Jesus, because the Lord says He was dead and is now alive, which is a clear reference to the resurrection
 - And again His voice sounds like many waters
 - And He has glowing features like fire
 - And it's so stunning that it puts John on his face dead like Ezekiel
- And finally when Jesus was transfigured we read this description

Matt. 17:1 Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

Matt. 17:2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.

- Once again, the pattern is the same
- Jesus in His glorified form will not wear a soft robe, eat fish around a table with His disciples or ride a donkey in sandals
- He will shine forth, sound like a tumult and illuminate the temple by His presence, prompting reverence and fear
- So now the glory of God is returning to reside in His temple for the duration of the Kingdom

Ezek. 43:4 And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east.

Ezek. 43:5 And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house.

>> Image 4

- The glory of the Lord enters from the East gate
 - This is the east gate that we saw described earlier in Chapter 40
 - The glory of God exited from that direction back in Chapter 11 and now He returns from the same direction
 - Though He left a very different temple and gate at the time
- Other Scriptures confirm that the Lord returns again by the east

Acts 1:9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Acts 1:10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.

Acts 1:11 They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

Acts 1:12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away.

- Jesus departed from the Mt. of Olives east of the city and temple

>> Image 5

- And the angel says He will return this way again
- Zechariah describes that return

Zech. 14:1 Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you.

Zech. 14:2 For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.

Zech. 14:3 Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle.

Zech. 14:4 In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.

Zech. 14:5 You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him!

- From the context, it's clear that Zechariah is describing a battle scene involving the nations of the earth and Israel
- That places us at the end of Tribulation, as the Lord returns to rescue Israel against the Antichrist's attack
- So this is the Lord's Second Coming at the end of this age, not the beginning of the Kingdom age
 - And therefore the city and temple here are of the Tribulation, not the Kingdom
 - Nevertheless, the Lord's entrance is from the east
 - This confirms what the angel told the apostles as Jesus departed the earth
- As the Lord enters the temple in v.4, He would then enter into the outer court

>> Images 6-14

- That would lead Him directly toward the east gate of the inner court
 - And then through the inner court gate and directly toward the altar
 - And then past the altar and up to the threshold of the temple itself
 - Finally, through the Holy Place and into the Most Holy Place where the glory of the Lord filled the house
- This is similar to the way the glory entered the first temple

2Chr. 5:1 Thus all the work that Solomon performed for the house of the LORD was finished. And Solomon brought in the things that David his father had dedicated, even the silver and the gold and all the utensils, and put them in the treasuries of the house of God.

2Chr. 5:7 Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, into the inner sanctuary of the house, to the holy of holies, under the wings of the cherubim.

2Chr. 5:11 When the priests came forth from the holy place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without regard to divisions),

2Chr. 5:13 in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the LORD saying, "He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting," then the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud,

2Chr. 5:14 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

- Notice this Holy of Holies is empty, which is different than it was in the first temple
 - The first temple contained the ark of the covenant
 - But this temple has no need of an Ark

Jer. 3:15 “Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding.

Jer. 3:16 “It shall be in those days when you are multiplied and increased in the land,” declares the LORD, “they will no longer say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ And it will not come to mind, nor will they remember it, nor will they miss it, nor will it be made again.

Jer. 3:17 “At that time they will call Jerusalem ‘The Throne of the LORD,’ and all the nations will be gathered to it, to Jerusalem, for the name of the LORD; nor will they walk anymore after the stubbornness of their evil heart.

- Jeremiah says that the ark will not be present, not be remembered, not be missed or needed again
 - It was an artifact of the Mosaic Covenant, and a reminder of Sinai and the Law established there
 - Those things have passed away and a covenant and law is in effect, so that ark will not be remembered or needed
- Once God’s glory fills His house, the entire mountain will also be protected by smoke and flame as it was in the Exodus journey

Is. 4:2 In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the adornment of the survivors of Israel.

Is. 4:3 It will come about that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy — everyone who is recorded for life in Jerusalem.

Is. 4:4 When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning,

Is. 4:5 then the LORD will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy.

Is. 4:6 There will be a shelter to give shade from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain.

- The airspace over the mountain will be protected from sun by perpetual shade and will be lit by fire at night, as it was for Moses

>> Image 15

- In the Exodus, these provisions allowed the people to journey for seven days straight,

day and night, without stopping

- But in the Kingdom, it will protect the mountain from weather of all kinds
- Presumably it also marks the mountain of the Lord as unique from all else, marking God's presence in His Temple
- From this moment, we have Jesus in the Holy of Holies filling the temple with His glory
 - Under the Mosaic Law, only one man could enter this room on one day a year
 - But under the Kingdom law, any priest may enter and it seems they will enter regularly
- Still, that limits exposure to Jesus to those who are priests only, and though there will be Gentile priests, it's unclear who will be appointed
 - So we must assume that Jesus is seen only by a few and even then, His appearance is like John or Ezekiel saw...awesome
 - And will Jesus come out from this place from time to time?
 - The answer comes in the next passage

Ezek. 43:6 Then I heard one speaking to me from the house, while a man was standing beside me.

Ezek. 43:7 He said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever. And the house of Israel will not again defile My holy name, neither they nor their kings, by their harlotry and by the corpses of their kings when they die,

Ezek. 43:8 by setting their threshold by My threshold and their door post beside My door post, with only the wall between Me and them. And they have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed. So I have consumed them in My anger.

Ezek. 43:9 "Now let them put away their harlotry and the corpses of their kings far from Me; and I will dwell among them forever.

- Ezekiel hears a voice again, and it was the voice of the Lord coming from the "house" which is a term for the temple
 - The Lord speaks personally to Ezekiel saying that this will be the place of His throne
 - And here Christ's feet will dwell among the sons of Israel forever
 - Notice the Lord is very specific..."this place" will be the place He dwells forever
 - In other words, the Lord doesn't get wanderlust, He doesn't need to take a walk or vacations
 - The Lord remains in this location for the duration of the Kingdom age, which is called "forever" in this text
 - Contextually, forever means until the end of the age, or we could say until the end of time in the Kingdom

- We know that this is not the eternal situation for Christ, because Paul says that after the Kingdom ends, the order of things changes

1Cor. 15:25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

1Cor. 15:26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

1Cor. 15:27 For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him.

1Cor. 15:28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

- Then in the second half of v.7 the Lord says that this dwelling with Israel will be different than the past
 - The house of Israel will not defile the house of the Lord with their abominations
 - Of course, the first half of this book was a recounting of those abominations
 - It was the cause for the exiles’ banishment from the land
- But now those exiles were hearing that there would be a day for the people of Israel when they could dwell with the Lord without defiling His temple
 - Specifically, the king wouldn’t allow harlotry in the temple in the Kingdom
 - The corpses of kings buried by the threshold of the temple is a euphemistic reference to the idols and their altars set up in temple
- These altars were set up threshold to threshold, door to door, with only a wall between the Lord’s glory and a demon’s altar
 - Imagine how proud Satan must have been to achieve such a thing
 - And it’s the reason the Lord consumed them with His anger He says
 - But not in the Kingdom...things like this won’t happen at all
- Now our attention turns to the sacrificial system itself, the rules for using the temple
 - This study will go in parts, and our approach will be to simply note important highlights and distinctions to the Mosaic Law
 - But we’ve already addressed the key purposes of the system in general
 - So we won’t revisit why sacrifice is happening...please refer to earlier lessons for that detail
 - The detail starts with the center of worship...the altar

Ezek. 43:10 “As for you, son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the plan.

Ezek. 43:11 “If they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the house, its structure, its exits, its entrances, all its designs, all

its statutes, and all its laws. And write it in their sight, so that they may observe its whole design and all its statutes and do them.

- First, notice the main purpose in giving Israel so much description of their future temple
 - The grandeur and magnificence of what God will do for Israel in the future brings shame to the people for how they have treated the Lord
 - God's goodness puts Israel's faithlessness into stark contrast
 - And that contrast is useful to God in convicting the hearts of the people
 - I believe that's a pattern you will see repeatedly with the Lord as He disciplines His children
 - He can do His best work of conviction by blessing us beyond measure even in the face of our sin
 - So that we see Him come to our side when we anticipated judgment or retribution
 - In that moment we're shocked by the goodness of God
 - And the awesomeness of the goodness of God can be such a humbling moment that it propels us into greater obedience
 - That's the point here, to shame Israel for their past by giving them a preview of the glory that God has prepared for them
 - And to do that, the preview needs to be specific so that it can be appreciated fully
 - Which explains all the detailed measurements
 - But for the same reason, it seems that we're given a preview, not a full accounting
 - If the Mosaic system is rough comparison, then we seem to get details about some aspects of the system while others aren't mentioned

Ezek. 43:12 “This is the law of the house: its entire area on the top of the mountain all around shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house.

Ezek. 43:13 “And these are the measurements of the altar by cubits (the cubit being a cubit and a handbreadth): the base shall be a cubit and the width a cubit, and its border on its edge round about one span; and this shall be the height of the base of the altar.

Ezek. 43:14 “From the base on the ground to the lower ledge shall be two cubits and the width one cubit; and from the smaller ledge to the larger ledge shall be four cubits and the width one cubit.

Ezek. 43:15 “The altar hearth shall be four cubits; and from the altar hearth shall extend upwards four horns.

Ezek. 43:16 “Now the altar hearth shall be twelve cubits long by twelve wide, square in its four sides.

Ezek. 43:17 “The ledge shall be fourteen cubits long by fourteen wide in its four sides, the border around it shall be half a cubit and its base shall be a cubit round about; and its steps shall face the east.”

- The sacrificial system is called the law of the house, the “house” being the temple
 - The entire mountain on which the house sits will be called holy
 - And at the center of the mountain and the sacrificial system of Israel sits the altar
 - Altars are not “tables” where we place candles in a church or other such ritual
 - Altars are always places of sacrifice...a place where an innocent’s blood is spilled
 - Therefore, in the church today we don’t have altars...at most we have tables that we mistakenly call altars
 - But in the Kingdom, sacrifice returns for the reasons we discussed earlier
 - Therefore, an altar will return too

>> Image 16

- This altar has a terraced design and stands about 16 feet (8 cubits) off the ground
 - The altar itself stands another 8 feet (4 cubits) high
 - The stairs leading up probably go to the top of the altar, so you stand on top of it
- After the altar is built, it will be prepared for use

Ezek. 43:18 And He said to me, “Son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘These are the statutes for the altar on the day it is built, to offer burnt offerings on it and to sprinkle blood on it.

Ezek. 43:19 ‘You shall give to the Levitical priests who are from the offspring of Zadok, who draw near to Me to minister to Me,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘a young bull for a sin offering.

Ezek. 43:20 ‘You shall take some of its blood and put it on its four horns and on the four corners of the ledge and on the border round about; thus you shall cleanse it and make atonement for it.

Ezek. 43:21 ‘You shall also take the bull for the sin offering, and it shall be burned in the appointed place of the house, outside the sanctuary.

Ezek. 43:22 ‘On the second day you shall offer a male goat without blemish for a sin offering, and they shall cleanse the altar as they cleansed it with the bull.

Ezek. 43:23 ‘When you have finished cleansing it, you shall present a young bull without blemish and a ram without blemish from the flock.

Ezek. 43:24 ‘You shall present them before the LORD, and the priests shall throw salt on them, and they shall offer them up as a burnt offering to the LORD.

Ezek. 43:25 ‘For seven days you shall prepare daily a goat for a sin offering; also a

young bull and a ram from the flock, without blemish, shall be prepared.

Ezek. 43:26 ‘For seven days they shall make atonement for the altar and purify it; so shall they consecrate it.

Ezek. 43:27 ‘When they have completed the days, it shall be that on the eighth day and onward, the priests shall offer your burnt offerings on the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you,’ declares the Lord GOD.”

