

Ezekiel

Dire circumstances require extreme measures. When the unthinkable happens to Israel, namely, the destruction of their temple—God’s house, a deported priest becomes to a Babylonian community of captives a living object lesson of why it had been necessary for Yahweh to resort to such extreme measures. Ezekiel’s visions and messages became for that community, and every generation of Jews since, both the black backdrop of God’s righteous judgment and the white pearl of hope for their eventual restoration. As glorious as the past had been it paled in comparison with what God would some day do on behalf of His chosen people. Whatever the nation would have to endure by way of purifying discipline, it would be proven to be worth it in the end.

Authorship

Ezekiel is identified as the son of a priest who lived in the land of the Chaldeans, making him an exile of the Babylonian captivity. He was apparently thirty years old when he began his prophetic ministry in the fifth year of Jehoiachin’s exile (592 B.C.), which would place his birth at c. 622 B.C. Unable to enter actual temple service, Ezekiel was called to a prophetic ministry that centered on the temple, though he visited it only through visions. He was commissioned with the unpopular message of God’s determination of an extended period of captivity for Israel due to their rebellion and was called upon to perform difficult and unusual things in the course of that proclamation. His name means something like “God strengthens (hardens),” which is appropriate with respect to both his personal needs and his prophetic message.

Date

According to his own chronological information, Ezekiel carried on his prophetic ministry between 592 B.C. and 570 B.C., that is, during the first phase of the Babylonian captivity.

Historical Setting

The northern nation Israel had been defeated and deported in 722 B.C., leaving Judah with an ominous warning, one that had gone largely unheeded. Jeremiah had pronounced the coming doom at the hands of the Babylonians, a doom that finally began in 605 B.C. with Nebuchadnezzar’s defeat of Assyria and Egypt and his subsequent invasion of Judah, upon which he deported a number of Israelites to Babylon, including Daniel and his friends. In 597 B.C. the Babylonian monarch again invaded Judah and despoiled the temple, hauling its

treasure and all the nobles of the land back to Babylon. Ezekiel was part of this second deportation. He began his prophetic ministry five years later (“in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s captivity—1:3) and continued until 570 B.C. (Ezek 29:17). This period saw the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and the third deportation (586 B.C.).

Original Readers

Though Ezekiel’s ministry concerned Jerusalem and the temple, both in immediate judgment and ultimate restoration and glory, his ministry was to the Babylonian exiles. This may have included exiles stemming from the earlier Assyrian captivity as well.

Occasion

The impetus for Ezekiel’s literary activity was the reception of visions and messages from the Lord, which had announced the imminent destruction of Jerusalem. The reason for writing these down is so that Israel might have a permanent record of the reasons for that judgment as well as the prophetic assurance that God would eventually restore Israel to the land in glory and peace.

Special Issues

The Interpretation of Apocalyptic. The message of Ezekiel, couched as it is in visions and symbols and directed toward the ultimate outcome of history is often termed “apocalyptic.” This term has been variously defined. It should be understood as a specific literary genre that has its beginnings in an exilic type setting. Merrill defines it as a “cataclysmic way of perceiving the eventual sovereignty of Yahweh and the elevation of his people Israel as the head of all the nations.”¹ It is important to remember that, though symbols do not interpret themselves, when the biblical author uses symbols and images he does so within the framework of the intentions of the divine author. This means that the clues for interpreting these symbols lies within the totality of a writer’s work, as supplemented by the rest of Scripture. Once the knowableness and inner consistency of the Scriptures are assumed, the interpreter may ascertain and validate the text’s meaning and application. Thus, the actual intention of Ezekiel’s futuristic images must

¹ Eugene H. Merrill, “A Theology of Ezekiel and Daniel,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, Roy B. Zuck, ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 366. Alexander defines apocalyptic literature as “symbolic visionary prophetic literature, composed during oppressive conditions, consisting of visions whose events are recorded exactly as they were seen by the author and explained through a divine interpreter, and whose theological content is primarily eschatological” (Ralph Alexander, *Ezekiel* in *Everyman’s Bible Commentary* series (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), 115; see also Alexander’s “Hermeneutics of Old Testament Apocalyptic Literature,” (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1968)).

correspond to the historic, plain-sense promises made to the patriarchs upon which Israel's national identity and destiny are based. Since Israel has a historically determinable purpose and goal according to the Abrahamic, and Davidic covenants, the interpretation of the prophet's symbols must correspond to and inform that depiction of reality. For example, the nature and purpose of a future temple is entirely dependent upon the viability of Israel's perpetual existence as a nation. Thus, apocalyptic is controlled and understood in terms of Scripture's plain statements about God's intentions for His covenant nation throughout the course of time.

