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PROSPECTUS

“What’s the word from the Lord today, Ezekiel?” The Judean exiles in Babylon often gathered around Ezekiel in eager anticipation. But it was all an act. The people genuinely wanted to hear from Ezekiel, but they genuinely did nothing with his words.

Why not? Despite being ripped from their homes, these exiles had only been humbled enough to give Ezekiel their ears, not their hearts. They listened with hard hearts — continuing to work injustice, profane the Sabbath and sleep around with their neighbors. They had lost everything, but they still loved their familiar idols and false prophets that protected them. The temple was still standing — maybe they could carry on with their lives and loves. Surely, redemption was coming, right?

They didn’t get it. They didn’t know the Lord. They didn’t care about whether his name was honored or profaned by them. And so Ezekiel repeatedly asserts that God is going to work to cause everyone - Israel, Judah and the ends of the earth - to know that he is Yahweh. Yahweh will vindicate the holiness of his name. All will see and respect him.

In 586 BC, Jerusalem and the temple fell. The exiles who had “listened” to Ezekiel for years sat dumbfounded in the dust. What now, Ezekiel? Long story short — God would act again for the sake of his holy name. God would crush the enemies who had harmed them and any others like them. God would act to restore the land, the people, their hearts, their king and their temple. It would be better than ever before.

Paul (1 Corinthians 10:6): *What happened to Israel was an example for us.* **Peter (Acts 3:18, 21; 2 Peter 1:19):** *What God prophesied by the mouths of his prophets he has done. Pay careful attention to the words of the prophets until the day dawns. Heaven must receive Jesus until the time of restoring all the things about all the things God spoke about by the mouths of the holy prophets. We will aim to receive Ezekiel’s corrections and be encouraged by his hope as we both experience and anticipate it.*

BIBLE-STUDY BASICS

“Blessed is the man... his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.” Psalm 1:1-2, ESV). *“Evil people... will go on from bad to worse... But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing... how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work,”* (2 Timothy 3:13-17, ESV)

People will go from bad to worse, but if we will heed Paul’s instruction to Timothy and continue in all Scripture — including those “sacred writings” (Old Testament) — we will be wise for salvation in Christ Jesus. But Scripture, especially those sacred writings, can be challenging at times to understand. Have you ever read a text and thought, “I have no clue what I’m supposed to do with this.” Have you ever been in a Bible class or listened to a sermon and thought, “How in the world did they get *that* from this text?” Maybe they made a legitimate conclusion that we just didn’t grasp. Or maybe they were being a little too creative in their interpretive methods.

Paul’s reminder to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15 is good for us to ingest here. *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth,”* (ESV) Some definitely make biblical interpretation too complicated — digging too deep into original languages, reconstructing archaeological finds, etc. Some make it too simple too — making interpretations and conclusions quickly and rashly. Consider Paul’s admonition to Timothy. *“Present yourself to God as one approved.”* We are interpreting Scripture in the presence of God. Sit on the gravity of that knowledge for a moment.

We are not always going to see the exact same thing in each Scripture — and there can be a blessing there. It is a blessing to be able to hear the fruit of others’ meditations on God’s sacred words. But when our conclusions are worlds away, that’s cause for concern. Furthermore, even in our personal study, we want to be able to understand Scripture. When we get lost, it is good to be reminded of some tried-and-true Bible-study basics. Whether one is aware of it or not, here’s the basic approach *any* good Bible-interpreter uses. I call it the three step method.

- 1. Discovery: what does it say?** (big message, context, structure, word/phrase repetition, etc.)
- 2. Interpretation: what does it mean?** (impact in redemptive story, connections to themes, etc.)
- 3. Application, etc.: how does this impact my thinking? my life?** (how does this freshen my view of God? how can I arrange my life around the worldview/ethic of this text?, etc.)

Here’s the key: *follow each one of these steps in order.* The majority of boring, wild, wrong or goofy thoughts about Scripture happen when we don’t stay disciplined here. *Powerless Bible-study* is when we just follow step one. *Academia* is when we just follow steps one and two. *Over-eager Bible study* is when we skip steps one and/or two and chase immediate relevance *right now*. We all want relevance, but if we don’t take time to think through what is being said (2 Tim. 2:7), we aren’t going to understand what the text means and how it impacts our lives. It will be like building a frame and constructing a roof without first laying the foundation. Even if the frame, dry wall and roofing happen to be built superbly, the house won’t stand.

INTRODUCTION + STRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION

How we came to this point in redemptive history. Deuteronomy 28-30, especially 30:1-10, provide a good summary of where God's people are at in redemptive history in Ezekiel's day. The people have abandoned their covenant partnership with the Lord. The Lord rescued them to be his bride and his representatives to the nations. They were to enjoy their holy marriage to the Lord and to bring him holy offspring. But Israel (capital: Samaria) and Judah (capital: Jerusalem) abandoned their partnership with the Lord. Instead of cherishing the Lord as her only lover, the people cast their lustful eyes upon the pleasure and security they could find in the arms of the nations and their gods. They chased the nations with their wealth, formed agreements with them and worshipped their gods.

So, God sent Israel (North) away into exile in 721 BC. In 606 BC, Jerusalem (South) was attacked by Babylon and the royal family — including Daniel — was taken away into exile. In 597 BC, more were taken into exile — including Ezekiel the priest (probably at 25 years old).

How Ezekiel spoke to the Babylonian exiles. In exile, many wondered why they were there. This did not seem just. “We are suffering for our fathers’ sins,” (Ezekiel 18). “We will return soon,” (Jeremiah 29:8-9). So, when Ezekiel was (probably) 30 years old and would have started serving as a priest, the throne and glory of the Lord appeared to Ezekiel in exile. God gave Ezekiel a series of visions, sign-acts, parables and prophetic messages to deliver to his people in exile.

It seems that while many listened to him, they didn't have true hearts (ch. 2-3, 14, 33, etc.). Not until Jerusalem fell did the people realize it was time to listen more intently. Why had Jerusalem fallen? What was God going to do now?

In hindsight, Ezekiel's message was clear. *Stop deceiving yourselves that this is all some misunderstanding: you are dying for **your** sins. You have hard, impenitent hearts. Your actions are nothing less than complete betrayal of your covenant partner. You have profaned the name of the Lord. But hope came ringing through clearly as well. I will not allow my name to be profaned any longer. I will act for the sake of my holy name. I will renew your hearts, forgive your sins, restore your land, raise your dead, reinstitute David as shepherd, unite Israel and crush the enemy nations once and for all. I will put my temple-presence among you and my life-giving presence will flow to the whole world.*

How Ezekiel's message — and all Scripture — challenges us to reimagine our lives circumstances in light of the biblical context and revelation. We rightly emphasize context in our Bible-reading so that we do not dislocate Scripture from its intended meaning. Ezekiel's message was spoken to a real generation of real people and the message becomes more clear when we see that.

However, we must remember that the message was not preserved primarily for the generation that first heard it (1 Pet. 1:12). Ezekiel did not write down the ramifications of being the watchman for Israel (ch. 2-3) for his own sake. He did not record the sins of Israel or the disasters that would overtake them simply for the sake of the few around him. Scripture was recorded so future generations would understand the Lord and their responsibility to him through their experience. It was recorded so future generations would understand the workings of the Lord and

how he rules the world. Furthermore, God's actions then were always meant to be read in light of what God would one day do in Jesus.