- The initial sin offering will be a bull
 - In all cases, the sin in view is that of those who live in the Kingdom in natural sinful bodies
 - It’s providing the temporary physical atonement for those of sin we rule over with Christ
 - And it’s also for that audience to understand Christ’s atonement for sin
 - The ritual you see described here differs from that used in the Mosaic Law
 - The meaning of those differences are not clear, though at the very least they reinforce that the Law has changed
 - Mosaic vs. Kingdom Law

Mosaic Sin Offering	Kingdom Sin Offering
Anoints the altar	No anointing of the altar
Demands a sin offering in the form of a bullock for all seven days	Demands a bullock only on the first day
No goat offered	Goats have to be offered for the last six days
Blood applied on the horns of the altar	Blood applied on the horns, the corners, and the lower molding round about

- Next the angel takes Ezekiel back to the east gate along the outer court of the temple, where the glory of God first entered

Ezek. 44:1 Then He brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces the east; and it was shut.

Ezek. 44:2 The LORD said to me, “This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the LORD God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut.

Ezek. 44:3 “As for the prince, he shall sit in it as prince to eat bread before the LORD; he shall enter by way of the porch of the gate and shall go out by the

same way.”

- The east gate is now shut and can't be used again since it was used by the Lord
 - No one will take the same journey that the Lord took, which clearly symbolizes the Lord's work of atonement
 - That work of Jesus dying on the cross can't be repeated by anyone
 - So too His journey into the temple won't be repeated by anyone else
 - So all others will enter through some other route
 - Don't confuse this sealing with the present-day sealing of the east gate of the Old City of Jerusalem

>> Image 18

- Today, you see a walled up gate on the east side of the present walls facing the Kidron valley
- Those walls were built by Suleiman the Magnificent in the early 16th century
- For the most part they are built on top of the remains of previous walls built by the crusaders around the 11th century
- It was the crusaders who first walled up the east gate thinking Jesus entered through this gate
 - So they believed it should be sealed until Jesus returned
 - But they barred the wrong gate...the gate Jesus entered is buried underground today
- And of course, the entire modern structure of the temple and walls will be gone when we get to the Kingdom
 - The walls we're talking about here don't even exist yet
 - So Jesus will enter the current walls in the Tribulation under a time of distress and destruction
 - No brick is going to stop Him then
 - And then in the Kingdom He enters an all-new temple in full glory
- Going back to Ezekiel, we see one man will occupy the gate inside the wall, the prince

>> Image 19

- You may remember from past study that the gates inside city walls served as places of official business
 - And magistrates and other officials would sit in the gate to conduct business
 - So it will be in that day as well
- The prince of Israel will sit in the gate, though the outer door to the gate will not be opened for anyone
 - So visitors must enter the temple outer court through either the North or South

gates

- Then they will walk to the East gate and enter through the porch as you see this figure doing in Image 18
- So who is the prince who will officiate in the temple?
 - We learned back in Ezekiel 34

Ezek. 34:22 therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another.

Ezek. 34:23 “Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.

Ezek. 34:24 “And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the LORD have spoken.

- Ezekiel named the resurrected King David as the prince, so here he doesn’t bother naming him again
 - David will again rule over Israel, though he is a prince this time because Jesus is the King
 - Since Jesus is on the throne, David doesn’t sit on a throne
- We also know from elsewhere in Scripture that the government that serves Jesus will include several levels
 - Under David will be the 12 apostles ruling the twelve tribes

Matt. 19:27 Then Peter said to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?”

Matt. 19:28 And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

- The twelve apostles (including Matthias) will rule over the tribes of Israel assembled in their land in the Kingdom
 - This reference is one of those passages that suggests Israel may yet have natural citizens in the Kingdom (despite other passages that seem to say otherwise)
 - Or perhaps there will be natural Gentiles living in the tribes’ territory that require ruling
- And Gentile believers (Church saints) will also be in the government
 - Several passages tell us that

1Cor. 6:2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is

judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?

1Cor. 6:3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?

- Paul says the Church will be involved in judging the world and even the angels under Christ's authority

Rev. 20:6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

- Again, all who participate in the first resurrection (the believers' resurrection) will reign with Christ
 - To participate with the resurrection means to be glorified, of course
 - So the glorified will judge the world under Christ's authority

>> Image 20

- What place will you have in Christ's government? Does everyone get the same role? Does it matter?
 - Many passages give us those answers but we get a concise summary in two parables of minas and talents
 - You can read the answer on the [VBVM website here](#).
 - Next time we pick up with the priesthood and the land divisions for Israel's tribes

- As we finished our last study in Ezekiel, we entered into Chapter 44 where the prince, David, had set up his office in the east gate of the temple
 - This will be the place he spends his work time (at least part of it) serving the Lord

Ezek. 44:1 Then He brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces the east; and it was shut.

Ezek. 44:2 The LORD said to me, “This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the LORD God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut.

Ezek. 44:3 “As for the prince, he shall sit in it as prince to eat bread before the LORD; he shall enter by way of the porch of the gate and shall go out by the same way.”

>> Images 1-2

- The east gate is now shut and can't be used again since it was used by the Lord
 - No one will take the same journey that the Lord took, which clearly symbolizes the Lord's work of atonement
 - Jesus' death on the cross was an act of atonement that can't be repeated by anyone
 - And His entry into the temple is a symbolic representation of Christ serving as our High Priest interceding for our sin
 - Therefore His entry into the temple through the east gate happens once, and thereafter the journey can't be repeated
 - This symbolizes the once-for-all reality of Christ's sacrifice
 - So David enters into the gate from the inside of the outer court and performs service to Christ in that place
 - We don't know his job description, but we know that leaders and judges sat in the gate of city walls in ancient times
 - So it seems likely that David will officiate over Kingdom business for Israel
 - There's simply more we don't know than we do know about the nature of that time and the work that will take place
- And as I showed in the graphic from last week, Jesus' government has several levels

>> Image 3

- Under David will be the 12 apostles ruling the twelve tribes, according to Matthew 19:27-28
 - And Gentile believers (Church saints) will also be in the government

1Cor. 6:2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is

judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?

1Cor. 6:3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?

Rev. 20:6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

- We will judge the world in Christ's government and we will reign with Him
- Furthermore, the Gentile nations of the world will have rulers, princes according to Isaiah

Is. 49:5 And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,

To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him
(For I am honored in the sight of the LORD,
And My God is My strength),

Is. 49:6 He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also make You a light of the nations
So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Is. 49:7 Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One,
To the despised One,
To the One abhorred by the nation,
To the Servant of rulers,
"Kings will see and arise,
Princes will also bow down,
Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You."

- Isaiah says that "kings" and "princes" will see the Kingdom of Christ and the prominence of Israel in that time
- They will come to bow down to Christ
- But the point is that there are rulers in that day, which is part of a government
- So fundamentally, the government of the Kingdom is a monarchy: Christ as King and various levels of authority under Christ to rule the world
 - What place will you have in Christ's government?
 - Many passages give us those answers but we get a concise summary in two parables Jesus taught
 - The parables of the minas and talents – and we want to take a moment to

consider that teaching before we move on in Ezekiel

- You can read the answer on the VBVM website [here](#)
- These two parables together explain how Christ will assess each believer so He may assign to each a just reward
 - The reward takes two forms, and these two parables explain the two-sided nature of our reward
 - The first part is found in Matthew 25:14-30

Matt. 25:14 “For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them.

Matt. 25:15 “To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey.

Matt. 25:16 “Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents.

Matt. 25:17 “In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more.

Matt. 25:18 “But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

Matt. 25:19 “Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them.

Matt. 25:20 “The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.’

Matt. 25:21 “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

Matt. 25:22 “Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, ‘Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.’

Matt. 25:23 “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

Matt. 25:24 “And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed.

Matt. 25:25 ‘And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’

Matt. 25:26 “But his master answered and said to him, ‘You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed.

Matt. 25:27 ‘Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest.

Matt. 25:28 ‘Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who

has the ten talents.'

Matt. 25:29 "For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.

Matt. 25:30 "Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

- In the parable, a master gives his slaves "talents" to steward during His absence
 - A talent in Jesus' day was a measure of weight of about 130 lb or nearly 60kg
 - A talent of silver was equal to 9 years salary for a laborer, so even a single talent represented considerable personal resources
 - In fact, our modern meaning of the word "talent" finds its origins in this parable
 - The three slaves received differing amounts of wealth based on their ability
 - Evidently, the master recognized the abilities and limitations of each servant
 - So he assigned responsibility to each accordingly
 - Regardless of the degree of responsibility, each slave was to devote his full time and attention to managing the talent(s) he was given
 - Even the slave who received only one talent still had a significant responsibility in light of the high value of a talent
 - Therefore, all slaves must serve faithfully in the master's absence.
 - At the end of the parable, the master returns to evaluate each slave's service to know if the slave had been faithful in discharging his duty
 - The first slave doubled his five talents as did the slave given two talents
 - So both slaves received the same commendation from the master.
 - Even though the master assigned a different degree of responsibility to each slave, he did so understanding each slave's ability
 - Therefore when both slaves performed faithfully, the master awarded each slave equally
 - The master's commendation to each slave in v.21 and v.23 was identical
 - To both he emphasized each slave's faithful service rather than the magnitude of his achievement
 - Only the third slave received a rebuke for failing to provide faithful service to his master
- Based on these details, we see Jesus is describing a reward system for believers

>> Image 4

- Christ (i.e., our Master) invites every believer (i.e., His slaves) to serve Him during His absence

- A talent in the parable symbolizes a believer's duty to serve the Lord faithfully in some important and challenging way
- And the way we are called to serve the Lord will vary in keeping with our abilities
- Jesus calls some believers to assume greater burdens than others
 - Some believers must bear greater burdens in serving Christ (i.e., five talents)
 - While other believers are asked to make fewer sacrifices in serving the Lord (i.e., two talents)
 - Nevertheless, all believers are expected to demonstrate faithfulness so as to receive an equal inheritance
- A faithful servant's reward is a share of Christ's inheritance in the Kingdom
 - Believers will receive a portion of Christ's inheritance on the Earth to enjoy during the 1,000-year Kingdom

Col. 1:12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

Col. 3:23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,

Col. 3:24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

Eph. 1:11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, **Eph. 1:12** to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

Eph. 1:13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,

Eph. 1:14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

- We can tell that this parable is focused on Christ's inheritance in v.14 since the parable opens speaking about the master's "possessions"
 - In fact, notice how each faithful slave was permitted to keep the additional talents he earned during the master's absence
 - In a sense, we can say the slaves stored up wealth for themselves by their faithful service to the master
 - Scripture commands the believer to do this very thing:

Matt. 6:19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

Matt. 6:20 “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

Matt. 6:21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- We store up treasure by faithfulness to our assigned duties in service to Christ, not the magnitude of our accomplishments
 - Christ may assign us lesser opportunities to serve Him, but our assignment does not limit our potential inheritance
 - For example, a pastor serving faithfully in a small church, or a Christian mother serving faithfully in her home, may be rewarded equally with the Apostle Paul or Martin Luther, assuming equal faithfulness
- Jesus’ parable on the laborers in Matthew 20:1-16 confirms equal material reward for equal faithfulness
 - In that parable, a landowner hires some laborers early in the day and others late in the day
 - But at the end of the day, the landowner pays every laborer the same based on faithfulness, not accomplishment
 - Certainly, those that worked longer accomplished more – nevertheless the pay was the same
- So the parable in Matthew 20 confirms that faithful service earns a material reward in the Kingdom
 - All believers who serve the Lord faithfully will receive an equal inheritance regardless of when we were “hired”
 - Even those assigned the least role to serve Christ (i.e., the one receiving only a single talent) are still expected to serve
 - If even the least among us rise to the challenge and demonstrate faithfulness, they will receive a reward equal with the greatest
- Finally, we notice that the third servant who produced no return with his talent received no reward at all
 - In the parable, Jesus says the slave was “afraid” of the master and “went away” after the master departed
 - This indicates the slave did not love the master nor did he wish to remain in the house serving him
 - When the master returns, he calls this slave “wicked” and “lazy”
 - Then the slave is sent to “outer darkness”
 - In other words, the slave's faithlessness to serve was an indication that he was not truly a servant
 - So the master is putting him out of the home

- In literal terms, the servant's failure to serve was evidence of an unsaved heart
- The Bible teaches that without faith it is impossible to please God
 - So Jesus included that final slave in the parable to reinforce the necessity of faith before reward
 - The slave's unwillingness to serve his master was proof that he was faithless
 - He was never truly a disciple, so he was sent to outer darkness; which pictures the disposition of unbelievers (i.e., hell)
- In summary, Matthew's parable teaches that faithfulness in service to Christ will determine our inheritance in the Kingdom
 - Believers may be assigned different opportunities to serve Christ
 - But faithful service will be rewarded equally

Luke 16:10 "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.