The Eschatological Temple and its Animal Sacrifices. Many modern commentators have objected to the concept of a restored temple cultus, complete with animal sacrifices, since Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus Christ, by His own death, put an end to the sacrificial system (cf. Heb 9:24-28). However, it must be countered that even those sacrifices had no efficacy in and of themselves when it came to the guilt of sin. They were all anticipatory of the sinless sacrifice of the human Lamb of God whom Yahweh would provide in due time. Since Ezekiel can in no way be construed as indicating that the whole Mosaic system will be re-instituted, it is best to understand the offerings of chapters 42–46 as memorial sacrifices, much in the same manner that the elements of the Lord's Supper point to Christ's final and effective payment for sin. But why return to the bloody rituals of Old Testament Judaism? One reason is that Israel has yet to fulfill its covenant mandate as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod 19:5-6). This mosaic sacrificial system was Israel's prescribed method of manifesting the holiness of God and they still need to give an adequate demonstration of that. Secondly, it must be remembered that sin and death will still be operative in the millennial kingdom (which is the context of Ezekiel's temple and its service). The death of innocent animals will be a graphic reminder of this fact in an otherwise peaceable and harmonious environment. In the eternal state, when the Lamb Himself is the temple, there will doubtless be no need for such sacrifices (cf. Rev 21:1–22:5).

The Title "Son of Man" as it Pertains to Christ in the Gospels. Over ninety times Ezekiel is addressed as "Son of Man" by the Lord. The term probably indicates Ezekiel's human frailty and thus his need to depend upon the Spirit to sustain him in his prophetic ministry. In the Gospels this is presented as one of Jesus' favorite terms in referring to Himself. It is nearly universally agreed that Daniel 7:13 and 8:17 are what inform Jesus' usage of "Son of Man" as a messianic title. It seems likely, however, that its occurrence in Ezekiel must have had

significance as well, at least with respect to Jesus' humanity and dependence on the Spirit.² Perhaps Jesus' use of this title was also intended to underscore His own authority as an eschatological prophet who was carrying forth Ezekiel's message of hope in a restored kingdom for Israel.

Theme Statement

Since Yahweh cannot dwell in a defiled house, Israel must be purified through the discipline of captivity, after which she will be restored and renewed in preparation for Yahweh's perpetual dwelling among them.

Outline

- I. Ezekiel is called, commissioned, and confirmed in his ministry to Israel.....1:1–7:27
 - A. Ezekiel's ministry is set in the context of captivity.1:1-3
 - B. Ezekiel is confronted with a vision of Yahweh's glory.1:4-28
 - C. Ezekiel is called to declare Yahweh's word to rebellious Israel.....2:1–3:14
 1. Ezekiel is commissioned to go to a rebellious people.....2:1-7
 2. Ezekiel is cautioned not to rebel or be discouraged in the face of Israel's rebuff of his message.2:8–3:11
 3. Ezekiel is encouraged by Yahweh's glorious presence and sent to his ministry.....3:12-14
 - D. Ezekiel is commissioned in his ministry to Israel as watchman and prophet.....3:15–6:14
 1. Ezekiel is commissioned in his ministry as a watchman.....3:15–5:17
 - a. Ezekiel is instructed about the nature of his ministry to the unresponsive of Israel.3:15-27
 - b. Ezekiel is instructed about the method of his ministry with respect to the coming judgment of Jerusalem.4:1–5:17
 - 1) He is to enact the siege of Jerusalem.4:1-17
 - 2) He is to enact the destruction of Jerusalem.5:1-17
 2. Ezekiel is commissioned to his ministry as a prophet.....6:1-14
 - E. Ezekiel is confirmed as to the imminence of the judgment he was to proclaim.7:1-27

² Alexander remarks: "This title indicates the frailty and weakness of man the creature humbled before the mighty and majestic God, who had just been revealed in the previous vision By this title Ezekiel would be reminded continually that he was dependent on the Spirit's power, which enabled him to receive the message of God (v. 2) and to deliver it in the power and authority of the Lord—"This is what the Sovereign LORD says" (v. 4). This same name—"Son of Man"—was given Christ in the Gospels (Luke 19:10) to emphasize his relation to humanity and his voluntary dependence on the Spirit of God (Ralph Alexander, "Ezekiel," in *Isaiah-Ezekiel* Vol. 6 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. Frank E. Gaebelein and Richard P. Polcyn eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986)).