Scripture was not recorded to say, "Here's some isolated prophecies of Jesus and some bygone history. Sorry — can't help you with what is going on now." No, as Peter says, we should read the prophets as a lamp shining in the dark now (2 Peter 1:19). To be clear, this doesn't mean we identify ISIS or Russia as specifically fulfilling prophecies about Gog of Magog in Ezekiel and Revelation; however, knowing about Tyre, Egypt and "Gog" of "Magog" sure does shed a lot of light on what nations are doing today. We don't identify particular politicians or false teachers as **the** antichrist, but we recognize that many antichrists have gone out. We don't proclaim that this catastrophe, that pandemic or economic meltdown was specifically prophesied about in the Bible; however, as Amos says to those who doubted God was behind their demise, "*Does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it?*" (Amos 3:6). In short, the sayings of the prophets have been written down and recorded to be a lamp in our darkness. Instead of cherry-picking certain prophecies to bring into relevance today, we should take the entire worldview the prophets paint and reimagine what our lives would look like if we saw ourselves in the world as they define it.

Three ways Ezekiel's message specifically challenges how we think and live today.

1. Ezekiel's message challenges us to stop pointing outside of ourselves to explain our sin or God's discipline. As Ezekiel repeatedly points out, the problem then and now is our rock-hard hearts, our idols, and our lust for the ways of the nations. The problem is our lack of absolute covenant loyalty to our husband and our God. We cannot blame our parents or circumstances.

2. Ezekiel's message challenges us to be primarily concerned with God's glory. Israel only cared about their personal welfare. They had no concern for how their actions impacted God's reputation. Ezekiel's prophecies repeatedly state that when God acts, all will know "that I am the Lord." Ezekiel reminds us that God's number one devotion is his glory - and this is for our good. In our amazement over God's goodness, we should be passionately devoted to his glory as well.

3. When all hope is cut off, Ezekiel challenges us to hope in God to bring about restoration. Our hearts may be hopelessly corrupt, but God's Spirit can transform the hardest of hearts. We may be divided, but Jesus is the David who can unite "North" and "South" into one. Our world may be corrupt and dead, but God's temple presence can bring life. "Gog" may be throwing all he has at the people of God, but the Lord will burn him with fire. Our bodies may lie dead in the ground, but God's Spirit can raise us to bodily life again. We may have driven God's presence from our cities, but God's Spirit indwells us now and he promises his children a new city: The Lord Is There.

STRUCTURE

This is a condensed version of Iain M. Duguid's structure from the NIVAC series (pg. 40-41)

- I. Ezekiel's Call and Commissioning (1:1-3:21)
- II. Oracles of Doom (4:1-24:27)
 - A. Prophecies Against Jerusalem and Her Land (4:1-7:27)
 - B. The Vision of the Temple (8:1-11:25)
 - C. Further Oracles of Judgment (12:1-24:27)
- III. Oracles Against the Nations (25:1-32:32)
- IV. Oracles of Good News (33:1-48:35)

EZEKIEL 1

The Bible is full of stories of exile. In fact, an overarching storyline in the Bible is one of exile. Adam and Eve were exiled from the garden, but the last Adam brings us back to the garden in the end. Ezekiel's visions and messages are originally delivered to those who are exiled from home for their rebellion against God's instructions. As such, this book can speak to those who see themselves as in a sort of "exile" for their sin — a place every human has been. Condemned to live apart from the presence of God, suffering in the pain and aftermath of our infidelity.

But the message of Ezekiel is not for those who want a soft, tender call back home. In the beginning, it is for those who are ready to see in humiliating fashion how depraved they really are. And in the end, it is for those who are ready to be further humiliated by how gracious God is ready to be to such a rebel (Ez. 36:31-32). The sin of Israel (and ours in turn) must die an embarrassing death in exile before the renewing life of the Spirit can find a way in.

Chapter 1 is the best place for this reminder: don't read Ezekiel like a letter of Paul. Don't examine each wing and wheel for allegorical significance. What we see here is a word picture. See the significance more in the whole picture and less in the minutiae.

Also, it can help to know what comes later in the book. Here Ezekiel sees throne of God *arrive* in exile in Babylon. Later, he sees it *leaving* Jerusalem (ch. 8-11) — which is likely an explanation of why the throne arrives here in the first place.

1. *What does Ezekiel see here? What strikes you from this vision as memorable?*

2. *How all would this vision of carry so much significance for Ezekiel and for the exiles? As you note each point, bring us into their context to help us see the significance of this vision for us today.*

EZEKIEL 4-5

No matter how many prophets God sent or how many times he afflicted his people with various punishments, they never seemed to grasp the depths of how depraved they had become. Their hearts were rock-hard. Even in exile they still cherished other gods. But here, God aims to show these exiles the ramifications of their sin in the very person of Ezekiel.

A couple of notes to assist you as you read these chapters. 1) These *sign-acts* are quite different from *parables* — which Ezekiel will make use of later. 2) ESV's "punishment" in verses 4,5, 6 and 17 *can* also be translated "iniquity." 3) Ezekiel's uses of "house of Israel" and "house of Judah" do not have to be read as referring to two completely different entities. Ezekiel has been sent to the exiles who are from Judah but who are still part of the larger entity known as "the house of Israel" — as is clearly seen in chapter 3.

1. Consider how Ezekiel takes on the role of God in his demonstration in **4:1-3**. *How all should this scene impact the people then? And us if we were in their shoes?*

2. Consider how Ezekiel takes on the role of one bearing the iniquity and/or suffering the punishment of the people in **4:4-17**. It is hard to know precisely what the 390 + 40 days/years individually and collectively represent (Some say the time of Judah's sin from the foundation of the temple to its destruction (390ish years) and the exile of a generation - a symbolic 40). Let's focus on what we know. *What would it have been like to see Ezekiel on his side eating these meager rations for 390 (or 430) days. What is the meaning of Ezekiel's actions? What all is God communicating to these exiles?*

It is possible to see priestliness in Ezekiel's actions. The priests bore the iniquity of the people *in connection to the tabernacle* — whether to atone (Ex. 28:36ff) or simply to take responsibility for their sins (Num. 18:1). Notice how, even though Ezekiel is actually in exile, he is unique: he still refuses to defile himself.

3. *How has God accomplished a similar (yet greater) sign-act in Jesus Christ to that of Ezekiel here?*

4. (ch. 5) Ezekiel takes on the role of the sufferer as he shaves his head bald with a sword before taking on the role of God again by symbolically venting God's wrath upon Jerusalem. He combines this with a scathing message in **5:5-17**. *How all should these exiles have been impacted by this demonstration and message? How does this speak to us as well?*

EZEKIEL 6-7

1. *What stands out to you as significant or instructive from Ezekiel's message in **chapter 6**? Keep in mind this was first addressed to those who were in Babylon and had already experienced God's wrath, but hoped they'd be able to return home soon.*

2. *Using **6:8-10** as your foundation, explain what idolatry is. Using this definition, give modern examples of idolatry.*

3. **Chapter 7** shows us how Judah will react underneath his wrath. *What stands out to you as instructive here? How all would this experience of God's wrath affect the people in the moment?*

4. Considering **chapters 6-7**. Understanding how God's wrath was going to turn their world upside down in the future could help the exiles live differently now in view of the end. *What strikes you from this chapter as instructive as we consider living now in light of God's judgment — whether temporal judgments or the final judgment? (1 Cor. 7:29-31, Luke 17:26-33 and 1 Thess. 5:1-11 may stir your thoughts)*

INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL 8-11

Ezekiel 8-11 is a unified vision focused on the temple. In general, chapters 8-9 explore the defilement of the temple and chapters 10-11 explores the movement of God's glory from the temple with a concluding promise of hope after exile. Because God's presence in the temple is a key theme in Ezekiel, it is important to get a better grasp of the temple's significance before diving into these chapters. *The brief overview that follows may not be perfect and certainly isn't exhaustive. Please share your helpful questions, thoughts and study as you see fit.*

God personally dwelled with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but their sin resulted in them being cast out. At the end of the story of the Bible, John sees a vision of God making his dwelling with his people in a new garden-city in a new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21:1-22:5). But this is not a story where 'A' is the Garden of Eden and 'B' is the final garden-city — as if the grand biblical story between the two gardens is unrelated. No, one substantial focus of the narrative after the Garden of Eden is the advancement (or lack thereof) of God's Eden-like presence with his people until the final garden-city. *The temple, Jesus and the Spirit help bridge the gap in the story between the first garden and the last garden-city.*

The tabernacle and the temple were earthly copies of God's true heavenly "tent" (Heb. 8-9). To put it another way: the temple was a small replica of God's heavenly throne on earth. Israel and the nations were to draw near to God's earthly sanctuary to offer prayers and sacrifice. God's tabernacle presence among Israel made them distinct from all people on earth (Ex. 33:16).