Luke 16:11 "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?

Luke 16:12 "And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?

- So our physical rewards in the Kingdom (i.e., our share of Christ's inheritance) will be assigned by Christ to us based on faithful service to Him now
 - So that in our daily Kingdom life, as we eat, sleep and work in some capacity for Christ, we may enjoy our inheritance
 - It will be our home, our farm (or ranch), the place we enjoy for 1,000 years based on our faithfulness to Him now
 - That's what Christ means when He calls us to store up treasure in Heaven... make decisions now that maximize our inheritance
 - That's one side of the reward system...so now to the second part of that system: our place in the government
 - Jesus explains that part of the reward system in a similar parable in Luke 19

Luke 19:11 While they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately.

Luke 19:12 So He said, "A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return.

Luke 19:13 "And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, 'Do business with this until I come back.'

Luke 19:14 "But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'

Luke 19:15 “When he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him so that he might know what business they had done.

Luke 19:16 “The first appeared, saying, ‘Master, your mina has made ten minas more.’

Luke 19:17 “And he said to him, ‘Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.’

Luke 19:18 “The second came, saying, ‘Your mina, master, has made five minas.’

Luke 19:19 “And he said to him also, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’

Luke 19:20 “Another came, saying, ‘Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief;

Luke 19:21 for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.’

Luke 19:22 “He said to him, ‘By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow?

Luke 19:23 ‘Then why did you not put my money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?’

Luke 19:24 “Then he said to the bystanders, ‘Take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has the ten minas.’

Luke 19:25 “And they said to him, ‘Master, he has ten minas already.’

Luke 19:26 “I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.

Luke 19:27 “But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence.”

- This parable sounds almost identical to the one in Matthew and it is similar in the broad outline, yet numerous details differ from the parable in Matthew
 - First, a master departs to receive a new kingdom, and he leaves ten slaves behind commanding them to "do business" until he returns
 - The Greek word for "do business" (*pragmateuomai*) means to keep occupied, to busy oneself
 - So the slaves are expected simply to pursue everyday life, not some special project or task
 - Secondly, the unit of weight in this parable has changed from a talent to a mina
 - In Jesus' day one mina was equal to 1/60th of a talent
 - So a mina represented considerably less value than a talent
 - Once again, the relatively modest payment to each slave is consistent with the master's charge to "do business"
 - Thirdly, every slave received the same number of minas

- No slave was given an advantage in this assignment
- All had the equal task of doing business
- Fourthly, when the master returned he assigned rewards proportional to each slave's performance
 - Those who accomplished more with their minas received a proportionally greater reward
 - So the rewards varied with performance
- Finally and most significantly, the form of the reward was not more wealth but authority over cities
 - Since the master had received a new kingdom, he needed men to assist him in ruling this new territory
 - So he assigned responsibility in the new kingdom according to each slave's performance in everyday matters
 - The slaves who were more effective in business were deemed worthy of greater responsibility in managing the new kingdom
- These differences in Luke's parable show us that Jesus was teaching a different reward system than the one in Matthew's parable
 - Matthew's parable taught how believers receive material wealth in the Kingdom, which was assigned equally
 - But Luke's parable teaches how the Lord will assign believers responsibility to rule in the Kingdom
 - And that responsibility will not be assigned equally
 - So what will be the criteria for assigning levels of responsibility in the Kingdom?
 - Our first clue is the prominent repetition of the number ten in this parable
 - For example, the master initially calls ten slaves (though only three are judged), and each slave received ten minas
 - The number ten in scripture signifies testimony or witness
 - The prominent use of that number here suggests the parable is focused on a believer's testimony rather than his degree of service
 - Further reinforcing that conclusion, we know the slaves were told to do business; which means pursue everyday activities
 - In other words, our good testimony is not a special work or short-term task
 - Rather, believers are called to live everyday as a testimony as Paul says:

Rom. 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Rom. 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that

which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- Our witness is a life lived according to the will of God, which is a spiritual service of worship
- This is a daily effort, a way of “doing business” while the master is gone
- More specifically, our witness takes the form of good works, according to Matthew 5:16

Matt. 5:16 “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

- The good works of our sanctification is like light shining before men
 - Those who pursue sanctification as Christ expects are those producing good testimony
 - Those who live in their flesh are grieving the Holy Spirit and failing to produce a good testimony
- And just as every slave began with an equal number of minas, so every believer begins his or her walk in Christ with equal opportunity
 - We all have equal opportunity to pursue sanctification and yield a good testimony
 - The Lord does not “handicap” one believer over another in the cause of sanctification
 - Though our life's circumstances, spiritual gifts and mission may vary, nevertheless every believer receives the same Spirit
 - And we all have access to the same word of God and therefore must answer the same call to godliness
- The test is whether we will obey Christ’s command to “do business” (seek sanctification) in His absence
 - The believer who shows the self-discipline and character to pursue sanctification now demonstrates trustworthiness
 - And that trustworthiness will be rewarded with greater responsibility in the Kingdom
 - Therefore, a believer's testimony of godliness determines his or her ruling position in the Kingdom
- Notice that the judgment for responsibility is proportional: a believer with a better testimony will be awarded a greater opportunity to serve in the Kingdom
 - Similarly, a believer with a poorer testimony will receive a lesser degree of authority in the Kingdom
 - Responsibility then is a proportional reward, unlike material rewards which will be assigned uniformly
 - This difference makes sense when we realize that greater sanctification makes for greater spiritual leadership

- Who better to receive greater authority in the Kingdom than the one who has achieved greater spiritual maturity during the present world?
 - As Jesus said:

Luke 12:48 ...From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

- The more we have been given here (in terms of responsibility), the more we will be required to show for it
- And to the one who has cared well for much here, there will be more to care for in the Kingdom
- What of the slave who produced no results with his minas? The master denies him reward just as we saw in Matthew
 - But unlike in Matthew 25, this slave was not consigned to outer darkness
 - Why not? Because in the case of spiritual maturity, every believer is assured the Kingdom regardless of the degree of our sanctification
 - Faith is required for the Kingdom but a good testimony is not
- A believer with a poor testimony who fails to pursue sanctification will still be saved by their faith and cannot be denied the Kingdom

>> Image 5

- As Paul says:

2Tim. 2:11 It is a trustworthy statement:

For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him;

2Tim. 2:12 If we endure, we will also reign with Him;

If we deny Him, He also will deny us;

2Tim. 2:13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

- Paul says if we died with Christ (i.e., we have faith in Him), then we will live with Him (be resurrected)
 - If we endure (pursue sanctification), we will receive a reward of reigning with Christ in the Kingdom
 - If we deny Christ our endurance, He will deny us the opportunity to reign with Him
 - Even if we are faithless, however, we still enter the Kingdom because Christ is faithful to us
 - The Lord cannot deny Himself, meaning He cannot reject the one He has come to dwell within
- It's worth noting that Luke's parable still includes the example of an unbeliever though the unbeliever in Luke's parable is called an "enemy"

- This distinction makes sense, since Luke's parable isn't focused on faithfulness but rather a testimony
- And discussions of testimonies are only relevant for believers

>> Images 6-9

- So faithful service leads to equal inheritance (the talents) while better testimony leads to greater authority (the minas)
 - Our inheritance in the Kingdom will be determined by what we do for Christ
 - Our authority in the Kingdom will be determined by who we become in Christ
- The Kingdom will be the period of history when we will enjoy the rewards of our lives spent as Christians now
 - And Christ's justice will be evident both in how He rules over the natural citizens of that day
 - But also in how He rewards the glorified citizens



Ezekiel - Lesson 44B- 45A

Chapter 44:4-31, 45:1-8

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- Today we return to Ezekiel 44 to finish the chapter looking at the rules for the priests of that coming day

Ezek. 44:4 Then He brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the house; and I looked, and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD, and I fell on my face.

Ezek. 44:5 The LORD said to me, “Son of man, mark well, see with your eyes and hear with your ears all that I say to you concerning all the statutes of the house of the LORD and concerning all its laws; and mark well the entrance of the house, with all exits of the sanctuary.

- Ezekiel’s escort takes him inside the inner court by way of the north gate
 - As he approaches the entrance to the temple, he can see the glory of the Lord filling the house, and down he goes again
 - Notice how Ezekiel cannot even stand in the presence of the Lord’s glory and power
- And then the voice of the Lord speaks to Ezekiel from this future moment in the temple
 - He tells Ezekiel to report everything that he’s seeing and hearing to the people of Israel concerning their temple
 - The point of these revelations is to share them with Israel, so that the people would know them
 - In fact, that’s the purpose of everything God reveals through His prophets, that God’s people would know what has been revealed
- But beyond the temple itself, the Lord also has a message for the people of Israel regarding how they dealt with the previous temple

Ezek. 44:6 “You shall say to the rebellious ones, to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Enough of all your abominations, O house of Israel,

Ezek. 44:7 when you brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary to profane it, even My house, when you offered My food, the fat and the blood; for they made My covenant void — this in addition to all your abominations.

Ezek. 44:8 “And you have not kept charge of My holy things yourselves, but you have set foreigners to keep charge of My sanctuary.”

Ezek. 44:9 ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter My sanctuary.

- In Ezekiel’s day, and in generations prior, the people of Israel had committed uncountable abominations against the Lord
- This book is the primary record of those abominations, so we need not repeat them here

- But now the Lord contrasts Israel's defiling of the temple to the immense glory the temple will have in the Kingdom
 - As an example, the Lord says the people of Israel brought foreigners who were uncircumcised in heart and flesh into the temple
 - To be uncircumcised in the flesh means to be Gentile, that is to not have a part in the covenants of Israel
 - But to be uncircumcised in the spirit means to be unbelieving, to not have the Spirit of God giving the person new spiritual life
 - So the Jews allowed unbelieving Gentiles to enter into a place reserved exclusively for Jews and even the priests
 - The Mosaic Covenant established these rites and rituals for Israel alone, and Gentiles have no part in that covenant
 - But the nation had allowed Gentiles to defile the temple
 - And more than that, the Lord says Gentiles were allowed to eat of sacred foods reserved for sacrifice or for priests
 - And if that weren't bad enough, it seems Israel may have allowed foreigners to officiate in the temple as if they were priests
 - We know Joshua employed Gibeonites to serve at the altar as water carriers (Josh 9:23-27)
 - So apparently that set a precedent that continued afterward until Gentiles were serving in greater capacities
 - But now the Lord says in v.9 that in the Kingdom, no natural man who is uncircumcised in flesh and spirit may enter His sanctuary
 - We know that the nations stream to the temple to celebrate feasts and holy days
 - Yet apparently, unbelieving citizens will not be allowed to enter the temple grounds in the Kingdom
 - And of course in that day the heart of a person will be known by God so the rule will be enforced perfectly
- And then turning to the Levitical priests, the Lord changes the rules for how the priests serve and where they will come from within Israel

Ezek. 44:10 “But the Levites who went far from Me when Israel went astray, who went astray from Me after their idols, shall bear the punishment for their iniquity.

Ezek. 44:11 “Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house and ministering in the house; they shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them.

Ezek. 44:12 “Because they ministered to them before their idols and became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel, therefore I have sworn against them,” declares the Lord GOD, “that they shall bear the punishment for their iniquity.

Ezek. 44:13 “And they shall not come near to Me to serve as a priest to Me, nor come near to any of My holy things, to the things that are most holy; but they will bear their shame and their abominations which they have committed.

Ezek. 44:14 “Yet I will appoint them to keep charge of the house, of all its service and of all that shall be done in it.

- The Lord reminds the Levites that they stood by as Israel went astray, allowing the profaning of the temple over the centuries
 - As Israel descended into idolatry and depravity, the priests even officiated over the pagan rituals
 - Remember back in Ezekiel 8 we read:

Ezek. 8:16 Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD’S house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun.