- II. Ezekiel announces that judgment is at hand for Judah and the Nations.....8:1–33:20
- A. Ezekiel depicts Judah’s judgment as imminent.....8:1–19:14
1. The departure of the glory of Yahweh from the temple signals the inevitability of judgment.....8:1–13:23
 - a. Ezekiel is shown the abominations of the temple, which have provoked Yahweh’s departure from the sanctuary.....8:1-18
 - b. As the glory prepares to depart, the wicked of the temple are symbolically slain.....9:1-11
 - c. As the glory further departs coals of purifying judgment are cast over the whole city.10:1-22
 - d. Wicked counselors are judged for their false advice.11:1-13
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 - b. Israel will be punished for persistent unfaithfulness, though a remnant will remain.14:12-23
 - c. The land will become desolate.....15:1-8
 - d. Israel will be judged as an adulterer.....16:1-59
 - e. (Despite the coming judgment, Yahweh will renew covenant with Israel in the future.)16:60-63
 - f. Israel is guilty of rebelling against God’s instrument of judgment.17:1-21
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- B. Ezekiel confirms Judah’s judgment as unavoidable.....20:1–23:49
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 3. Israel’s idolatrous leaders must be judged for their wickedness and irresponsibility.22:1-31
 4. Jerusalem must be judged because her faithless sister Samaria had been.23:1-49
- C. Ezekiel announces Jerusalem’s judgment as having begun.24:1–25:17
1. It is a judgment of purification, like that of a boiling pot.....24:1-14
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- D. Ezekiel reveals the nature of other nations' judgment.26:1–33:20
 - 1. Tyre will be judged for its attitude toward Israel brought on by its callous pursuit of trade.....26:1–28:19
 - a. Tyre becomes the object of a divine judgment oracle.26:1-14
 - b. Tyre will become an international object lesson.26:15-21
 - c. Tyre is lamented for her demise.27:1-36
 - d. Tyre's ruler is judged for his impious improprieties.28:1-19
 - 2. Sidon will suffer judgment for troubling Israel.28:20-23
 - 3. Israel will one day dwell in the land in security and safety.28:24-26
 - 4. Egypt will be judged for its prideful fierceness toward the other nations, including Israel.....29:1–32:32
 - a. Judgment upon Pharaoh and Egypt is pronounced.....29:1–31:18
 - 1) Egypt's demise is predicted for its callous pride and lack of respect for Israel.....29:1-16
 - 2) Egypt will be plundered by Nebuchadnezzar.29:17-21
 - 3) Egypt's alliances will fail.30:1-19
 - 4) Pharaoh's power will be broken.....30:21-26
 - 5) Egypt will be cut down like Assyria.31:1-18
 - b. Lamentation over Pharaoh and Egypt is made.32:1-32
 - 5. Ezekiel reminds Israel of his ministry as watchman to call individuals to repentance.....33:1-20
- III. Ezekiel proclaims hope and encouragement for Judah in the future.....33:21–48:35
 - A. Jerusalem's captivity is announced, thus shifting Ezekiel's focus.33:21-22
 - B. Israel will be restored to the land through a covenant of peace.33:23–39:29
 - 1. The reason for Israel's removal from the land is reviewed.33:23-33
 - 2. The provision for Israel's restoration to the land is revealed.....34:1-31
 - a. Israel's false shepherds will be judged and the flock removed from their care.34:1-10
 - b. Yahweh will deliver Israel through a covenant of peace and rule over them as the True Shepherd.34:11-31
 - 3. The process of Israel's restoration to the land is set forth.35:1–39:29
 - a. The Promised Land will be delivered from Israel's enemies and filled with Yahweh's people.35:1–36:15
 - b. The people of promise will be spiritually renewed for acceptable obedience unto full blessing in the land.36:16–37:14
 - c. The people will be reunited as one kingdom under one King, Messiah-David.37:15-28
 - d. Yahweh will put down a final attempt of foreigners to possess the land.....38:1–39:29
 - C. Israel will worship in a temple indwelt by the glory of Yahweh.40:1–48:35
 - 1. The area of the temple is described.40:1–42:20
 - a. A commission to declare the temple is given to Ezekiel.....40:1-5
 - b. The gateways of the temple are measured.....40:6-37
 - c. The tables of sacrifice are measured.....40:38-43
 - d. The chambers for singers and priests are viewed.40:44-46
 - e. The inner court and vestibule are measured.40:47-49
 - f. The sanctuary and bordering chambers are measured.....41:1-11