What does this have to do with the Garden of Eden and the final garden-city? The tabernacle and the temple had distinct features that made them reminiscent of these gardens. Filled with precious metals and stones, depictions and carvings of flowers, cherubim, lions and oxen, the temple was more than God's house — it was a small garden-like paradise (albeit, a bloody paradise due to sacrifice). Through the tabernacle and the temple, God was taking steps to set his Eden-like presence among his people once again.

Leviticus and Numbers reminded Israel of the absolute importance of preserving the purity and holiness of this sacred place. But in Ezekiel 8-11, Ezekiel sees a vision of the beloved Eden-like temple defiled by all manner of idolatry and ultimately by death. It is impossible to overstate how tragic this vision is. It is like watching a worse version of Adam and Eve in the garden. The people weren't just being kicked out of the temple — the temple had been trashed, so God abandoned it and defiled it yet more with their dead bodies. The glory of God's house was gone along with any hope of a peaceful paradise with God.

But we can thank God for the morsels of hope in Ezekiel 34-48. In the end, Ezekiel sees a vision of a new temple in a new city called "The Lord Is There." Waters flow from the new temple to bring life wherever they go. But let's not get too far ahead of ourselves.

What does a vision about an ancient temple have to do with Christians today? **First**, know that our place in the story of redemption is quite a few steps beyond this temple in Jerusalem. In fact, we are around W-X-Y — just a step from the vision of the end times garden-city where we see God face to face. **Second**, when Jesus pronounced the temple in Jerusalem corrupt, he declared himself to be the temple of God (John 2). They would destroy him, but he'd rebuild that temple again in three days. Third, Jesus' apostles declare to us that we have the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit and that we are individually and collectively being built together as God's temple(s).

If you need some help in understanding what the New Testament has to say about the temple, the following list of passages will get you started. We will not discuss all these passages now. The bolded passages especially relate to our discussion of these chapters. John 1:14; 2:13-21; 4:20-24; 7:37-39; 14:1-11; 1 Corinthians 3:10-17; **6:15-20**; **2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1**; **Ephesians 2:18-22**; **4:29-30**; **1 Peter 2:4-8**; Revelation 3:12; 11:19; 21:1-22:5.

EZEKIEL 8-9

Here are some notes about Ezekiel 8 that may address some questions. (See *Ezekiel*, Duguid)

- *“Image of jealousy”* — some think this was an Asherah positioned at the north to guard the city from attacks. More important than the specific identity is its descriptive title.
- *Burning incense to creeping things, loathsome beasts, idols* — some believe this was intended to ward off dangers from demonic forces. God had instructed that they depict cherubim, oxen and lions in the temple, but it seems the engravings had been massively expanded and turned into an idolatrous exercise.
- *“Weeping for Tammuz”* — this may have been a Babylonian ritual which lamented the god “Dumuzi’s” death and descent into the underworld. This god’s “death” and “return” may have paralleled the annual rhythms of nature, with mourning possibly accelerating the world’s return to fertility.
- *“Behold, they put the branch to their nose”* — we are not entirely sure what this means. Could likely be an idiom for some sort of defiant, insulting gesture. The LXX (Septuagint/Greek Translation of the Old Testament) simplifies it to “Behold, they are like mockers.” (See NET Notes)

As you read, interpret and apply Ezekiel 8-9, what stands out to you here as significant and/or instructive for us today as the temple(s) of God?

EZEKIEL 10-11

Chapter 10 depicts Ezekiel's vision of the glory of the God of Israel with his cherubim-carried throne gradually leaving the temple and the city. The burning coals that are scattered over the city (10:2, 6-7) is probably a visionary depiction of God's heavenly agent burning the city down. Though the Babylonians are the human agents, Ezekiel is able to see a visionary depiction of the full reality: spiritual agents are at work here too as God's glory departs the city into exile.

1. Consider the significance of the temple and all it meant to Israel. *How all could these exiles be impacted by the vision of God's glory leaving the temple? How should we be impacted by this vision today as the temple(s) of the Lord through the Spirit?* (Exodus 33, 1 Samuel 4, Psalm 51:1ff, Isaiah 63:7-64:12 and other texts also explore the idea of God's glory and/or the Holy Spirit departing)

In **Ezekiel 11** God's Spirit gives Ezekiel a listen into the evil thoughts of leading men back in Jerusalem. Chapter 11 can be slightly confusing, so I have placed **Christopher Wright's** helpful explanation below. In short, these men of Jerusalem thought they were safe using the shift in power for their own unjust purposes, but God declares and demonstrates their certain judgment.

“At this point (11: 1), Ezekiel finds himself suddenly shifted to another location to witness a remarkable scene at the eastern gate of the temple: a group of public figures discussing building projects as if nothing were happening inside the city. It may seem odd that such a group were still around in the wake of the slaughter and fire already described in chapter 9, but we need to remember that this is all part of a vision and visions do not always conform precisely to logic or chronology. Actually, placing this scene here produces a wonderful double irony. Not only is this group of pompous men engaged in planning their future apparently unaware of the mayhem in the city that will soon overtake them, but also they are doing so at the very spot (the east gate of the temple) where the glory of God had just passed on its exit from the city. There they are complacently assuming their own safety when the Lord himself, their only possible protector, has just gone and they haven't even noticed.

The twenty-five men whom he overhears in conversation are described as leaders of the people, that is, public officials, who had obviously not been among those of the governing class who had been carried off into exile in 597 BC. Ezekiel recognizes two of them from his own pre-exile acquaintances in the city, Jaazaniah and Pelatiah. Their discussion is described as plotting evil and giving wicked advice (11: 2). When taken with the rather enigmatic proverb that follows, this almost certainly means that they were giving false hope to the inhabitants (or at least to their own landed and privileged class), in the expectation of a safe delivery from any possible siege. Such advice was 'evil and wicked' because it led the people into complacent optimism when they should have been engaging in deep repentance and radical change of heart and life. But in the absence of such repentance, their doom was already sealed, as Jeremiah and Ezekiel both made clear. To reassure the unrepentant is to share in their wickedness.

The basis of their optimism seems again to be the expected inviolability of the city of Jerusalem. This city is a cooking pot, and we are the meat (11: 3) may not sound to our ears like a proverb describing a safe place to be, yet that is what it is, as God's contradiction of it in verse 11

(EZEKIEL 10-11)

makes clear. In ancient Israel the best cuts of meat were cooked in a pot on the fire (probably boiled), whereas poorer pieces and offal would be fried over the open fire, or discarded altogether. These leaders, therefore, are expressing a double arrogance: on the one hand they see themselves as the choice pieces, the prime cuts, of the meat—the ones who will therefore not only survive, but survive with their privileges intact; on the other hand they still regard Jerusalem, with its covenant guarantees, as being as impregnable as an iron pot, 80 in which they will be safe from the fire of the enemy's attacks.

Who then were the offal? In the minds of these new leaders, the offal that would be thrown out of the pot referred probably both to the former leaders, who had been taken off into exile and were now being gleefully written off by those left behind in Jerusalem, who could profiteer in their absence (cf. 11: 15), and also to the poorer, ordinary people of the city and countryside who were suffering violence and dispossession because of the greedy land-grabbing tactics of such men (11: 6–7). God reverses both prejudices. Those who have gone into exile will eventually experience a reversal of fortune and they will be the ones to inherit the future (11: 16–21, see below), and those who have been the victims of injustice and violence in the city will be the ones whom Yahweh will vindicate and treat as the best meat (11: 7).