Ezek. 8:17 He said to me, “Do you see this, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose.

Ezek. 8:18 “Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them.”

- The Lord showed Ezekiel 24 priests and the high priest bowing to the sun as it rises, in pagan worship ritual
- They were standing on the threshold of the temple preparing to serve in the temple that day
- Because of the unfaithfulness of God’s ministers in that day, He says the Levitical priests will officiate in a more limited way in the Kingdom
 - Notice in v.13 the Lord says they shall not come near Him in this time
 - This is different than under the Mosaic law, where the offerer kills his own sacrifice, not the priest
 - The priest offered the sacrifice on the altar and took blood into the Holy Place
- But in the Kingdom, the priests have a more limited role
 - They will have oversight of the house and gates, slaughtering animals and ministering to the people who worship there
 - They now do the “dirty” work for the worshippers, ministering to them in the temple
 - Only one family of priests will be allowed to serve Christ as before

Ezek. 44:15 “But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My

sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer Me the fat and the blood,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 44:16 “They shall enter My sanctuary; they shall come near to My table to minister to Me and keep My charge.

- Among the Levitical priests, only the sons of Zadok will be permitted to approach the Lord in the sanctuary
 - Zadok was the high priest who remained loyal to David during the time that the house of Saul was contending with David for the throne
 - As David fled from Absalom and left Jerusalem, we read this:

2Sam. 15:23 While all the country was weeping with a loud voice, all the people passed over. The king also passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over toward the way of the wilderness.

2Sam. 15:24 Now behold, Zadok also came, and all the Levites with him carrying the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar came up until all the people had finished passing from the city.

2Sam. 15:25 The king said to Zadok, “Return the ark of God to the city. If I find favor in the sight of the LORD, then He will bring me back again and show me both it and His habitation.

- Zadok took the ark of the covenant and followed David as David fled
 - He was demonstrating that he knew David was the the Lord’s anointed, not Absalom
 - Because of Zadok’s faithfulness, the Lord makes Zadok and his sons the only priests who will officiate in the Kingdom
- There’s a great picture in that story of our time now in the Church
 - David’s departure from Jerusalem pictures Jesus being rejected by His own people, Israel
 - Because of that rejection, Jesus departs for a time
- And David’s command to the priests to remain behind with the Ark pictures the Church remaining behind on earth for a time
 - Just as the Glory of God dwelled on the Ark, so does the Spirit of God dwell in the body of Christ, the church
 - And just as David said the Ark should remain in Jerusalem until he returned, so does the Church remain on earth waiting for Christ
 - And just as Zadok’s faithfulness to David gave him the right to minister in the Kingdom temple...
 - So will our faithfulness give us opportunity to reign in the Kingdom
- To finish the chapter, we look at the dress and conduct of these priests

Ezek. 44:17 “It shall be that when they enter at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and wool shall not be on them while they are ministering in the gates of the inner court and in the house.

Ezek. 44:18 “Linen turbans shall be on their heads and linen undergarments shall be on their loins; they shall not gird themselves with anything which makes them sweat.

Ezek. 44:19 “When they go out into the outer court, into the outer court to the people, they shall put off their garments in which they have been ministering and lay them in the holy chambers; then they shall put on other garments so that they will not transmit holiness to the people with their garments.

- First, all the dress of the priests of Zadok will be linen, not wool
 - There are theories for why linen is required
 - First, linen is a product of plants while wool is the product of animals
 - Since God used animal skins to cover the first sin, linen pictures our purity without need for atonement
 - Just as saints in the Bible are pictured dressed in linen, being clothed in Christ’s righteousness
 - Furthermore, the Lord said His priests could not sweat
 - Sweat makes a priest ritually unclean
 - Obviously, wool is warmer and makes one sweat, while linen is cooler
 - Interestingly, the priests may not take their garments out of the temple
 - The Lord says in v.19 He doesn’t want the priests to transmit their holiness to the people
 - The word transmit isn’t found in the original Hebrew
 - In fact, the Septuagint says “so they shall not sanctify the people”
 - By that we understand God is saying He does not want to expose the common man to what the priests experienced in the presence of God
 - This suggests that perhaps their clothing will radiate as Moses’ face did after encountering God in the tent of meeting
 - So unbelievers can’t enter the temple and neither will the unbelieving world see the glory of God reflected on the priests
- From these details we begin to see the requirement for faith in the Kingdom just as it is today (and has always been)
 - Students of the Bible naturally wonder how it could be that a world ruled by Christ could include unbelievers
 - Most assume that Jesus will be visible in the world
 - And we assume that supernatural displays will be common
 - And even the fact that we live among the world in our glorified bodies should be proof enough to bring faith
 - But if you think a moment longer, you come to realize these things *can’t* be true in

the Kingdom

- Hebrews says:

Heb. 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

- And Paul adds:

Rom. 8:24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?

- The Bible teaches that faith is an expression of hope because it accepts something as true before it can be “seen” or experienced in reality
 - Once something can be seen, accepting the truth of it no longer requires faith... it’s become self-evident
 - Nor should it gain us anything, because God Himself gains no glory when we acknowledge the obvious
- So God’s plan of salvation depends on faith, trusting in the promises of God found in His word concerning things yet to come
 - We place our faith in thing that cannot be seen: Christ’s atoning death, our future resurrection and judgment
 - God’s word has made promises to us concerning these matters, and faith is required to accept them
- Now imagine if Jesus were visible in His glorified form to the unbelieving world?
 - They would certainly acknowledge Jesus, but that acknowledgement wouldn’t be based on faith in God’s word
 - It would merely be a self-evident truth, and acknowledging Jesus under those circumstances wouldn’t result in salvation
 - No more than at the final judgment when Paul says:

Phil. 2:9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

Phil. 2:10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

Phil. 2:11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- At the final judgment, all humanity from all history will come to understand the truth that Jesus is Lord
 - In that moment, Paul says every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that truth
 - Notice the various places where humanity will exist when they make this

confession

- Some are above the earth, others on the earth, but importantly some are still *below the earth*
- Obviously, those below the earth refers to souls enduring eternal judgment
 - Paul says they too will confess Christ as Lord, yet they remain in judgment despite their confession
 - Why? Because at that point their confession is simply an acknowledgement of self-evident truth...no faith required
 - And so it does not bring salvation
- Therefore, since unbelief remains part of life during the Kingdom, then faith must still be the means to salvation
 - And if faith is required, then the truth of Christ will not be self-evident – at least not in the sense that it nullifies the need for faith
 - That's one reason Jesus is not roaming the earth in His glorified form but rather He remains in the Holy of Holies
 - The testimony of that day will be that our Lord is resident in the temple, reigning and ruling
 - But accepting that testimony will require faith, since unbelievers will not see Jesus nor will they be permitted to enter the temple
 - Moreover, the priests will leave the temple dressed like ordinary people
 - They leave their garments back in the temple
 - And then there's the issue of our appearance and, for the same reason, we should assume that our glorified appearance won't vary dramatically
 - We should expect that our physical construction will mirror the one we have now albeit without sin or disease or weaknesses
 - Perhaps our appearance will remain essentially the same (just fewer wrinkles and maybe a little thinner)
 - And if so, that may be the way we'll recognize each other
 - And perhaps most amazing, our sinless nature won't make us radically different from the sinner
 - We can live side by side with the natural man or woman and yet our sinlessness won't challenge their understanding of God
 - They won't look at us and be amazed at the difference, so that it causes them to believe in Jesus
 - Perhaps they recognize us as being "kind" or "upright" or perhaps they will think we're weird and resent us for our perfection
 - It's a situation I know very well (joke)
 - But one thing we can know for sure: our sinless nature won't nullify faith for those who remain sinful
 - Remember, Jesus lived a sinless life, and yet none of his earthly brothers were moved by what they saw to believe in His claims

- So if sinless Jesus could live side by side with unbelievers without them noticing, we should expect to do the same
- The more we consider these issues, the more reason we have to look forward to the Kingdom life
 - It's going to be everything we like about life today and nothing we don't
 - It's going to be a life with fulfillment in place of disappointment
 - A life with meaning instead of one that sometimes seems senseless
 - It's a life with a rhythm and stability that eliminates fear or worry
 - A life where the prospect of growing old and dying are gone, where the consequences of sin are no more
 - Our days will be filled with work we enjoy, pastimes that don't hurt us or others, and possessions that never fade away
 - And for the unbeliever, the same will be true so long as they do not sin, and if they come to faith during their first 100 years
 - And in the midst of that near-perfect world, the unbeliever will be told that must believe in Jesus if they want to continue in that bliss
 - Though we may assume that such a great world would make faith easier to come by, the reality will be the exact opposite
 - When the world is experiencing such bliss, faith will be harder
 - Just as today when people are comfortable in their circumstances, they find little reason to consider a change
 - Especially not a change as significant as repenting of their present way of life to embrace a new one in Jesus
- Moving back to the priests, we have a series of rules for proper conduct

Ezek. 44:20 “Also they shall not shave their heads, yet they shall not let their locks grow long; they shall only trim the hair of their heads.

Ezek. 44:21 “Nor shall any of the priests drink wine when they enter the inner court.

Ezek. 44:22 “And they shall not marry a widow or a divorced woman but shall take virgins from the offspring of the house of Israel, or a widow who is the widow of a priest.

Ezek. 44:23 “Moreover, they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

Ezek. 44:24 “In a dispute they shall take their stand to judge; they shall judge it according to My ordinances. They shall also keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts and sanctify My sabbaths.

- The priest can't drink on the job, can't look like a hippie, and must marry a respectable woman (i.e., a virgin)
 - That reference to marrying raises a huge red flag for us, because it indicates that

the priests will be natural men

- Which brings us back to the question of whether all Israel will be glorified or not
- Earlier, I addressed this question by noting how Scripture indicates that Israel will all know the Lord and obey Him perfectly

Jer. 31:31 “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, **Jer. 31:32** not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

Jer. 31:33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Jer. 31:34 “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

- Jeremiah says there will be no need for one Jew to teach another Jew to know and obey the Lord
- They will all have the law on their hearts so that they may follow it perfectly
- Perfect knowledge and obedience to God strongly suggests that all Israel will be glorified just as all the Church saints will be
 - And if Israel is glorified then they won’t marry, since Jesus says in Matt 22:30 that the glorified are like angels not marrying
 - That is hard to reconcile with the command to teach Israel about things clean and profane
- Nevertheless, here we have a reference to the descendants of the priests of Zadok marrying women
 - Clearly if priests are descendants of Zadok, then they are Jewish
 - And if they are marrying, they are natural men which would mean that not all Israel is glorified
 - Moreover, in v.23 we’re told the priests explain the difference between what is holy and profane to Israel
 - By their teaching, the Lord says Israel will discern between unclean and clean
 - And in v.24 were told the priests will judge over disputes among the people of Israel
 - Sinless people don’t enter into disputes, presumably, nor do they require judging
 - Admittedly, this is one of the most difficult concepts in eschatology, and I haven’t resolved it yet
 - Somehow it must be true that Israel fully knows and obeys the Lord in the Kingdom

- And yet it's also possible for priests to have wives and to need the judgment and instruction
- At the very least, we know the Old Testament saints will be resurrected and glorified just as the Church will be
- So perhaps there are some of both among Israel, yet even that answer doesn't fully resolve the question
 - Further complicating our understand, we find these tantalizing details

Ezek. 44:25 “They shall not go to a dead person to defile themselves; however, for father, for mother, for son, for daughter, for brother, or for a sister who has not had a husband, they may defile themselves.

Ezek. 44:26 “After he is cleansed, seven days shall elapse for him.

Ezek. 44:27 “On the day that he goes into the sanctuary, into the inner court to minister in the sanctuary, he shall offer his sin offering,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 44:28 “And it shall be with regard to an inheritance for them, that I am their inheritance; and you shall give them no possession in Israel — I am their possession.

Ezek. 44:29 “They shall eat the grain offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering; and every devoted thing in Israel shall be theirs.

Ezek. 44:30 “The first of all the first fruits of every kind and every contribution of every kind, from all your contributions, shall be for the priests; you shall also give to the priest the first of your dough to cause a blessing to rest on your house.