- g. The whole temple and its sanctuary are described and measured.41:12-26
- h. The chambers for the priests to partake of the sacrifices are described.42:1-14
- i. The outer perimeter of the temple is measured.42:15-20
- 2. The return of the glory of Yahweh is depicted.43:1-9
 - a. The glory of Yahweh entered and filled the temple.43:1-5
 - b. Assurance of Yahweh's permanent residence is given.43:6-9
- 3. The service of the temple is delineated.43:10-46:24
 - a. Ezekiel is told to describe the temple to Israel for their encouragement and motivation.43:10-12
 - b. The altar is measured and instructions for its consecration are given.43:13-27
 - c. The closure of the east gate is explained.44:1-3
 - d. Regulations for admittance to the temple are given.44:4-9
 - e. Laws governing the priests are given.44:10-31
 - 1) The offending Levites will perform general service.44:10-14
 - 2) The faithful Zadokites will be granted special privileges of service before Yahweh.44:15-31
 - f. A district for the temple, priests, and Levites is measured. ...45:1-5
 - g. The city is measured and part given to the prince.45:6-8
 - h. Laws governing the prince are given.45:9-17
 - i. Specifications for certain feasts are given.45:18-25
 - j. The manner of worship is set forth for prince and people.46:1-15
 - k. Laws of inheritance for the prince are given.46:16-18
 - l. Procedures for preparing the offerings are given.46:19-24
- 4. The characteristics of the land are described.47:1-48:35
 - a. A river will flow from the temple with waters of healing.47:1-12
 - b. The entire land promised will be possessed.47:13-23
 - c. The land will be divided between all twelve tribes.48:1-29
- 5. The gates and city are named.48:30-35
 - a. The gates are named for the tribes.48:30-34
 - b. The city is named "Yahweh is There."48:35

Theme Statement

Since Yahweh cannot dwell in a defiled house, Israel must be purified through the discipline of captivity, after which she will be restored and renewed in preparation for Yahweh's perpetual dwelling among them.

Theme Development

I. Ezekiel is called, commissioned, and confirmed in his ministry to Israel (1:1-7:27).

When the Lord places people into His service He always gives them adequate preparation and instruction, which includes not only the definition of the task but also encouragement as to the resources available for its fulfillment. This whole opening section

serves that purpose for Ezekiel.³ As such it looks at both personal and ministry issues, summarizing the prophet's personal qualifications for such service, the message he would be delivering, and the methods he would be using.

A. Ezekiel's ministry is set in the context of captivity (1:1-3).

Ezekiel's ministry is set in its context in the first three verses as pertaining to the Babylonian captivity under the sovereign direction of the Lord of glory. His would be a ministry based on visions to those who were to experience the judgment of God.

B. Ezekiel is confronted with a vision of Yahweh's glory (1:4-28).

As with Isaiah, a vision of the glory of God is the basis for personal ministry. Ezekiel's vision concerns the glory of God as moving throughout the earth whereas Isaiah's is of the Lord in His established rule. Later on God's glory will be portrayed as abandoning the temple until the subsequent restoration of Israel to obedience.

C. Ezekiel is called to declare Yahweh's word to the rebellious people of Israel (2:1-3:14).

Ezekiel's calling is unlike the prophets before him. They generally focused their messages upon the need for repentance, even in the context of coming judgment. Ezekiel's message, however, is one of unavoidable judgment. Though the message was pleasant to the prophet as a revelation of the righteous and holy character of the Lord (3:3) it would not be accepted by the nation and would, therefore cause him great pain (3:14). Once again Yahweh reveals His glory to His servant for encouragement and strength (3:12-14).