These considerations help us to interpret the difficult saying in 11:3a. They were saying (lit.), 'It is not near for the building of houses.' This may be a negative statement: 'It is not time now to be building houses', which could mean either 'Consolidate, defend and hold on—don't embark on new investments,' or 'We don't need to be worried about our building projects; we'll be safe.' Some, however, read it as a question: 'Is it not time to build houses?' This turns it into a positive statement which would imply, 'There is nothing to fear from this attack; it will soon be over and we can get back to business as usual.' Whichever is correct, it seems certain that it was a complacent attitude, and it is also quite possible that the connection with building projects reflects the ruthless tactics of seizure of land and property being practised by the Jerusalem elite over a century earlier that was so hateful to Micah. 81 These powerful few, and the class they represent, were taking full advantage of the national distress to line their own pockets (a well-known phenomenon in war-time), and they were going so far as to murder for their greed (11: 6–7).

God's word of judgment on these men—reported by Ezekiel to the elders back in Babylon, but having direct and shocking effect in Jerusalem itself (11:13; see below)—rebutts the proverb and turns it upside down (or inside out, to prolong the pot image). Those who think themselves safe inside the pot will be thrown out to face the fire and sword. Far from being safe in the city, they will be driven out to be slain at the very extremities of the land—the borders of Israel, where some of them have probably never set foot before. They will be treated like offal, in the same way as they have treated the poor and dispossessed, whose bodies they have stacked in the streets in their atrocities of greed. In a wider sense also, it will mean they will be treated with the same contempt that they no doubt had for the pagan nations banging at the walls of Jerusalem—nations with whom they have already been compared unfavourably (11:12b; cf. 5:5–7). But most of all, this act of judgment will vindicate Yahweh (11: 12a)—the God who characteristically acts to uphold the victimized and put down the mighty in the imagination of their hearts.

At this point Ezekiel suddenly sees Pelatiah, one of the men in his vision, drop down dead (11:13). The shock of this juxtaposition of visions of angelic judgment with the death of a real-life acquaintance forces another exclamation out of Ezekiel. It is not so much a question as an astonished affirmation, 'Then you really do intend to destroy completely the remnant of Israel!' Whereas Yahweh's answer to the question in 8:8 had been virtual agreement that, yes, that is what he was doing, this second outburst from Ezekiel leads to a response from Yahweh which, for the first time, injects a note of hope into the otherwise horrendous darkness of the scene all around Ezekiel in his vision. So we turn, finally, to the hope with which the whole vision comes to an end.

b. Suspended in hope (11:14–21)

In 11: 14–15, one final piece of Jerusalem gossip is revealed to Ezekiel before the end of his vision. What was the word on the street in Jerusalem regarding the exiles in Babylon? Not very flattering. Whatever the optimists in Babylon were saying about a rapid return, the people left behind in

(EZEKIEL 10-11)

Jerusalem were intent on making the most of their absence. If the exiles were far away from the LORD, then they had also lost their stake in his land. So this was yet another factor in the opportunistic profiteering that was going on in the troubled times. People were hardly out of the city before others were muscling in on their property and land. The injustices of war are nothing new. As we have seen in the recent Balkan wars, when people are displaced through ethnic cleansing or aerial bombing, the homes they leave behind are at the mercy of scavengers. When Ezekiel reported this particular piece of news back in his house in Babylon it must have added to the hapless exiles' depression and alienation. Never mind Nebuchadnezzar; the precious homes and possessions they had left behind were not even safe from their own compatriots.

Such then, was the view of the situation from the perspective of some circles in Jerusalem. But what was God's view? As often, some human perspective or opinion provides the trigger for a divine word that not only addresses the immediate issue under discussion, but goes far beyond it in scope and vision. So here, God's answer in verses 16–21 first of all simply contradicts the Jerusalem opinion. The exiles are not lost to history and the future. They are scattered, yes, but they will be kept safe. God himself will be a sanctuary for them—a remarkable irony in the immediate context of the destruction of the physical sanctuary in Jerusalem. In fact, there is irony in the very structure of chapter 11. In its first half, the leading citizens who are left in Jerusalem will be dragged out of the city for judgment and destruction (7–11). In the second half, the exiles who have already been dragged out of the city in judgment will conversely eventually be gathered for restoration (16–17).

Then God's answer goes on to summarize and anticipate much more far-reaching promises which will be filled out in glorious detail later—especially in chapters 34, 36 and 37. This word of hope brings a positive ending to Ezekiel's long, dark vision, even though it brought no immediate hope to his listeners. For the destruction of the city would be total, and it was indeed the end of the history of Israel for most of the people of that generation. But it was not God's intention, as Ezekiel's outbursts had feared, to annihilate the remnant of his people entirely. There was hope for Israel's future. But this would not be founded on the exiles' false hopes and fraudulent protests about their own righteousness and the undeserved excesses of God's judgment. There was a long road of ministry still ahead for Ezekiel before the people could be sufficiently disillusioned of all such deceptions. For it would only be as they plumbed the depths of contrition that repentance and restoration could be possible." — *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit* by Christopher J. H. Wright, pages 120-124

2. *Why all do you think God gave Ezekiel this part of the vision to convey to the exiles in Babylon? As you consider the attitude of these men, how God handled them and why God revealed this to the exiles then, explain the different ways this text can impacts us as God's people today.*

EZEKIEL 12-13

1. (12:1-20) Here, Ezekiel again acts out God's punishment of Jerusalem for the exiles in Babylon. We ultimately see his act play out in reality in 2 Kings 25:1-7. *Considering what is said here, why do you think God wanted Ezekiel to act this out for the exiles? Why did they need to see this?*

2. (12:21-28) *How were these exiles responding to Ezekiel's messages? Why all were they doing this? How does Ezekiel's message to them speak to us as we await the final day of the Lord? (cf. 2 Peter 3)*

3. (13) *Characterize the false prophets of Ezekiel's day — what did they look like? What all were the repercussions of their actions on people then? (While it is challenging to know exactly what the women with "magic bands" were doing, we can still learn by focusing on the result of their actions)*

4. (13) Recognizing the differences in our situation and using the descriptions of the false prophets here, *what does "false prophecy/teaching" look like today? How can we distinguish so we are not vulnerable ourselves? See also 2 Timothy 2:14-19, 2 Peter 3:16-17, 1 John 4:1-6 and Acts 17:11.*

5. (13) *Considering the nature of false prophets then and now, in what ways could we become false prophets/teachers ourselves? How can we ensure that we avoid this?*

EZEKIEL 14-15

1. (14:1-11) The elders of exile came to consult Ezekiel with idols in their hearts (*cf.* 8:7-13) and this precipitates a warning from Ezekiel to the whole community. *How is God going to deal with people like these elders? What are God's intentions through this?*

2. (14:1-11) Consider the sin of the elders here in carrying idols in their hearts (stumbling block of iniquity is probably another way of describing the same thing) while consulting Ezekiel. *What might be modern equivalents of their transgression? How is God's response to this instructive to us?*

3. (14:12-23) The exiles probably carried hope that Jerusalem — or at least some there — would be spared. Maybe they would be spared for the sake of the righteous (*cf.* Genesis 18:22-33) or maybe they should be spared because they really aren't that depraved. Possibly in response to these thoughts, God explains how he generally deals with lands and how he will specifically deal with Jerusalem. *What is God's message to the exiles?*

4. (14:12-23) *How all is the Lord's word here instructive to us as we grapple with the question of who will be saved, God's [gruesome] judgments through Scripture and the final judgment of the wicked?*

5. (15) *What is God's message in this chapter to the exiles and why would he see fit to use such an insulting image for Jerusalem? How can this add to our discussion of God's justice from 14:12-23?*