Ezek. 44:31 “The priests shall not eat any bird or beast that has died a natural death or has been torn to pieces.

- In v.25 the Lord says the priests cannot visit a dead body unless that dead body is part of their family
 - Here again, only a natural, unsaved person will die in the Kingdom, as we learned in Isaiah 65
 - So if these priests have relatives who can die, then it means they have natural, unsaved Jewish family in Israel
 - Yet Jeremiah promised that all Jews in the Kingdom will know the Lord
 - Notice also in v.27 that the priest who has contact with a dead body offers “his” sin offering before he may return to officiating in the temple
 - This is a stunning statement since it implies the priest has sin
 - Here again, that makes the priest a natural born person, or so it would seem
 - Clearly, there is a gap in our understanding here, which cannot be resolved easily
 - Finally, as it was with the levitical priests of the Mosaic Law, these priests will depend upon the gifts to the temple for their supply
 - The priests have no other inheritance in the land except the temple itself

- And they shall be fed by what comes into the temple
 - Later in the book we study the specific allotments for the tribes, including for the priests
- The final verses teach a common principle of the Bible, both for Old Testament, New Testament and Kingdom times:
 - Those who minister to God's people are to expect their supply from God's people
 - According to Leviticus, the priests could not eat meat killed in any way except meat sacrificed in the temple
 - That was the only source of meat for priests serving in the temple
 - In New Testament times, the same principle applies as Paul explains

1Cor. 9:13 Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar?

1Cor. 9:14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

- Those who devote their life to the purpose of the Gospel should expect to see their needs met by the church body
- Elsewhere, Paul explains that this system is to the benefit of the Church
- This system ensures that God's servants have maximum opportunity to serve us spiritually
- And in the Kingdom, the same principle continues on
 - The priests in the temple will receive the first fruits of the people of Israel as their payment
 - And as we'll learn later, they live in the temple as their inheritance in the Kingdom
 - And as it was under Moses, they only eat meat sacrificed in the temple
 - Knowing there will be many priests in the Kingdom, it also tells us how much sacrificing will go on at the temple
- Now in Chapter 45 we begin to see how the Lord divides the land, starting with the land for the priests and the prince

Ezek. 45:1 “And when you divide by lot the land for inheritance, you shall offer an allotment to the LORD, a holy portion of the land; the length shall be the length of 25,000 cubits, and the width shall be 20,000. It shall be holy within all its boundary round about.

Ezek. 45:2 “Out of this there shall be for the holy place a square round about five hundred by five hundred cubits, and fifty cubits for its open space round about.

Ezek. 45:3 “From this area you shall measure a length of 25,000 cubits and a width of 10,000 cubits; and in it shall be the sanctuary, the most holy place.

Ezek. 45:4 “It shall be the holy portion of the land; it shall be for the priests, the

ministers of the sanctuary, who come near to minister to the LORD, and it shall be a place for their houses and a holy place for the sanctuary.

Ezek. 45:5 “An area 25,000 cubits in length and 10,000 in width shall be for the Levites, the ministers of the house, and for their possession cities to dwell in.

Ezek. 45:6 “You shall give the city possession of an area 5,000 cubits wide and 25,000 cubits long, alongside the allotment of the holy portion; it shall be for the whole house of Israel.

Ezek. 45:7 “The prince shall have land on either side of the holy allotment and the property of the city, adjacent to the holy allotment and the property of the city, on the west side toward the west and on the east side toward the east, and in length comparable to one of the portions, from the west border to the east border.

Ezek. 45:8 “This shall be his land for a possession in Israel; so My princes shall no longer oppress My people, but they shall give the rest of the land to the house of Israel according to their tribes.”

- The Lord says the land will be assigned by lot
 - As Israel enters the Kingdom, each tribe will get an allotment of the Promised land, as the Lord directs
 - They will discern His will by throwing lots, and of course the Lord will control the outcome of each throw
 - So that by throwing lots the people of Israel come to know what the specific allocation of land will be for each tribe
 - Why didn't the Lord just publish those decisions in this book?
 - Probably for two reasons...
 - First, the allocation will be a reflection of the obedience of the various tribes, and at the time this book was written that record wasn't complete
 - Secondly, to know this allocation in advance would likely have caused strife among the tribes in the present age
 - But at the time they throw lots, the Lord says they should set aside a portion of land for the temple, the priests and for prince David
 - The space carved out will be 25,000 cubits by 20,000 cubits, which is 8.3 miles by 6.6 miles
 - This space is further divided up into sections for various uses
 - The top third of the rectangle is 25,000 x 10,000 and it holds the temple with its holy empty space
 - Outside that space the priests of Zadok live
 - Then below that in the middle section of the rectangle is a 25,000 by 5,000 cubit portion for the city of Jerusalem
 - We don't know much about the city except that it is the possession of all Israel
 - Finally, the bottom third is 25,000 by 10,000 and is the home for all non-priest Levites

- On either side of this space (outside the 25,000 x 20,000 measurement) are allotments that are equal in width to the rectangle
 - These portions are for the prince and the princes
 - So this is the land reserved for David and his senior leadership
 - The total of this space is significant, amounting to the size of Salt Lake City
 - That land is divided among a handful of people, indicating how richly the Lord will award those who please Him

- Back to Chapter 45 and the priestly activities of the Kingdom Temple
 - Beginning with the offerings and feast days in the Kingdom

Ezek. 45:9 ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Enough, you princes of Israel; put away violence and destruction, and practice justice and righteousness. Stop your expropriations from My people,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 45:10 “You shall have just balances, a just ephah and a just bath.

Ezek. 45:11 “The ephah and the bath shall be the same quantity, so that the bath will contain a tenth of a homer and the ephah a tenth of a homer; their standard shall be according to the homer.

Ezek. 45:12 “The shekel shall be twenty gerahs; twenty shekels, twenty-five shekels, and fifteen shekels shall be your maneh.

Ezek. 45:13 “This is the offering that you shall offer: a sixth of an ephah from a homer of wheat; a sixth of an ephah from a homer of barley;

Ezek. 45:14 and the prescribed portion of oil (namely, the bath of oil), a tenth of a bath from each kor (which is ten baths or a homer, for ten baths are a homer);

Ezek. 45:15 and one sheep from each flock of two hundred from the watering places of Israel — for a grain offering, for a burnt offering and for peace offerings, to make atonement for them,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 45:16 “All the people of the land shall give to this offering for the prince in Israel.

Ezek. 45:17 “It shall be the prince’s part to provide the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the drink offerings, at the feasts, on the new moons and on the sabbaths, at all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel; he shall provide the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering and the peace offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel.”

- The Lord begins with an exhortation to the leaders of Israel to treat the people justly, which we know they will do in the Kingdom
 - Rather than rob from people or exploit their power, Israel’s leaders would deal fairly with the people, the Lord says
 - This has always been the Lord’s expectation for those who shepherd His people
 - And as we learned in previous chapters of Ezekiel, past generations of Israel were victims of corrupt leaders
 - In fact, Ezekiel is sitting in exile giving these prophecies to his countrymen largely because of the damage done by corrupt leaders
 - The Lord described the corruption back in Ezekiel 22

Ezek. 22:23 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezek. 22:24 “Son of man, say to her, ‘You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.’

Ezek. 22:25 “There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst like a roaring lion tearing the prey. They have devoured lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in the midst of her.

Ezek. 22:26 “Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they hide their eyes from My sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.

Ezek. 22:27 “Her princes within her are like wolves tearing the prey, by shedding blood and destroying lives in order to get dishonest gain.

Ezek. 22:28 “Her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ when the LORD has not spoken.

Ezek. 22:29 “The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice.

Ezek. 22:30 “I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one.

Ezek. 22:31 “Thus I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads,” declares the Lord GOD.

- The prophets were false and like roaring lions, they devoured the gullible and unsuspecting
- They took precious things from the people, which means the prophets used their influence to rob the people
- And because they lied to Israel, it led men to act according to their lies leading to their deaths when Babylon attacked
- The priests likewise did violence to the law, profaned the holy things of God
 - They failed to teach the people right from wrong
 - And they ignored the proper conduct of the law in observing feasts and sabbaths
- And finally, the princes (referring to the kings) were like wolves tearing prey
 - They shed blood by engaging in foolish wars contrary to the Lord’s instructions
 - And they fought against Babylon, who God sent to discipline His people
- This corruption left a gap, a vacuum of good leadership, and the Lord searched for someone to step into that gap He says
 - But none could be found...until Messiah came
 - In the Kingdom the Lord promises that Messiah’s leadership will ensure that the princes of the land serve justly
 - They will not exploit nor abuse the people

- In v.10 the Lord declares that these government officials will use just balances
 - In ancient times, monetary value was established on the basis of weight
 - A scale or balance would be used to compare the weight of a dry good with a known weight of a precious metal
 - Similar to the way we purchase vegetables by weight
- But if a corrupt merchant wanted to steal from his customers, he could literally tip the scales in his favor
 - And a king or prince could do the same so that taxes were increased without the people realizing
 - This had become the practice among Israel's corrupt leaders
- But the Lord says that won't happen in the Kingdom
 - In vs.11-12 the Lord assures Israel that an ephah and a bath would be standard, dependable and consistent in that day
 - An ephah is a dry measure of volume and a bath is a wet measure of volume from that day, and both will be equal in the Kingdom
 - Likewise shekels, which are units of weight, would not vary
- The point is that all business dealings will be fair and trustworthy in that day... another welcome change from today
 - In other words, we will never need to count our change in the Kingdom
 - But by the same token, it also confirms there will be an economy in the Kingdom
 - Money will change hands, goods will be sold and bought, wealth can be transferred and stored...real life!
- Then in v.vs.13-17 the Lord specifies the payment the people of Israel would give to the prince, David, for his own offering at the temple
 - The house of Israel makes this payment to David regularly so that he might offer it to the Lord as a sin offering
 - Once again, hearing that a sin offering is made for atonement for the house of Israel indicates sin within Israel
 - If there is sin, then apparently not all who are living in Israel are sinless at this point in history
 - The allotment required here is significant
 - One sixth of all grain produced in Israel is given in this offering
 - As well as one percent of all oil and one out of every 200 animals
 - Taken from everyone in Israel, this is a lot of material to sacrifice
 - So as they say, nothing is certain except death and taxes
 - But which of the two is the more powerful force in the Universe?
 - Well, consider that in the Kingdom we will no longer experience death...but

there will still be taxes!

- Next, we have regulations for feasts in the Kingdom

Ezek. 45:18 ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “In the first month, on the first of the month, you shall take a young bull without blemish and cleanse the sanctuary.

Ezek. 45:19 “The priest shall take some of the blood from the sin offering and put it on the door posts of the house, on the four corners of the ledge of the altar and on the posts of the gate of the inner court.

Ezek. 45:20 “Thus you shall do on the seventh day of the month for everyone who goes astray or is naive; so you shall make atonement for the house.

Ezek. 45:21 “In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall have the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten.

Ezek. 45:22 “On that day the prince shall provide for himself and all the people of the land a bull for a sin offering.

Ezek. 45:23 “During the seven days of the feast he shall provide as a burnt offering to the LORD seven bulls and seven rams without blemish on every day of the seven days, and a male goat daily for a sin offering.

Ezek. 45:24 “He shall provide as a grain offering an ephah with a bull, an ephah with a ram and a hin of oil with an ephah.

Ezek. 45:25 “In the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month, at the feast, he shall provide like this, seven days for the sin offering, the burnt offering, the grain offering and the oil.”