D. Ezekiel is commissioned in his ministry to Israel as watchman and prophet (3:15-6:14).

The commissioning of the prophet takes place in the context of the beginning of his ministry to the captives at the Chebar.⁴ Commissioning to ministry generally takes place in a

³ The break at 3:16 should be understood as a minor not a major division. The dating notations serve as major division markers. Since 3:16 only contains the phrase "at the end of seven days" it should not be considered a full-fledged division marker. Hence, this should be viewed as a continuation of the call and commission of the prophet, by which his ministry is further defined and specified. The body of the prophetic message should be taken to begin at 8:1 which contains all the division indicators found throughout the book, namely, the phrase "now it came to pass," a date indicator, the mention of elders being present, and the concept of the hand of the Lord being on the prophet. This is the only place these all occur together. Dorsey supports this division (David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 254).

⁴ This is the first occurrence of the phrase "now it came to pass that the word of the Lord came to me saying." It is not a major break indicating the formal beginning of his ministry but a minor break signifying the continuation of the prophet's call and commission but in the context of initial ministry (it occurs at 6:1 and 7:1). Note that there is still much personal instruction of Ezekiel in this section.

“public” context. Ezekiel sits “astonished” among the captives for seven days and then hears further instruction from the Lord (3:15-27) and direction as to his first proclamational enactments (4:1–5:17). As a watchman Ezekiel is to be careful to warn of wickedness whenever instructed to do so regardless of the response, fully aware that it is a rebellious people to whom the Lord is sending him (4:1-17). The method of Ezekiel’s ministry as watchman would often entail symbolic actions and enactments. The primary focus of his ministry would be the coming judgment of Jerusalem. To this end he is instructed to portray its siege (4:1-17) and destruction (5:1-17).⁵ Ezekiel’s other method of ministry would be standard prophecy, as other prophets. This aspect of his commission is set forth in 6:1-14, in which he is instructed to proclaim Yahweh’s coming judgment against the land of Israel for its idolatry.

E. Ezekiel is confirmed as to the imminence of the judgment he was to proclaim (7:1-27).

In this poem of judgment the prophet is told of the imminency of Yahweh’s announced intentions for Israel. It serves as a fitting *inclusio* for the warning given to him as the watchman. Judgment is coming soon; Ezekiel must take his calling seriously.

II. Ezekiel announces that judgment is at hand for Judah and the Nations (8:1–33:20).

This section develops the message of the imminent judgment of Israel. In line with the pattern established in his call and commission, Ezekiel undertakes a ministry of dramatic presentation, supplemented by necessary explanation, through which he communicates God’s intention to inflict a purifying judgment upon His people. Though there are interspersed statements of hope, this is mostly an announcement of judgment.

A. Ezekiel depicts Judah’s judgment as imminent (8:1–19:14).

Even though Jerusalem had been breached and the temple ransacked by this time, there was still a prideful, and naïve, confidence in the city’s ultimate inviolability since it had become the earthly dwelling place of the Most High God. This misplaced trust needed to be exposed in preparation for the imminent destruction that had already been determined.

1. The departure of the glory of Yahweh from the temple signals the inevitability of judgment (8:1–13:23). The symbolic departure of the Shekinah, representative of Yahweh’s holy presence, coupled with an exposing and judging of the abominable practices that had been

⁵ With respect to the years of siege mentioned in 4:4-6 see Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 23-24 who concludes that this represents from the captivity of Jehoiachin the 430 “years that the nations would be in subjection to the foreign powers. This would give us a concluding date of approximately 167 B.C., the year that the Maccabean revolt began and the Jews once again exercised rule over the land of Canaan for the first time since 597 B.C.”

taking place in the temple and its city, was designed to drive home the point that God could no longer dwell in this specially appointed place, defiled as it was. Since His presence in the temple was not guaranteed, judgment should not come as such a shock. The common marker “Now the word of the Lord came to me saying” occurs for the first time in this section, at 11:14. It is as though Yahweh cannot complete His symbolic exit of Jerusalem without assuring Israel that He would continue to be their sanctuary where ever they were driven (11:16) and that he would eventually restore them to the land (v. 17) and renew them spiritually by giving them a new spirit and heart (vv. 18-20—cf. Jer 31:31-34). In the meantime, captivity was to be the order of the day, as Ezekiel portrays (12:1-16), and it would come very soon regardless of what certain false prophets were saying (12:17–13:23).