EZEKIEL 16

1. (16:1-22) Throughout this chapter God compares Jerusalem to someone who ultimately becomes a prostitute, but the basic story is contained in verses 1-22 (the rest is outrage about specific aspects of Jerusalem's whoredom and what God will do about it). Focusing on verses 1-22, *why all is God so outraged by Jerusalem's behavior? Why all do you think he uses this image to depict Jerusalem? What strikes you as impacting about this image?*

2. (16:23-24) God comments here on different outrageous aspects of Jerusalem's whoredom. *What are God's charges in verses 23-34 and how all does this shed light on sin, idolatry and misplaced trust today?*

3. (16:35-43) *How will God and Jerusalem's lovers deal with her? How does this ring true as we consider the danger of sin, idolatry and/or being unequally yoked with unbelievers/trusting worldly people and institutions today?*

4. (16:44-52) *What stands out as instructive from this comparison of Jerusalem to Samaria/Sodom?*

5. (16:53-63) *Before interpreting this section, what strikes you about God's promises of restoration? Interpret: what all do you think these promises mean? Use Scripture to logically explain your reasoning.*

EZEKIEL 17

1. (vs. 1-21) *On the surface, what is the meaning of this parable? What does God want Israel to see? What specifically is Israel's failure here and what can we learn from it?*

2. (vs. 1-21) Note that this is also called a "riddle" which may point to the existence of a subtler message. Reconsider this riddle from the perspective of Israel's relationship with the Lord. *What can Israel and we in turn learn from a second look at this riddle? (cf. 19:10-14; Psalm 80:8-13)*

3. (vs. 22-24) *What is the meaning of this final parable? How would this be an encouragement then and how all is it an encouragement now? (cf. Matt. 13:31-32)*

EZEKIEL 18-19

1. (18) In Ezekiel 18 this proverb among the people is being put on trial. *“The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”* What are God’s main points throughout the chapter? (Structure: vs. 1-4, vs. 5-20, vs. 21-24 (29?), vs. 25-29, vs. 30-32)

2. (18) Zoom in on **Exodus 20:5-6** and **34:6-7**. Note their minor differences. *What is God teaching Israel about his character and how he deals with sin and sinners in these texts? How do the teachings of Ezekiel 18 jive with Exodus?* (Note: I suggest leaving behind the popular notion — which I have previously taught — that Exodus is telling us that the consequences of sin are far-reaching. While the Bible does demonstrate the multi-generational effects of sin, I suggest that’s not what these Exodus texts are about).

3. (18) *What did God want the exiles to do with Ezekiel’s teaching? What all are the practical ramifications of this chapter upon how we live and how we think about sin?*

4. (19) *What is the message of this lamentation? Compare this with Genesis 49:8-10 and consider — why would God give these exiles a depressing lament such as this? In our culture that often has [baseless] optimism, what is the place of laments such as this one?*

EZEKIEL 20:1-44

1. (1-31) To help see the flow of this text, summarize each paragraph (use this outline or another).

A. (vs. 1-3)

1. (vs. 4-9)
2. (vs. 10-17)
3. (vs. 18-26)
4. (vs. 27-29)

A¹. (vs. 30-31)

2. (1-31) What history and/or repeated themes stand out to you here? Explain why this impacted you and how this affects our view of God and living in covenant with him (cf. Exodus 32:12).

Ezekiel 20:25-26 is the subject of some debate. Compare these verses with Ezekiel 20:11 and Romans 1:24-28ff. The NLT may capture the sense of these challenging verses. (NLT-SE) *“I gave them over to worthless decrees... I let them pollute themselves... and I allowed them to give their firstborn children...”*

3. (32-44) Without interpreting, try to capture the picture of **what** all God is promising to do here and **why** all he is determined to do this. Compare to the first Exodus.

4. (32-44) Ezra-Nehemiah paints the return from exile to rebuild as a new exodus; yet, it is evident throughout that their new exodus is only a partial fulfillment of prophetic images like this one. When Christ's ministry begins we can see the new exodus take more substantive steps (remember this as you read the gospels). As captives who have been set free and identified as part of God's true Israel, *what do you learn about who we are and are to be as the fulfillment of God's ancient vision here?*

As the new exodus comes into clearer view in the New Testament, it becomes apparent that the heavenly Jerusalem, the holy mountain has drawn near, and whenever we are, those who worship in spirit and truth have been brought near to live and worship at the foot of that mountain in spirit until we see it and are gathered into it in the age to come (see John 4:19-26, Hebrews 12:18-24 and Revelation 21:10-11).

EZEKIEL 20:45-22:31

1. (20:45-21:32) Here God sends Ezekiel with a lively proclamation of God's impending punishments by sword upon the forests of the Negeb (which means southland and is likely a reference to the land of Israel), upon Jerusalem and upon the Ammonites. *What stands out to you from this section as interesting, significant and instructive?*

2. (22) In chapter 22 Ezekiel justifies God's judgment against Jerusalem with a detailed condemnation of her sins. *What stands out to you as interesting, significant and instructive?*

EZEKIEL 23-24

1. (23) God gives Ezekiel an allegory that reveals the treachery of Samaria (Israel's capital) and Jerusalem (Judah's capital) toward God in their love for and trust in other nations. This image also provides a sketch of what it looks like when any of us choose to desire the world and give ourselves to sin, idolatry, false loves and trusts. As you consider the points made by Ezekiel through this allegory, *what all stands out to you as significant or instructive?*

2. (24:1-14; January 15th, 588 BC) As the king of Babylon begins sieging Jerusalem, Ezekiel proclaims a parable to the exiles to make them think about this in the right way. It is probable that sacrificial language is intended here. [[As the king of Babylon "leans on" Jerusalem (*samak* — translated here as siege, though not used this way elsewhere), worshippers would "lay their hands on" sacrificial animals (*samak*, cf. Lev. 1:4, etc.). As sacrifices were boiled in a pot (cf. 1 Sam. 2:12-17), so Jerusalem was a pot that would be burned up along with its people.]] *What strikes you as significant or instructive from this parable about Jerusalem's destruction? (cf. Lev. 17:13 regarding blood being covered by dust)*

3. (24:15-27) No one can ever say Ezekiel prophesied from an unaffected distance. In the most painful of all of Ezekiel's sign-acts, God takes away the delight of Ezekiel's eyes — his wife — and instructs him not to mourn for her. The exiles would respond similarly when they heard the news of Jerusalem's destruction. *Why? What is the meaning of Ezekiel's and the exile's response to this tragic loss? What all is God trying to teach these exiles and us through this image?*

CONNECTING ANCIENT COVENANTS, EZEKIEL 25-48 AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

As we begin to consider the second half of Ezekiel and what will happen now that God's covenant with Israel has been broken, it helps to take a step back so we can place what we are about to see in redemptive history. God is about to speak of how he will destroy Israel's enemies, restore Israel's land, transform his people, restore the temple and much, much more. What does any of this have to do with Gentile Christians? Furthermore, if God's covenant with Israel is annulled, what is the basis of his continuing actions? Shouldn't Ezekiel just end here?

In short: God is bringing a new covenant which is actually a means of fulfilling ancient covenants with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and even the nation of Israel. God kept his promises to these men and their offspring in many ways (Joshua 21:43-45, etc.), but, as the New Testament makes clear, **we who belong to Christ are the offspring who receive and await eternal fulfillment of these promises in Jesus.**

Refresh yourself on these ancient promises and how the New Testament speaks to their fulfillment before you dive back into Ezekiel. We will find that Ezekiel's words and visions not only foreshadow their ultimate fulfillment in the kingdom of God, they are actually expounding upon (and expanding) even older promises that are also fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

Some Related Promises Predating Ezekiel

Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:5-6; 22:17-18; 24:60; 26:3-5; 27:27-29; 28:13-14; 49:8-10;
Deuteronomy 30:1-10; 2 Samuel 7:8-17; Psalm 2

New Testament Reflections on These Ancient Promises

Luke 1:50-55, 68-79; Acts 3:17-26; Romans 4:9-18; 1 Corinthians 15:22-28; 2 Corinthians 3:3;
Galatians 3:28-29; 6:15-16; Colossians 2:11-12; Hebrews 4:8-10; 11:13-16.