- The first day of every year begins with the sacrifice of a young bull to cleanse the sanctuary
 - Why does the Millennial temple need cleansing? Because sinners enter into it
 - The blood is placed on the doorpost and four posts of the altar
 - And then this ceremony is repeated on the seventh day of the first month
 - The blood of the bull is applied to the doorways of the temple similar to the lamb’s blood on Passover
 - This sacrifice cleansed the temple for the coming year
 - Then on the seventh day of the new year, this sacrifice is repeated
 - Marking the first and last day of the first week suggests Jesus, Who is the beginning of Creation and the Sabbath
 - Then later that month, on the 14th, the first feast of the year is celebrated; Passover
 - It begins on the same day as in the Mosaic Law but unlike the current Passover, the new one is seven days long
 - Under the Mosaic Law, the nation practiced a single day feast for Passover, followed by a seven day feast of Unleavened Bread
 - Now the Passover is seven days, and there is no separate feast for Unleavened

Bread

- Other differences exist as well
 - The Prince officiates over the ritual, instead of each family conducting their own Passover sacrifice
 - The first day will be marked by sin offering only it's a bull, not a lamb as it is today
 - And because it's a seven-day feast, the sacrifices are made daily during the event – both bulls and rams
 - There are also differences in the meal offerings
- Interestingly, this feast is repeated on the seventh month, which corresponds to the feast of booths or tabernacles
 - These are the only two feasts mentioned in Ezekiel
 - So it seems that these are the only feasts observed in the Kingdom
- What do we make of the differences between the Passover we have now and the one to come?

>> Image 1

- First, every feast in Israel serves the purpose of a historical memorial and a prophetic picture
 - Historically, these feasts commemorate the work of God on behalf of Israel
 - The Passover commemorates the death of the first born of Egypt but not Israel
 - The Feast of Unleavened Bread memorializes the Exodus journey in haste eating unleavened bread
 - The Feast of First Fruits commemorates the bounty of the provision of the Lord in the Spring harvest, etc.
- But these feasts also look forward to a spiritual fulfillment by Christ
 - Jesus is the Passover Lamb sacrificed on the 14th of Nisan
 - Jesus leads us away from sin and to the Father (i.e., our Exodus), and He's our Bread of Life who removes our sin (i.e., unleavened bread)
 - And Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection, our bountiful provision, who rose from the dead on the day of First Fruits
- So looking at the feasts in the Kingdom, we find two that continue to serve the same purpose

>> Image 2

- The feasts of Passover and Tabernacles are the first and the last on the Jewish calendar
- And they are the only two that still have prophetic relevance in the Kingdom
- The Passover continues to picture Christ's atoning death, which is still a message that has relevance for sinners in that age

- And the Feast of Tabernacles pictures God dwelling with His people in the Kingdom, which is obviously still relevant
- But the feasts that fall in between relate to events that take place between these two moments
 - The resurrection of Jesus, the giving of the Law, the rapture of the church, the destruction of the Tribulation, etc.
 - These are events that no longer have meaning in the Kingdom
 - Therefore, it makes sense that in the Kingdom we only remember the two feasts connected to the Kingdom
 - The first explains how you enter into the rest of God and the second pictures how that rest will be experienced
- Now we move into Chapter 46 looking at the Sabbath observance and new moon festivals

Ezek. 46:1 ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “The gate of the inner court facing east shall be shut the six working days; but it shall be opened on the sabbath day and opened on the day of the new moon.

Ezek. 46:2 “The prince shall enter by way of the porch of the gate from outside and stand by the post of the gate. Then the priests shall provide his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate and then go out; but the gate shall not be shut until the evening.

Ezek. 46:3 “The people of the land shall also worship at the doorway of that gate before the LORD on the sabbaths and on the new moons.

Ezek. 46:4 “The burnt offering which the prince shall offer to the LORD on the sabbath day shall be six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish;

Ezek. 46:5 and the grain offering shall be an ephah with the ram, and the grain offering with the lambs as much as he is able to give, and a hin of oil with an ephah.

Ezek. 46:6 “On the day of the new moon he shall offer a young bull without blemish, also six lambs and a ram, which shall be without blemish.

Ezek. 46:7 “And he shall provide a grain offering, an ephah with the bull and an ephah with the ram, and with the lambs as much as he is able, and a hin of oil with an ephah.

Ezek. 46:8 “When the prince enters, he shall go in by way of the porch of the gate and go out by the same way.

- The Sabbath observance will continue in the Kingdom, as it did under the Mosaic Law
 - But there are unique details here, of course

>> Image 3

- First, we learn that the inner court’s east door is closed six days of the week

- Remember, the outer court east door is always closed, but now we learn that the inner door is also closed most of the time
- With that door closed, there is no way for anyone visiting the temple to see the glory of the Lord six days a week
- But on the seventh day, the day of rest, the door is opened
 - So visitors to the temple on that day will be able to stand in front of that gate and look through

>> Image 4

- And presumably they might glimpse the glory of the Lord back in the deep recesses of the temple
- Remember that only believers will have access to the temple, as we learned earlier, so unbelievers will never see the glory
- On the Sabbath, special sacrifices take place but they differ than under the Mosaic Law
 - Under the Mosaic Law, there are two lambs and a ram for a total of three sheep
 - Under the Kingdom law, there are six lambs and a ram for total of seven
- The meaning of this change in Sabbath sacrifices isn't immediately clear
 - The new moon festivals also include a change in offerings
 - Though again the meaning of the change is unclear except to distinguish it from the Mosaic system
 - But the significance of the glory of God being visible on the Sabbath (and the meaning of the Sabbath itself) is clear
 - According to Hebrews 4, the Sabbath is a picture of resting in the work of Christ done on our behalf
 - So that when we believe in Christ as Messiah, we enter His rest and we rest from our own works – spiritually speaking
 - So it makes sense that the inner east door opens on the Sabbath, picturing our access to Christ through our Sabbath rest in Him
 - Also notice that the one officiating in this ceremony is the prince, David
 - Remember, the inner courtyard is the place for the priests to minister
 - And now we know that the east door leading into the inner court is open only one day of the week
 - Which means that most days the only way into the inner court is by the north and south gates leading into the priests' chambers
 - So only priests enter into the court six days a week
 - And on the seventh day, the east gate is opened for David only
 - This means that we will not see the glory even in our resurrected state, unless you believe Gentiles will be priests
 - The one passage that suggests such an outcome is Isaiah 66

Is. 66:18 “For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory.

Is. 66:19 “I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations.

Is. 66:20 “Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the LORD, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem,” says the LORD, “just as the sons of Israel bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD.

Is. 66:21 “I will also take some of them for priests and for Levites,” says the LORD.

- Depending on the reading of this passage, the Lord is either promising to make some Gentiles into priests
- Or else the “them” in v. 21 refers to the brethren, meaning Jews, which is where I lean
- Now we consider how the people of the Kingdom will engage in worship in the temple

Ezek. 46:9 “But when the people of the land come before the LORD at the appointed feasts, he who enters by way of the north gate to worship shall go out by way of the south gate. And he who enters by way of the south gate shall go out by way of the north gate. No one shall return by way of the gate by which he entered but shall go straight out.

Ezek. 46:10 “When they go in, the prince shall go in among them; and when they go out, he shall go out.

Ezek. 46:11 “At the festivals and the appointed feasts the grain offering shall be an ephah with a bull and an ephah with a ram, and with the lambs as much as one is able to give, and a hin of oil with an ephah.

Ezek. 46:12 “When the prince provides a freewill offering, a burnt offering, or peace offerings as a freewill offering to the LORD, the gate facing east shall be opened for him. And he shall provide his burnt offering and his peace offerings as he does on the sabbath day. Then he shall go out, and the gate shall be shut after he goes out.

Ezek. 46:13 “And you shall provide a lamb a year old without blemish for a burnt offering to the LORD daily; morning by morning you shall provide it.

Ezek. 46:14 “Also you shall provide a grain offering with it morning by morning, a sixth of an ephah and a third of a hin of oil to moisten the fine flour, a grain offering to the LORD continually by a perpetual ordinance.

Ezek. 46:15 “Thus they shall provide the lamb, the grain offering and the oil, morning by morning, for a continual burnt offering.”

- First, the Lord says that all who enter into the court to worship must come in one gate and exit another
 - The worship mentioned here is that which takes place on the two feast days described above
 - And the prince leads the people in worship
 - And the offerings in v.11 are to be the same as on the Sabbath or new moon
 - But on those days, the worshippers must enter and exit in a specific way
 - Remember, there are only three gates in total in the outer wall
 - And we know that the east gate was permanently closed after the Lord's glory entered
 - So that leaves only the north and south gates accessible
 - You enter by one, but you must leave by the other

>> Image 5

- Why does the Lord have these worship requirements?
 - Take a look at the illustration of a group of worshippers crossing to exit the opposite gate
 - Notice they have to pass in front of the east gate of the inner court to reach the exit regardless of which gate they use
 - As they pass the east gate, they will be able to look into the inner court because the gate will be open on this feast day
 - So as they pass they will catch sight of the glory of the Lord
 - The point of the rule is to remind the worshippers of Whom they worship
 - The prince's role to lead the people reminds us that the leader of God's people is also the worship leader
 - Technically, a musician may lead the worship in our church
 - But spiritually, the pastor is the worship leader of the congregation
 - He leads worship in the word, of course, but he also has authority over the worship in song
 - So a pastor should always take an active, leading role in both, to some degree, just as we see David leading God's people here
 - Looking at freewill offerings in vs.12-15 the Prince brings voluntary offerings to the east gate
 - The east gate will be opened for a voluntary offering like on a Sabbath day
 - As well, the priests were making daily sacrifices in the temple as is done in the tabernacle of Moses
 - In the Mosaic system, there is a lamb at the beginning of the day and another in the evening
 - In this system, there is only one at the beginning of the day

- This is another difference that defies easy explanation
- Next, we look at the gifts the prince may give to others

Ezek. 46:16 ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “If the prince gives a gift out of his inheritance to any of his sons, it shall belong to his sons; it is their possession by inheritance.

Ezek. 46:17 “But if he gives a gift from his inheritance to one of his servants, it shall be his until the year of liberty; then it shall return to the prince. His inheritance shall be only his sons’; it shall belong to them.

Ezek. 46:18 “The prince shall not take from the people’s inheritance, thrusting them out of their possession; he shall give his sons inheritance from his own possession so that My people will not be scattered, anyone from his possession.””

- This passage describes how the prince, David, would share his wealth with his “sons”
 - Now this passage is intriguing on many levels
 - First, there is the simple issue of sharing an inheritance
 - We know from New Testament teaching that each believer receives an inheritance from the Lord personally
 - So when Ezekiel talks about the prince sharing his inheritance, it must mean transferring wealth
 - David is taking wealth that the Lord gave him and transferring it to his sons for whatever reason
 - Secondly, the Lord will not allow the allotment of inheritance in the land to change hands across tribal or family boundaries
 - David can give his wealth to his sons but not to other Jews in other tribes
 - And this rule is true for all Jews in all tribes
 - Thirdly, any wealth assigned to a servant must revert back to David when the servant gains his freedom
 - This detail tells us that there may be those in the Kingdom who serve others for a period of time to learn freedom from that service
 - In ancient Israel, a person would become an indentured slave or servant because of a debt owed
 - When the debt was repaid, the service could end
 - The same seems to be true in the Kingdom
 - It seems as though someone might serve the prince to repay a debt, and at a certain point they earn their freedom
 - Could these be glorified Jews? Natural Gentiles? We can’t be sure
- But that leads us to the conversation (again) about natural vs. glorified Israel, and the

mention of prince David offers us another look at that dilemma

- As you've heard me say before, there are scripture verses that seem to say that all Israel will be glorified; which means no death and no marriage or children
 - But then there are passages like those we studied last week that seem to indicate that Israel can experience death and sin and have children
 - Death and sin are characteristics that only natural human beings can share, so that would argue that at least some in Israel are not glorified
 - But other passages seem to suggest that all Israel knows and follows the Lord perfectly, which requires glorification
- Here we find another passage that suggests Israel has natural people within it
 - David is said to have sons, which implies marriage
 - But in this case, we have a second reason to pause because we know David will be glorified in the Kingdom
 - He has died, so he has left his natural body behind
 - So the only body remaining for him is a glorified new body
- So we know David cannot marry or have children in the Kingdom, according to Luke 20:34-36
 - So how can he have sons?
 - It must be that sons refers to his resurrected descendants who are also present in the Kingdom
 - They are David's sons in the sense that they came from his family line
 - It's likely that this is speaking about later good kings like Asa or Jehoshaphat
- So David can share some of the immense wealth the Lord gives him with his sons or servants but only the sons may keep the inheritance
 - And also the Lord says that the princes of Israel will take wealth from the citizens of the Kingdom
 - Though David and the others may share their wealth with each other or servants, they may not take from the wealth of the people
 - The leaders cannot steal the people's possessions to make themselves richer
 - Each tribe in Israel has their part of the inheritance that the Lord has assigned to them and no more
- Next, the Lord tells Ezekiel how the priests will work with the sacrificed meat in the temple inner court

Ezek. 46:19 Then he brought me through the entrance, which was at the side of the gate, into the holy chambers for the priests, which faced north; and behold, there was a place at the extreme rear toward the west.