2. The persistent unfaithfulness of Judah proves the necessity of judgment (14:1–19:14).

The mention of elders sitting before Ezekiel indicates a minor break. The topic turns to a demonstration of the reasonableness, indeed the necessity, of such an unthinkable act of judgment. The nation’s practice of idolatry (14:1-11) is tantamount to marital unfaithfulness between Yahweh and His bride Israel, whom He had rescued and beautified (16:1-59). This unfaithfulness had not been merely incidental but persistent throughout the nation’s history (14:12-23), necessitating the desolation of the land (15:8). Once again, such severe treatment is not without hope. Yahweh promises to establish an everlasting covenant with them (16:60-63) and eventually set Messiah-King⁶ over them (17:22-24), though in the immediate future they will be subdued by a king of judgment to whom they must submit (17:1-21). Though this judgment will affect all, it will not be unfair (18:1-32) since each individual will live or die for his or her own deeds. To highlight the failure of the leaders, perhaps as a way of pointing to the need for the ideal King, Ezekiel is instructed to take up a funeral dirge for the princes of Israel (19:1-14).

B. Ezekiel confirms Judah’s judgment as unavoidable (20:1–23:49).

This is a major break, having both a date indicator and reference to the elders inquiring of the Lord and sitting before Ezekiel. It occurs eleven months after the shattering of their false confidence in the temple’s inviolability. During this hiatus, Egypt had begun to reassert itself and Zedekiah was rebelling against Babylon. Perhaps hope in Egypt’s regaining of sovereignty over Palestine was the substance of their inquiry, which would, in effect, be a questioning or

⁶ Ibid., 58-59.

repudiation of Ezekiel's "pessimistic" message.⁷ Against this historical situation Ezekiel confirms that judgment was unavoidable no matter what. The reasons that he gives are (1) the need for Israel to undergo a complete program of discipline as the only means of purifying her of idolatrous ways (20:1-44) (2) Yahweh does not discriminate when it comes to righteous retribution (20:45–21:32) (3) Israel's leaders could not be pardoned (22:1-31) and (4) since Samaria had gone into captivity for the same sins, Jerusalem could not justly be excused (23:1-49). Anything happening on the political-military scene was inconsequential to God's holy and just purposes for His people.

C. Ezekiel announces Jerusalem's judgment as having begun (24:1–25:17).

The date notation marks this out as a major section break, though most make the break after chapter 24.⁸ Ezekiel is instructed to write down that date as the day on which Nebuchadnezzar actually began the siege of Jerusalem (about Dec. 25, 589 B.C.). The message of this section is that though Israel's judgment of purification had begun, symbolized by a boiling pot (24:1-14), her fate should not be mourned by the nation, as though something tragic and inappropriate were taking place (24:15-27). Neither should it be cheered by her neighbors out of spite and vengeance (25:1-17). It was the Lord's painful duty to judge His people for what they deserved even though Israel was still the apple of His eye. Thus, the provisions of the Abrahamic covenant are still in effect with respect to the blessing and cursing of all peoples on the basis of how they treat the descendants of Abraham.

D. Ezekiel reveals the nature of other nations' judgment (26:1–33:20).

The judgments pronounced against these three nations follow in the same vein as those already dealt with in the preceding section (Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia) in the sense that the basic pronouncement of judgment is based on their treatment of Israel. What is different is that there is an extensive development of the underlying attitudes and actions that led to such treatment. As such it becomes a warning to all nations about the attitudes and practices that lead to judgment, especially with respect to their treatment of God's chosen people, Israel.

⁷ So suggests Alexander, *ibid.*, 64.

⁸ Alexander's outline reflects the latter but he argues that there is no warrant for a major break between chapters 24 and 25, contending that they logically form a single message (*Ibid.*, 80). The date notation in 24:1 does initiate a succession of rapid-fire date indicators (at least once the judgment against Egypt is taken up) and so should be seen as at least introducing the section on judgment per se. There is a variation of the introductory construction in 24:1.

Tyre is marked out for special judgment because it looked upon Israel's demise as an opportunity for selfish gain (26:2). Her renown as a great trading power will be replaced by astonishment at her complete and final destruction according to divine pronouncement (26:3-21). Following a formal lamentation for the whole nation (27:1-36) Tyre's prince is marked out for destruction due to extreme pride over his wealth and wisdom (28:1-10). This is followed by another lamentation, this time for the King of Tyre (28:11-19). Due to the heightened description in this section it has been common for many commentators to see this as a reference to Satan, the spiritual power behind the human ruler of this great commercial center.⁹ Whether this refers solely to the human ruler of Tyre, or to the spiritual ruler as well, it is clear that Tyre's great sin lie in the abundance of trading (28:16) to the point of a violent devaluation of human life (cf. "bartered human lives" in 27:13) which was evidenced by her callous treatment of God's designated instrument of human blessing, the nation of Israel. Sidon, likewise, appeared to be a "prickling brier" (28:24) and so was judged. The positive reason for this judgment is that they, and other nations, might know that Israel's God was Adonai Yahweh (28:24).