In order to help you see how Ezekiel makes sense in the grand scheme of redemptive history, jot down any reflections, connections or discoveries you make as you consider these texts. Jot down other texts that come to mind too. (Ideas are listed below in white font)

EZEKIEL 25-26

1. (25) Ezekiel prophesies against Ammon, Moab, Segir, Edom and Philistia in **chapter 25**. *What stands out to you as significant or instructive as you consider their prophesied doom? Take time to explain why this stood out to you and how you see this as instructive.*

2. (26; 587 BC?) Ezekiel prophesies against Tyre in **chapter 26**. *What stands out to you as significant or instructive as you consider their prophesied doom? Take time to explain why this stood out to you and how you see this as instructive.*

EZEKIEL 27-28

1. (27) In **chapter 27** Ezekiel contrasts the perfection and power of Tyre with how everyone will react to Tyre's downfall in the second half. *What all is Ezekiel teaching and demonstrating through this lamentation of Tyre's downfall? What stands out to you as significant or instructive as you consider their prophesied doom? Explain why this stood out to you and how you see this as instructive.*

2. (28:1-23) In chapter 28 Ezekiel prophesies against and laments the downfall of the king of Tyre (who in many senses personifies the country) and the fall of Sidon. *What is all is so wrong with Tyre and its king? What stands out to you as significant or instructive as you consider their prophesied doom? Explain why this stood out to you and how you see this as instructive.*

In **verses 11-19** the fall of the King of Tyre is painted as analogous to the fall of a cherub and of Adam the priest of Eden (there may be better ways of describing the specific correlation here). As Adam was a guardian priest in the Garden of Eden — the mountain sanctuary of the Lord — so was the king of Tyre. Adam was perfect, but he became corrupted and profaned God's sanctuary, so the king of Tyre did as well. Far more could be said to make Adam's and the cherub's position and its correlation to the king of Tyre clearer. *The ultimate import of this image seems to be this:* as God granted Adam perfect beauty, honor and wisdom to carry out his duty in the Eden-sanctuary, so God had granted the same to the king of Tyre. But pride corrupted them both. It is a somber reminder of the need for humility: God makes us what we are and we should respect that with humility, for pride can cause any one of us to fall no matter how much wisdom and honor God has bestowed us with. *For intertextual connections between Adam and the cherubim in Eden, priests in the tabernacle and Ezekiel 28, see the following:* Genesis 2:10-17; 3:22-24; Exodus 28:17-20; Numbers 1:53; 3:5-10.

3. (28:24-26) According to this text, *why do the destructions of these arrogant nations matter? How can we relate to this reasoning and hope as we consider our place in the scheme of redemption?* (cf. 2 Samuel 7:10-11; Daniel 7:19-27; Luke 1:71-75; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; Revelation 13:7-10; 17:14)

EZEKIEL 29-32

1. (29-32) To help you process and see the big picture of these oracles against Egypt, summarize each chapter. Instead of only boiling each chapter down to one sentence, take time to capture the story, images, depictions and messages in each chapter.

CH. 29:

CH. 30:

CH. 31:

CH. 32:

2. (29-32) Consider the purpose and message of each section and chapter as you review these oracles. *What messages is God sending to Egypt, Israel and future generations in these oracles? What stands out to you as interesting, significant and/or instructive here? Explain.*

EZEKIEL 33

1. (33:1-9) While God already directed a similar warning to Ezekiel in chapter 3, God's words here are an expansion of what he said earlier. *After considering the content of Ezekiel's "trumpet" warning to the exiles (and the nations), what further reflections do you have on the significance and relevance of God's warning here? As we consider our charge to encourage one another and for leaders to keep watch over our souls (Hebrews 13:17), why can this be so challenging to put into practice?*

2. (33:10-20) While God already instructed Ezekiel to offer a similar encouragement to the exiles in chapter 18, we see in verse 10 that it seems the people's thinking has progressed. *How does it seem their thinking has changed? As you consider the message to these discouraged exiles, what stands out to you as significant or instructive here? Explain.*

3. (33:21-29) Ezekiel's words are finally vindicated: a fugitive from Jerusalem declares that the city has been struck down. After this, God squashes the false optimism of the remnant left in the desolate places of Israel. *Compare and contrast God's criticism of their attitude here with the hopelessness of the exiles in verses 10-20. What stands out to you here as instructive? Explain.*

4. (33:30-33) God crushes any false optimism Ezekiel may have about the people's reception to his message. They will listen intently but not obey (*cf.* Luke 6:46-49). *What all can teachers and preachers learn from this? What all can we learn as those receiving instruction?*

EZEKIEL 34

Shepherds were a common image for kings in the Ancient Near East. As one example, the Babylonian king Hammurabi declared himself to be “the shepherd who brings salvation and whose staff is righteous,” (cited by Duguid, *Ezekiel*, pg. 394). This is also significant as David is the shepherd who becomes king (cf. 2 Samuel 5:2). Ezekiel uses this image to both criticize the shepherd-kings of Israel and give hope to the “*human sheep*” of God’s pasture.

1. (34; esp. vs. 1-10) Contemplate the critical depiction of the kings of Israel here. *How did they fail in their kingship? How does this impact how rulers should exercise their rule today?*

2. (34; esp. vs. 1-10) Peter and Paul also used the image of shepherding to describe the work of elders/overseers (cf. 1 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:28-30; Ephesians 4:11). *How all does Ezekiel’s prophecy and this image impact how elders perceive themselves and do their work? How we select elders? Where helpful, contrast this with other images that shouldn’t describe this work (“lord,” CEO, etc.).*

3. (34) *What especially impacts, encourages and instructs you about the hopeful vision of God’s and “David’s” shepherding depicted by Ezekiel here? Explain.*

EZEKIEL 35-36

There are two areas of tension and significance in the oracle from **Ezekiel 35:1-36:15** — God's promise to resolve Edom's hatred and enmity toward Israel and God's promise to restore the land of Israel to fruitfulness and usefulness. While the activities of Edom (Esau) and Israel (Jacob) come into play, the mountains of Edom and Israel are personified and directly addressed here.

Read **chapter 35**. Mount Seir (in Edom) is addressed here. Edom hated Israel and loved the violence against them. They even hoped to benefit from the fall of Israel and Judah and take the Israel's inheritance for themselves. Because of this, Ezekiel promises Mount Seir that it will become a perpetual desolation. "*While the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate... Then they will know that I am the Lord.*"

Many have rightly acknowledged that Edom and its land typify something larger than the precise geographical land of Edom and the people who dwell there. Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom) were brothers and enemies from the beginning. Jacob was the younger, but God declared that the older (Esau) would serve him. But Edom was never willing to volunteer their subjection to Jacob. Instead, as seen here, they cherished *perpetual enmity*. Therefore, they and their land are destined to *perpetual desolation*. Edom and its land are typical of the "un-elect" — the enemies of God's people. As Israel could take comfort that God would not overlook the hatred of their brother, he will not overlook the hatred of those who make themselves enemies of God's people at any time. Their *perpetual enmity* will result in their *perpetual desolation* (cf. Malachi 1:2-5; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Revelation 16:4-7).