Ezek. 46:20 He said to me, "This is the place where the priests shall boil the guilt offering and the sin offering and where they shall bake the grain offering, in

order that they may not bring them out into the outer court to transmit holiness to the people.”

- We're inside one of those side buildings that flank the temple inside the inner court wall, the priests' quarters, specifically the one on the south side

>> Images 6-8

- And in those buildings the priests boil the offerings and bake the grains offered to the Lord
 - Like their garments, these sacrifices can't leave the inner court to be exposed to the people outside
 - Again, it seems these things are held in secret to keep people outside the temple seeing the glory of the Lord so that faith is required

Ezek. 46:21 Then he brought me out into the outer court and led me across to the four corners of the court; and behold, in every corner of the court there was a small court.

Ezek. 46:22 In the four corners of the court there were enclosed courts, forty cubits long and thirty wide; these four in the corners were the same size.

Ezek. 46:23 There was a row of masonry round about in them, around the four of them, and boiling places were made under the rows round about.

Ezek. 46:24 Then he said to me, “These are the boiling places where the ministers of the house shall boil the sacrifices of the people.”

- In contrast to the secret sacrifice boiling in the priests' quarters, there were public areas for preparing the sacrifices in the outer court

>> Images 9-10

- In v.21 we're told there are courtyards created in the four corners of the large outer court wall
 - These corner courtyards were 40x30 cubits in size (66ft by 50ft)
 - Surrounding the courtyards was a masonry wall that formed a series of fireplaces for cooking
 - And on those fires, the priests were boiling the sacrifices that the people brought to the temple
- Since these sacrifices were not offered by the priests inside the inner court, they did not possess the glory of the Lord
 - Furthermore, the sacrificial process required the worshipper to eat some of the sacrifice
 - So all this activity took place in the outer court away from the glory of the Lord

- So looking at the Kingdom sacrificial system compared to Moses, we find similarities and differences

>> Image 11

- Both systems include:
 - A physical Temple with God's glory
 - Altars & sprinkling of blood
 - Burnt, meal, peace, sin, and drink offerings
 - Priests and ritual cleansing
 - Sabbaths and new moon offerings
 - Morning sacrifices
 - Feasts of Passover & Tabernacles
 - Year of Jubilee (release of servants & return of property)
- But the Millennial system does NOT have:
 - Feasts of Pentecost, First Fruits, Trumpets and Atonement
 - High priest
 - Ark
 - Veil
 - Menorah & Showbread
 - Evening sacrifices
- Zechariah gives us a concise overview of how worship at this temple will go from the perspective of other nations

Zech. 14:16 Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Zech. 14:17 And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them.

Zech. 14:18 If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the LORD smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Zech. 14:19 This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Zech. 14:20 In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "HOLY TO THE LORD." And the cooking pots in the LORD'S house will be like the bowls before the altar.

Zech. 14:21 Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the LORD

of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts in that day.

- Notice that the feast of booths is mentioned here but not the other Millennial feast of Passover
 - So it's unclear if Gentiles celebrate that feast or only Jews
 - But in the case of Booths, the feast is mandatory for all Gentile nations
- In fact, any Gentile nation that doesn't go up will suffer drought
 - And the result of the drought will be a plague that results in nations dying
 - Obviously, this would refer to natural (unglorified) unbelievers
- Finally, Zechariah confirms the worshippers will join together in the outer court cooking their sacrifices as Ezekiel described
 - But no Canaanite will be in the house of the Lord in that day
 - Presumably, a Canaanite refers to a pagan unbeliever
- From here we will move into the topographical changes and tribal borders of the Kingdom...

- We've reached the final lesson of our study in Ezekiel
 - We've studied the Lord's condemnation of Israel for their failure to repent of their idolatry
 - And as He promised them, the nation would enter an extended time of exile as punishment for that sin
 - Their time in exile led Israel to turn away once and for all from worshipping other gods
 - But even as the nation entered into exile, the Lord instructed His prophet to reveal Israel's glorious distant future
 - The second half of the book provided a guided tour of the Millennial Kingdom temple
 - And it told us of the work of the priests, the religious life of the people and the nature of Christ's dwelling among the people
 - And ultimately, of the continuing requirement for faith for the unsaved among the nations of that day
 - In our final lesson, we look at some specific topographical changes in Israel and the tribal boundaries that mark the territory
 - I'm sure we would have preferred the Lord tell us much more about general life in the Kingdom
 - But not wanting to spoil the surprise, I guess, the Lord chose to only reveal a few features beyond the temple
 - And one of those details is a new river system extending out from Jerusalem

Ezek. 47:1 Then he brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the house faced east. And the water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar.

Ezek. 47:2 He brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate by way of the gate that faces east. And behold, water was trickling from the south side.

Ezek. 47:3 When the man went out toward the east with a line in his hand, he measured a thousand cubits, and he led me through the water, water reaching the ankles.

Ezek. 47:4 Again he measured a thousand and led me through the water, water reaching the knees. Again he measured a thousand and led me through the water, water reaching the loins.

Ezek. 47:5 Again he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not ford, for the water had risen, enough water to swim in, a river that could not be forded.

- As we look at the inner court with the temple door in front of us (we're facing west),

Ezekiel says there is a stream of water flowing out of the temple

>> Images 1-4

- It flows under the threshold of the door and past the south side of the altar in the inner court before exiting the east inner gate
 - Ezekiel says he was then taken by way of the outer north gate outside the outer wall
 - He then made his way around the outer wall to the closed outer east gate
 - At that point Ezekiel found the trickle emerging from under the wall just south of the gate
- Then in v.3 Ezekiel and his heavenly escort begin to follow the stream and measure it as they go
 - They measure for a third of a mile and then take a depth reading of the water
 - At that point the water was now ankle deep and flowing
 - Then in v.4 he travels another third of a mile and measures the water at a depth up to his knees
 - After another thousand cubits, the water is at Ezekiel's waist
 - Apparently Ezekiel is wading through the water as he walks
- We know the temple mount of that day will be located in the same general location as the temple mount today
 - However, we also know that the land will be very different
 - The temple will sit on a high mountain and no other mountains will be as high
 - And since there be water flowing eastward from the temple, it must be flowing downhill, gaining volume as it goes
- Though Ezekiel doesn't mention it here, Zechariah says that this river splits and flows in two directions, not just one

Zech. 14:8 And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter.

>> Image 5

- So apparently Ezekiel is describing only one side of the Temple's water system
 - Zechariah says it exits Jerusalem and then splits in half from there
 - So the river separates at some point outside the temple walls and flows toward the east and toward the west
 - The focus of Ezekiel's vision is the destination for the eastern half of the river, the Dead Sea as we call it today

Ezek. 47:6 He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen this?” Then he brought me back to the bank of the river.

Ezek. 47:7 Now when I had returned, behold, on the bank of the river there were very many trees on the one side and on the other.

Ezek. 47:8 Then he said to me, “These waters go out toward the eastern region and go down into the Arabah; then they go toward the sea, being made to flow into the sea, and the waters of the sea become fresh.

Ezek. 47:9 “It will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live. And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there and the others become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes.

Ezek. 47:10 “And it will come about that fishermen will stand beside it; from Engedi to Eneglaim there will be a place for the spreading of nets. Their fish will be according to their kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea, very many.

Ezek. 47:11 “But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt.

Ezek. 47:12 “By the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing.”

- As Ezekiel reached the point where the river was too high to continue walking, he moves to the bank
 - Then Ezekiel describes the bank as lined with many trees
 - The escort tells Ezekiel these waters (as opposed to the other waters of Zechariah) go to the eastern region, to the Arabah
 - The word Arabah means desert, and in this context it refers to the Jordan river valley, which is a desert valley today
 - In fact, if you were to retrace Ezekiel’s steps today, you wouldn’t see much water and hardly any trees

>> Images 6-11

- Today, you would descend from an alpine desert into a barren sandy desert
- Which makes this vision all the more incredible, and it also tells us that this cannot be a vision of past events
- Furthermore, they are made to flow into the sea, referring to the Dead Sea in the Jordan River valley
 - The Jordan River flows south from the Sea of Galilee into the Dead Sea, a salt water lake
 - The Dead Sea is salty because there is no outlet for this body of water
- Therefore sediment constantly flows in and water evaporates in the hot desert air,

causing salt concentrations to increase

- Today, the water is saturated with salt at around 35% – and at such high concentrations nothing can live in it
- Hence its name, the Dead Sea
- But Ezekiel is told that when the Kingdom arrives, the water flowing east from the temple will reach this sea
 - And when it does, the Temple river will transform the Dead Sea into fresh water
 - Ezekiel doesn't say if this happens miraculously (instantaneously) or naturally over time as fresh water dilutes the sea
 - The sense of the text, however, is a miraculous change; especially considering that the lake becomes filled with every kind of fish
 - So the Dead Sea comes to life as a beautiful Millennial picture of God's grace bringing life to the dead
 - Ezekiel adds that fishermen will fish there, from Engedi which is in the south near Masada to Eneglaim (which is unknown but probably somewhere in the north)
 - They will fish according to their kinds, meaning there will be so much variety of fish that fishermen will specialize in their catch
 - And the fish will be bountiful
 - But salt marshes remain, probably as a testimony of how the Lord changed the water from salt to fresh
 - This is truly a miracle for all the world to see...in faith
- Furthermore, there will be fruit trees lining the Dead Sea according to v.12
 - This is very different than the land around the sea today
 - Very few trees grow and nothing grows on the banks of the Dead Sea
 - The mineral content is simply too high
 - These trees will not lose their leaves, and fruit will be ever present
 - Furthermore, the leaves will provide healing
 - These special properties are a consequence of the water flowing from the temple
 - The connection between the tree's sustaining power and the water from the temple communicates the life-giving power of Christ
 - The world can't see Jesus, but they can see the river of life flowing from the temple
 - This sign is to encourage faith, as Jesus said in John 7

John 7:37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.

John 7:38 "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being

will flow rivers of living water.’”

- These details also draw a connection to the Garden of Eden and to the New Heavens and New Earth that follows the Kingdom period
 - In Revelation 22 we read

Rev. 22:1 Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb,

Rev. 22:2 in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

- This is a different river and tree, but notice the similarities
 - This tree is living from water that comes from the throne of God
 - This tree is also yielding fruit constantly
 - And this tree also has the power to heal in its leaves
- Apparently there is a tree of life in the Kingdom as well, and those similarities suggest a common purpose
 - What is the purpose of the tree of life?
 - We see that in Genesis 3

Gen. 3:22 Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” —

Gen. 3:23 therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.

Gen. 3:24 So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

- This tree had the power to keep Adam and Woman’s physical bodies alive forever by sustaining and healing them continually
 - In fact the Lord had to drive them out of the Garden and station an angel to bar them from returning to ensure they would die
 - Obviously God has designed this tree to reflect our supply from Christ, Who upholds everything by the word of His power
 - So we see the water leaving the throne in the temple, sustaining the tree which sustains us
- Furthermore, the tree only appears on earth during periods when immortality exists

- In the Garden Man and Woman were eternal prior to their expulsion from the Garden, and they had a tree
 - In the New Heavens and Earth everyone will be immortal, and we will have a tree there
 - And now we see in the Kingdom the tree of life exists, and of course there will be immortal human beings in the Kingdom
- So the implication is that immortality itself requires this tree
 - That is, the way God grants physical immortality to mankind is through the mechanism of this tree's fruit and leaves
 - In doing so, He ensures that we never forget that He is our supply of life
 - In fact, the ultimate fulfillment of John 7 may be pointing to this tree...
 - The flowing waters of Christ are truly our living waters, both spiritually *and* physically
- Next we move to the boundaries of the tribes of Israel

Ezek. 47:13 Thus says the Lord GOD, "This shall be the boundary by which you shall divide the land for an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel; Joseph shall have two portions.