Pronouncement of judgment against the nations also served as a foreshadowing of the time when all Gentile nations will honor Israel as it dwells in safety, security, and blessing in its promised land (28:25-26). Once again, this notice of the Lord's ultimate design for His people is inserted to bolster hope in the face of judgment.

Egypt will be judged for basically the same reason as Tyre, it had lifted itself up in pride (29:1-32:32).¹⁰ Pharaoh had taken credit for the great river the Nile (29:3) and all the Egyptians had utterly disdained Israel instead of helping her (29:6). Egypt will experience plundering by Nebuchadnezzar, just like Israel (29:17-21), and her political alliances will fail (30:1-19). Ezekiel sings Egypt's funeral dirge since it was going to die as a nation (32:1-32). As Assyria had passed from the scene in judgment, so would Egypt (31:1-18). As a postlude to the proclamation of judgment upon the surrounding nations Ezekiel is reminded that his ministry as a watchman necessitated vigilance in calling individuals to repentance (33:1-20).¹¹ The nation as a whole was

⁹ Alexander seemed to take it as referring to Satan in his earlier commentary (1976) but in a later work opts for interpreting it as referring to the human king of Tyre utilizing cultural and religious terminology of that area, though he admits great interpretational challenges for either view (see Alexander, "Ezekiel," in loc cit).

¹⁰ For the relationship of these prophecies, oracles and lamentations to the historical events taking place during the times mentioned in the date notations see Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 89-100.

¹¹ Since the date notation occurs at 33:21 this section belongs with the preceding judgment oracles.

going into captivity and nothing could now avert that. However, each individual was responsible before the Lord to work righteousness. Israel was not to take solace in God's judgment of the nations in their wickedness while remaining in their own sin. They needed, every single one of them, to turn from their evil ways (33:11).

In all the oracles of judgment, concerning Israel and the rest of the nations, the great underlying strategy is that all involved might come to know who Yahweh really is and humbly respond to Him in faith. Hence, the continual repetition of the phrase "they shall know that I am Yahweh." This is the underlying reason for all the messages to the various nations with respect to their culpability before the Lord. God's intent is to bring the blessing of Abraham to all the families of the earth. Thus, He is always working, through both salvation and judgment, to bring people to an understanding of that great truth.

III. Ezekiel proclaims hope and encouragement for Judah in the future (33:21–48:35).

A. Jerusalem's captivity is announced, thus shifting Ezekiel's focus (33:21-22).

Finally, the extensively predicted and enacted judgment of Jerusalem is completed, as announced by an escaped messenger (33:21). This allows Ezekiel the liberty of turning his attention completely to Israel's eschatological hope, communicated in two main sections dealing with the restoration of the people and the eschatological temple.¹² Ezekiel had continually maintained that Yahweh's judgment of His people and His city was disciplinary and restorative. Now that the reality of that discipline had really begun to set in the restoration could be prophetically depicted.

B. Israel will be restored to the land through a covenant of peace (33:23–39:29).

Since land had been part of the Lord's unconditional promise to the patriarchs, the issue of Israel's return to the land was of utmost theological importance. No matter how miserably Israel had failed in understanding its covenant mandate to be a holy nation (Exod 19:5-6) they were clear on the fact that the land belonged to them by promise. Hence, Ezekiel now turns to the issue of the nation's restoration to the land in obedience and blessing.

To set the context Ezekiel reviews the reasons for Israel's captivity, namely their disobedience to the Mosaic covenant (33:23-29—cf. Deut 28). They were still not in a state of spiritual obedience (33:30-33) and could not be until the Lord effected a spiritual reconstitution of His people (34:1-31). Once He has instituted a new covenant with them, called here a

¹² Each section begins with a date notation (33:21; 40:1) with a minor division at 37:1 marked off by the phrase "the hand of the Lord."

covenant of peace (34:25), then He Himself would rule over them as the True Shepherd, the Messiah of the house of David (34:23-24), and they would dwell in the land in abundance and security (34:37-29).