1. (35) *What stands out to you in Ezekiel 35 as interesting, significant or instructive?*

Now read **36:1-15** (36:33-38 will also play on similar themes). In the literary context, the desolation of Edom so important because Edom stood in the way of the restoration of the land of Israel. As the previous oracle addresses Mount Seir, this oracle addresses the mountains of Israel. The land of Israel had become a prey. Edom boasted of how they could take possession of Israel's inheritance. But the land that was suffering the reproach of the nations would be restored. The rightful owners of the land would return to till and sow the land again. The land would no longer be the prey of enemies, it would serve the children of Israel. The land of Israel would no longer be known as an unsafe place that devoured its people. God would cause man and beast to be fruitful and multiply in Israel once again (cf. Gen. 1:28; 9:1; 28:3; Lev. 26:9; Jer. 3:16, etc.)

The restoration of the land of Israel to become a fruitful place also typifies something much greater than modern agricultural development in the land of Palestine. The words and images of restoration here harken back to the creation of the world and the formation of Eden. Modern city-dwellers can have a hard time relating to this, but there has always been a close relationship between people and their land. People need the land to be fruitful and multiply, and the land needs people to cultivate it so it can serve its people as it was intended to (cf. Genesis 2:5, 15). As God promised the land that it would no longer devour its inhabitants but be an Edenic place for fruitfulness and multiplication, Paul declares in Romans 8 that the creation is now in bondage to corruption — groaning in the pains of childbirth and longing to share in the same glory the children of God will share in beyond this present age. As the culmination of this imagery and hope, John sees a new heavens and a new earth (and a new garden-like Jerusalem) where God dwells and ends death, mourning, crying and pain. As we will see in Ezekiel 36:16-32, the transformation of God's people could be seen as some of the first bits of this new creation (cf. Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).

2. (36:1-15) *What stands out to you in Ezekiel 36:1-15 as interesting, significant or instructive?*

(EZEKIEL 35-36)

3. (36:16-38) *What all does God promise to do here? Explain the significance of this and what this can look like today.*

4. (36:16-38) *What is motivating God's promised actions in this oracle? How does this impact how we view our salvation and lives today?*

EZEKIEL 37

1. (37:1-14) The exiles used to say, “*The days grow long and every vision comes to nothing,*” (12:22), but now that the words of the prophets had come to pass, they saw clearly that their hope was lost. The house of Israel was like a valley of dry bones in every sense of the picture — spiritually, situationally and physically (*cf.* Jeremiah 8:1-3). But God gives Ezekiel a vision of the resurrection and restoration of Israel to give them hope. As Jesus and the apostles used this image of resurrection for various applications (*cf.* John 5:25-29), it seems best to do that here. This passage is alluded to **numerous** times by Jesus and the apostles — whether in reference to death, resurrection or the Holy Spirit. After you spend time with Ezekiel’s vision, you may find it helpful to consider some of these passages. This list of relevant passages is not close to exhaustive — Genesis 2:7; Matthew 27:52-52; John 5:25-29; 11:23-26; Acts 26:6-8; Romans 6-8; Galatians 3:2; Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 2:11-15.

What happens in this vision? What stands out to you as interesting from this vision?

What does this vision mean? How all do you see that we should interpret it? Explain the significance and impact on us today.

2. (37:15-28) After the reign of David and Solomon, the kingdom of Israel splintered into two separate nations: Israel in the north and Judah (with the temple) in the south. *What does God promise to do here? What strikes you here as significant as you consider the plan and hope Ezekiel lays out here?* (*cf.* Leviticus 26:12; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Revelation 21:3; Ephesians 2:14)

EZEKIEL 38-39

Ezekiel 38-39 is an oracle against “Gog” of Magog who, in the distant future, is drawn out with his hordes by God against a restored and peaceful Israel. Though Gog has devised this evil scheme to harm God’s people, God has lured Gog out to demonstrate his greatness before the nations. Gog and the host with him will be destroyed and their bodies will become a sacrificial feast of epic proportions for the birds and wild beasts.

Though this oracle may seem odd at first glance, it is quite encouraging once we understand the message in the context of Ezekiel. **Chapters 1-24** show how, because of the defilement of the temple and the bloodshed in the land, God’s presence abandoned the sanctuary in Jerusalem and drew near to Ezekiel in exile. But God didn’t come with a warm embrace. The Lord sent Ezekiel with stern rebukes against these exiles. Jerusalem was to be destroyed and they had been participating in her sins. **Chapters 25-32** offer a measure of hope. The nations that had arrogantly proclaimed their own glory and afflicted Israel and Judah would fall from towering heights to the underworld. **Chapters 33-37** is a major shift. Though the exiles had refused to believe this day would come, Jerusalem was been sacked. The exiles were suddenly dejected, but God told them they didn’t have to die in their sins. They could turn. A day was coming when a good shepherd would return, their land would be restored and their people given new life. But what then? Are they doomed to spiral in a cycle of sin and oppression (as in Judges) all over again?

Chapters 38-39 offers an vivid answer through an oracle against this “Gog” character who thinks he’ll be able to prey on restored Israel. Though many have tried to identify a specific “Gog” event of history, I believe all the suggestions fail to closely resemble what is described here. It is my opinion (along with others) that Gog is not intended to describe one specific person and one attack; rather, Gog is a fictional character created by God, placed in the real world (Magog) and in the distant future *as an example*. He is a terrifying individual with evil plans and a massive army gathered from all over: North (Magog, Gomer, Meshech-Tubal, Beth-Togarmah), Southwest (Put and Cush) and East (Persia). However we “identify” Gog — whether as a fictional example or as a man of history — the message and impact of this chapter is the same.

1. *What elements from this vision stand out to you as significant and instructive? Explain.*

2. *How would this vision have encouraged the exiles and future generations?*

3. *How can this vision encourage us today? Consider this oracle alongside Romans 8:35-39. (Note Gog/Magog in Revelation 20:7-10. Also, note that Psalms 46, 48 and 76 have a similar message)*

INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL 40-48

Setting up the vision. Though mankind had been kicked out of paradise with God, God's glory returned to fill Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. The temple was reminiscent of the garden of Eden on the mountain of God — God's presence, precious metals, cherubim, trees, flowers and animals were there. Israel could draw near to fellowship with God in this representation of paradise.

But Israel did not keep their covenant. Injustice and bloodshed filled the land. Other gods were brought into the temple. God likened this to spiritual adultery. Jerusalem was a prostitute who had brought other lovers into their marriage bed and prostituted herself throughout the land (16). The temple was no longer a sacred copy of the heavenly throne. It was no longer a holy paradise for fellowship with the Lord. It was the home for Judah's religious promiscuities. The garden of God had been defiled once again. God's glory was driven from the temple (8:6; 11:23).

In chapters 40-48, Ezekiel is given a tour of a new temple that is eventually filled with God's glory. The name of the city near it gives hope, "*The Lord is there.*" But the end, Ezekiel sees more than a temple unto itself. He sees God's temple-presence bring life to all the land around it.

Interpreting the vision. Interpreting this vision is notoriously challenging. Some believe we await a literal construction of this exact building on Mount Zion in a future millennial age. Others interpret every single detail as a spiritual allegorical reference to Christ and the church. While it is easy to reject both of these extremes, it is still challenging to find an authoritative way forward.

This vision is reminiscent of the experience Moses had on Mount Sinai (Exodus 25-31). God showed Moses a pattern of the true heavenly tent and told him to build everything according to that pattern. However, Ezekiel is never given instructions to build the temple he sees (though, instructions are given to consecrate the altar and allot the land). God was the one who pushed the exiles to return and rebuild, and he never told the exiles to build *this* temple. In fact, Haggai tells them not to worry — keep working and *God* will fill the temple with glory. Also, Ezekiel sees this city on a "very high mountain," which does not describe Mt. Zion or anything nearby it.