Ezek. 47:14 "You shall divide it for an inheritance, each one equally with the other; for I swore to give it to your forefathers, and this land shall fall to you as an inheritance.

Ezek. 47:15 "This shall be the boundary of the land: on the north side, from the Great Sea by the way of Hethlon, to the entrance of Zedad;

Ezek. 47:16 Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim, which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazer-hatticon, which is by the border of Hauran.

Ezek. 47:17 "The boundary shall extend from the sea to Hazar-enan at the border of Damascus, and on the north toward the north is the border of Hamath. This is the north side.

Ezek. 47:18 "The east side, from between Hauran, Damascus, Gilead and the land of Israel, shall be the Jordan; from the north border to the eastern sea you shall measure. This is the east side.

Ezek. 47:19 "The south side toward the south shall extend from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribath-kadesh, to the brook of Egypt and to the Great Sea. This is the south side toward the south.

Ezek. 47:20 "The west side shall be the Great Sea, from the south border to a point opposite Lebo-hamath. This is the west side.

Ezek. 47:21 "So you shall divide this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel.

Ezek. 47:22 "You shall divide it by lot for an inheritance among yourselves and among the aliens who stay in your midst, who bring forth sons in your midst. And they shall be to you as the native-born among the sons of Israel; they shall

be allotted an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel.

Ezek. 47:23 “And in the tribe with which the alien stays, there you shall give him his inheritance,” declares the Lord GOD.

- The Lord established the boundaries of Israel in the Kingdom

>> Images 12-15

- To appreciate these borders, it helps to see Israel’s borders today
 - It’s a small country, and it’s much smaller than it was under David or Solomon
 - And it’s also much smaller than it will be in the Kingdom according to these borders
 - Because it’s a fulfillment of the promises given to Abraham
- Abraham was told

Gen. 15:18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying,
“To your descendants I have given this land,
From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:

- This gives us a southern and northern border
- Then we move to Joshua where we find:

Josh. 1:2 “Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel.

Josh. 1:3 “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses.

Josh. 1:4 “From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory.

- Now we see confirmation of the southern and northern borders and the addition of an (obvious) western border
- Finally, looking at Ezekiel we get a much better defined eastern border
 - It extends into present-day Syria in the north
 - Then comes back to parallel the Jordan River
 - Until bracing down into much of the Sinai
- This allows us to draw four approximate lines from which we arrive at the borders of the Kingdom Israel

>> Images 16-18

- If we “smooth” out those borders we get a more realistic border line

- Still, this is approximate though much larger than present day Israel
- Next we look at the tribal allotments

Ezek. 48:1 “Now these are the names of the tribes: from the northern extremity, beside the way of Hethlon to Lebo-hamath, as far as Hazar-enan at the border of Damascus, toward the north beside Hamath, running from east to west, Dan, one portion.

Ezek. 48:2 “Beside the border of Dan, from the east side to the west side, Asher, one portion.

Ezek. 48:3 “Beside the border of Asher, from the east side to the west side, Naphtali, one portion.

Ezek. 48:4 “Beside the border of Naphtali, from the east side to the west side, Manasseh, one portion.

Ezek. 48:5 “Beside the border of Manasseh, from the east side to the west side, Ephraim, one portion.

Ezek. 48:6 “Beside the border of Ephraim, from the east side to the west side, Reuben, one portion.

Ezek. 48:7 “Beside the border of Reuben, from the east side to the west side, Judah, one portion.

- Ezekiel tells us to start dividing up the territory from the north and then moving southward

>> Images 19-20

- So the tribes descend in the order listed in equal portions except for Joseph
 - To understand why Joseph isn't counted, remember that originally Jacob had 12 sons
 - When Jacob later discovered that Joseph was alive, Joseph had married an Egyptian and already had two sons of his own
- At that time, Jacob told Joseph that he would adopt Joseph's two boys, Ephraim and Manasseh
 - And future sons of Joseph would belong to Joseph's household, but these two boys would be considered sons of Jacob
 - So Jacob made Joseph's two sons to be his two sons and in that way Jacob went from 12 sons to 13
- So in that way, we can say that Joseph received the double portion of the inheritance
 - In Eastern culture, the most favored son (usually the oldest) received a double portion of the father's inheritance
 - In the case of this family the Lord created an inheritance for the family, since God created the people of Israel in the first place
- So the Lord told Abraham he would have an inheritance in the land and a seed blessing

that would bless all nations

Gen. 12:1 Now the LORD said to Abram,

“Go forth from your country,

And from your relatives

And from your father’s house,

To the land which I will show you;

Gen. 12:2 And I will make you a great nation,

And I will bless you,

And make your name great;

And so you shall be a blessing;

Gen. 12:3 And I will bless those who bless you,

And the one who curses you I will curse.

And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

- Like any inheritance, the inheritance God gave Abraham could be passed down to sons
 - Isaac received it and then did Jacob as the Lord determined
 - But when Jacob had 12 sons, the inheritance would have to be divided out among children
- Technically, Reuben was first born, so he should receive the double portion of the inheritance – but how do you divide the seed promise?
 - You can’t, so only one son would receive the promise to bring the Messiah
 - But Reuben disqualified himself by dishonoring his father’s bed
 - And the next two sons, Simeon and Levi likewise dishonored themselves as well
- Which meant Judah was in the lead position and he received the seed promise
 - But the inheritance of the land can be divided, so the sons share equally in that
 - Except in God’s providence, Joseph received the double portion by virtue of his two sons each getting a portion
 - But Levi had no portion since that tribe lives in the sanctuary
 - So in this list we have 12 sons, though Joseph is missing, and his two sons receive a portion each
- Speaking of the sanctuary city, we read how that allotment goes next

Ezek. 48:8 “And beside the border of Judah, from the east side to the west side, shall be the allotment which you shall set apart, 25,000 cubits in width, and in length like one of the portions, from the east side to the west side; and the sanctuary shall be in the middle of it.

Ezek. 48:9 “The allotment that you shall set apart to the LORD shall be 25,000 cubits in length and 10,000 in width.

Ezek. 48:10 “The holy allotment shall be for these, namely for the priests, toward the north 25,000 cubits in length, toward the west 10,000 in width, toward the east 10,000 in width, and toward the south 25,000 in length; and the sanctuary of the LORD shall be in its midst.

Ezek. 48:11 “It shall be for the priests who are sanctified of the sons of Zadok, who have kept My charge, who did not go astray when the sons of Israel went astray as the Levites went astray.

Ezek. 48:12 “It shall be an allotment to them from the allotment of the land, a most holy place, by the border of the Levites.

Ezek. 48:13 “Alongside the border of the priests the Levites shall have 25,000 cubits in length and 10,000 in width. The whole length shall be 25,000 cubits and the width 10,000.

Ezek. 48:14 “Moreover, they shall not sell or exchange any of it, or alienate this choice portion of land; for it is holy to the LORD.

Ezek. 48:15 “The remainder, 5,000 cubits in width and 25,000 in length, shall be for common use for the city, for dwellings and for open spaces; and the city shall be in its midst.

Ezek. 48:16 “These shall be its measurements: the north side 4,500 cubits, the south side 4,500 cubits, the east side 4,500 cubits, and the west side 4,500 cubits.

Ezek. 48:17 “The city shall have open spaces: on the north 250 cubits, on the south 250 cubits, on the east 250 cubits, and on the west 250 cubits.

Ezek. 48:18 “The remainder of the length alongside the holy allotment shall be 10,000 cubits toward the east and 10,000 toward the west; and it shall be alongside the holy allotment. And its produce shall be food for the workers of the city.

Ezek. 48:19 “The workers of the city, out of all the tribes of Israel, shall cultivate it.

Ezek. 48:20 “The whole allotment shall be 25,000 by 25,000 cubits; you shall set apart the holy allotment, a square, with the property of the city.

Ezek. 48:21 “The remainder shall be for the prince, on the one side and on the other of the holy allotment and of the property of the city; in front of the 25,000 cubits of the allotment toward the east border and westward in front of the 25,000 toward the west border, alongside the portions, it shall be for the prince. And the holy allotment and the sanctuary of the house shall be in the middle of it.

Ezek. 48:22 “Exclusive of the property of the Levites and the property of the city, which are in the middle of that which belongs to the prince, everything between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin shall be for the prince.

- We studied much of this detail in earlier chapters, so I will provide a picture and make some basic observations

>> Images 21-22

- First, this allotment is similar to Washington DC in the sense that it's not land belonging to any tribe but independent of all tribes
 - It's divided up into sections as we remember
 - One section is 25,000cu by 10,000cu section for the temple priests of Zadok
 - Next to that is the section for other Levites
 - None of this land may be sold or exchanged
- Another allotment in vs.15-19 is for the holy city of Jerusalem and its open spaces
 - These spaces are for common use by all Jews and include homes and a green belt and a farm
 - In v.20 we're told the entire allotment for priests and city is nearly 70 sq miles
- On the east and west sides of this 70 sq mile section would be land for the prince, meaning David
 - One man, King David, receives a portion of land almost as big as every other tribe received
 - That tells us something of how the Lord felt about David
- Then we see the rest of tribes

Ezek. 48:23 “As for the rest of the tribes: from the east side to the west side, Benjamin, one portion.

Ezek. 48:24 “Beside the border of Benjamin, from the east side to the west side, Simeon, one portion.

Ezek. 48:25 “Beside the border of Simeon, from the east side to the west side, Issachar, one portion.

Ezek. 48:26 “Beside the border of Issachar, from the east side to the west side, Zebulun, one portion.

Ezek. 48:27 “Beside the border of Zebulun, from the east side to the west side, Gad, one portion.

Ezek. 48:28 “And beside the border of Gad, at the south side toward the south, the border shall be from Tamar to the waters of Meribath-kadesh, to the brook of Egypt, to the Great Sea.

Ezek. 48:29 “This is the land which you shall divide by lot to the tribes of Israel for an inheritance, and these are their several portions,” declares the Lord GOD.

>> Images 23

- This completes the allotment of tribes
- Finally, we see some descriptions of the city and its gates

Ezek. 48:30 “These are the exits of the city: on the north side, 4,500 cubits by measurement,

Ezek. 48:31 shall be the gates of the city, named for the tribes of Israel, three gates toward the north: the gate of Reuben, one; the gate of Judah, one; the gate of Levi, one.

Ezek. 48:32 “On the east side, 4,500 cubits, shall be three gates: the gate of Joseph, one; the gate of Benjamin, one; the gate of Dan, one.

Ezek. 48:33 “On the south side, 4,500 cubits by measurement, shall be three gates: the gate of Simeon, one; the gate of Issachar, one; the gate of Zebulun, one.

Ezek. 48:34 “On the west side, 4,500 cubits, shall be three gates: the gate of Gad, one; the gate of Asher, one; the gate of Naphtali, one.

Ezek. 48:35 “The city shall be 18,000 cubits round about; and the name of the city from that day shall be, ‘The LORD is there.’”

- The name of the Millennial city of Israel is not given in Ezekiel, though any Jew would have known its name
 - Zechariah gives it to us

Zech. 14:8 And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter.

- Obviously, it will still be called Jerusalem
- The city overall will be 1.5 miles on each of its four sides
- And each side has three gates for a total of twelve
- Each gate is named after a tribe, so that the twelve are memorialized
- This design is similar to the one for the New Jerusalem, in which the city is a cube, not a square, and exactly 1,000 times larger
 - But it too has 12 entrances named after the tribes
 - So the design of the Kingdom city suggests the next age, just as the present city suggests the Kingdom age
- Finally, the name of the city will also be “The Lord is there” which is Jehovah Shammah
 - Interestingly, the phrase is the Lord is “there” not “here” as most of the world will not be in the city
 - Therefore, when the world speaks of Jerusalem, they say “the Lord is there”
 - Here again, it will be a testimony to the unbelieving world that their God resides in a certain city on earth
 - But it will require faith for the people of that time to accept it
 - Nevertheless, the people of Israel will be there and will be blessed by their close

relationship with the God Who called them and preserved them for that moment