The actual process of this restoration follows in 35:1–39:29. It will begin with the judgment of those foreigners who had continually sought to possess the land, represented by Edom, the ancient enemy of Israel, herein identified as Mt. Seir (35:1-15). In this way the land, which had become plunder for the rest of the nations (36:4) would be liberated and filled once more with the people to whom it had been promised, namely, Israel (36:1-15). However, Israel had been delivered into the land before, under the leadership of Moses and Joshua, and had failed to maintain possession. What would be different this time? The key to Israel's future obedience, and thus the perpetual enjoyment of their rightful possession, would be an inner spiritual renewal, the granting of a new heart and spirit by God's Holy Spirit (36:25-27). This is the same new covenant that Jeremiah had prophesied (Jer 31:31-34). This would be nothing short of a resurrection miracle, whereby Israel would come out of the grave of its captivity to a new life of service and blessing in the land. This is the point of the vision of the valley full of bones (37:1-14). Whereas Israel had become divided and disunited through sin, the new covenant would bring them together as a united kingdom once again under the reign of one King, Yahweh's servant David, the Messiah (37:1-28). The fact that Israel dwells in safety does not mean that there is a complete absence of those hostile to the chosen people. However, since she is dwelling in righteousness as a result of the new covenant, her safety is guaranteed by Yahweh, who will personally deal a crushing blow to this international threat (38:1–39:20). This is a reversal of the Babylonian captivity, during which hostile foreign nations had actually been empowered by God to defeat Israel. There will be no more defeat for the nation ever; she will glorify Yahweh among the nations without fail and without end (39:21-29).¹³ In this way Israel's future glory as Yahweh's people is guaranteed.

C. Israel will worship in a temple indwelt by the glory of Yahweh (40:1–48:35).

Israel being restored to the land is only half of the reversal that is being communicated by Ezekiel. The other half is Yahweh dwelling once again in His house, the temple. Hence, the conclusion of the visions has to do with a glorious new temple, indwelt once again by the glory of

¹³ For a discussion of the identity of Gog and the time of his defeat see Alexander, *Ibid.*, 118-29. He takes this prophecy as having a double fulfillment, once during the beginning of the millennial kingdom and again at the end.

the Lord. The cause of Israel's return to the land must be clearly seen by the nations. The construction of this magnificent temple and the god-honoring service of a holy nation is the means of that demonstration.

Ezekiel sees a vast temple complex, unlike anything known before, including Solomon's magnificent structure, which measures 500 rods by 500 rods, or about one mile square (40:1–42:20)! Such a structure can only have one purpose: to display the glorious magnificence of the One responsible for it.

In a reversal of the departure of the glory of God, Ezekiel sees the Shekinah return through the (reconstructed and expanded) gate through which it had exited (43:1-9). Once again, its permanence is guaranteed since Israel will never again defile Yahweh's holy name (43:7). If there is a temple, there must be worship. This is the next part of the vision (43:10–46:24). Ezekiel delineates the objects and implements of sacrifice (43:13-27), the laws governing the priests (44:10-31), the prescribed feasts (45:18-25), and the manner of worship (46:1-24). In this way Israel will finally keep its appointed service as a holy nation and a kingdom of priests in a way that truly glorifies the Lord. This has never happened and is not presently being fulfilled by the church, the Body of Christ. Israel must have a future in order to complete her covenant mandate and world mission.

Lastly, the land is described in two aspects (47:1–48:35). The first focuses on the river that flows from the temple containing waters of healing and life (47:1-12). This will be the universal effect of Yahweh's rule upon the earth during the Millennium. The second thing mentioned about the land is its division between the tribes of Israel (47:13–48:29). Its boundaries are basically the same as those given to the patriarchs, thus confirming the inviolability of God's original covenant with Abraham (47:1-23–cf. Num 34:3-12). The division of the land between the tribes is given (48:1-29) and they are all there! Yahweh has kept His promise to preserve His people and restore them from their captivity. But the most significant thing is that the name of the city is "Yahweh is There" (48:35). All is completed. The visions have come to pass. The Lord is dwelling with His people.

Conclusion

Ezekiel stands as a great object lesson on the condition necessary for God to dwell on earth among His people. As discouraging as the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the seventy-year captivity must have been, Ezekiel's concluding vision must rank as one of the most

encouraging for those descendants of Abraham who will accept what it naturally asserts and seek to live in light of its future certainty.

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