As we consider the New Testament use of this vision, I can identify five major ways this image is used (though they are all related and part of the same movement towards the end times vision of God's dwelling with his people). First, Jesus declared himself to be the new temple (John 2:18-22). In Jesus, the Word became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us (John 1:14). Second, the apostles declared the bodies of individual Christians are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Jesus says that through Holy Spirit rivers of living water flow from the hearts of believers (like Ezekiel's temple in 47:1-12; John 7:37-39). Third, this is not a stagnant picture, for Christians are collectively growing into a temple and being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:21-22). First Peter 2:4-6 also relates here. Fourth, the Hebrew writer speaks to our ability through Jesus to "*enter the most Holy Place*" (10:19) and "*come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem,*" (12:22). He also speaks of how we have access to an altar even Levitical priests don't have access to (13:10). Fifth, Ezekiel 40-48 is alluded to most directly in John's vision of the New Jerusalem (on "a great, high mountain") which comes down out of heaven in the vision of the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21:1-22:5).

Applying the vision. My opinion would be that Revelation presents a grander, non-structural vision of the consummation of Ezekiel's temple vision. In the end, God's glory will not merely fill a

building made by hands but all creation to make it new. I believe this reality began when Jesus was born into the world through the Holy Spirit. He was a walking, talking life-giving temple. I believe this reality was massively expanded through believers who have the *firstfruits* of the Spirit. Through the Spirit, believers are able to be not only a new creation themselves, but can be channels to the world of the Spirit's water-like new creational work. We are being built together as a temple and we are to work together with God toward the end for which all creation was made: to be a temple filled not only with images of his glory, but the fullness of the glory of God himself.

The largest question in our minds may be, "How will God bring all this to pass? What will it be like?" But as we hope in the visions God has given us, the larger question is really, "Will our hope motivate us to bring God's desire to pass in our day?" We must live in a balance: wait and work, work and wait. "*Work, for I am with you... My Spirit remains in your midst... I will fill this house with glory... The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former,*" (Haggai 2:4-9 ESV). "*Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain,*" (1 Corinthians 15:58 ESV). "*Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory!*" (Psalm 72:19 ESV).

So as to not be vague, but clear and succinct, I believe this vision speaks to God's aim to dwell with his people and fill the earth with his glory. As his temples through the Spirit, the vision ultimately urges us to participate in the work of new creation before the great day.

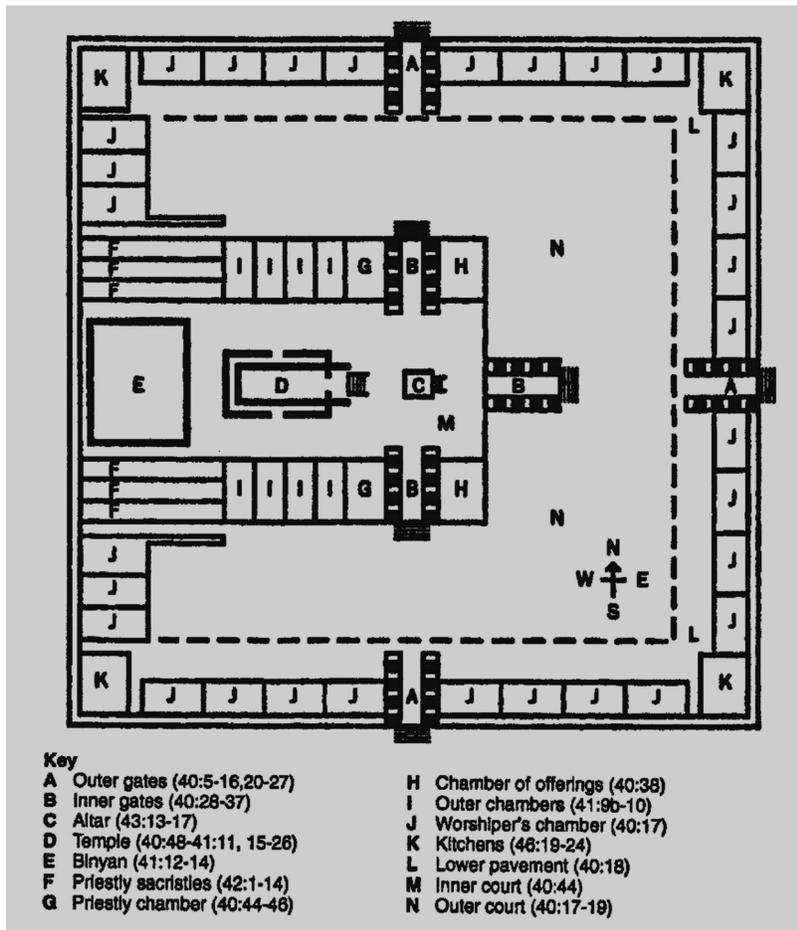
Why a detailed vision with antiquated systems? This brief interpretive lens I have laid out may seem nice, but once you start reading Ezekiel 40-48 you may start to wonder about the purpose of all the detail. Why measure each part? Why detail each entrance and exit? Why talk about the cooking pots and rooms for slaughtering sacrifices (Jesus is our sacrifice!)? Why talk about a structural temple in Ezekiel when John will use the same imagery but say there is no structural temple? Why use past images that wouldn't relate in the future? Two notes are in order here.

First, in Ezekiel 43:10-12 God says he wants Ezekiel's description of this temple to cause the exiles to "*be ashamed of their iniquities.*" We will discuss this in detail later, but part of God's aim in offering this ultra specific vision was to make the exiles amazed at God's plan and ashamed of their sins (and thus their lack of hope in God). They had felt like they were wasting away in their sins. The temple in Jerusalem was in ruins. But hearing such a detailed picture would awaken a certainty in them that God was going to reverse their fortunes and restore something of what they had. Furthermore, the basic law of the temple was holiness. So, in view of this most holy temple to come, the exiles needed to "*go and do likewise*" — be holy now.

Second, the principle of "progressive revelation" is helpful here. Ezekiel's vision serves us (1 Peter 1:12), but was first spoken to exiles in Babylon. The specifics of the vision may not always literally relate in the future, but they were certainly relatable in the past. The specifics of this vision gave them hope. The vision given to Ezekiel wasn't inaccurate, it is that further revelation has expanded our understanding of how it will be fulfilled. God wanted to give the exiles hope that his Eden-temple-like presence would return in an even grander way than before. If the temple Ezekiel described didn't look like a temple at all, they would actually miss the message. Alec Motyer's succinct comments are helpful here, though he is talking about the relationship between the Old Law and New Law here. "Progressive revelation is not a movement from error to truth but from truth to truth, the lesser to the greater, the provisional to the permanent, the inadequate to the perfect." (Alec Motyer, "What Is Progressive Revelation?" www.crossway.org)

EZEKIEL 40-42

Having considered a big picture view of how we can interpret this vision, we can walk through the vision and have a better grasp on how to think about the items that stand out to us as significant. Aspects of this vision may remind us of Jesus as a temple. Others aspects may remind us of our need to keep the temple of our body pure. Others may remind us of our communal purpose to be a dwelling place for God. And still others of our ability to approach the heavenly throne now or of the end times vision of God's dwelling place with man. *When you get lost*, remember that these are all just different looks at the same goal: God's presence dwelling with his people and his glory filling the world as it filled the temple. Also, remember how this aptly rounds out the theme of God's glory and presence in the book: God leaves and destroys, God returns and renews.



Layout of Ezekiel's Temple
from Christopher J.H. Wright's
"The Message of Ezekiel"
(The Bible Speaks Today)

On the following page, I'll share my findings. But, first take time to read the text yourself. *What stands out to you from Ezekiel 40-42 as interesting or significant? Explain.*

(EZEKIEL 40-42)

40:1. This vision took place on the 25th year of their exile. Every 50 years was Jubilee: all debts were forgiven, slaves were freed and property was returned (Leviticus 25). It is *possible* that this vision takes place 25 years in as a punch of hope in the theoretical midway point to Jubilee. The vision also took place on the tenth day of the first month. This was the day Israel would have normally brought the Passover lamb to live in their home (Exodus 12:3). Passover was a festival celebrating God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Until these exiles heard about Ezekiel's vision, this day would have started as another depressing reminder that they were — in a sense — still in "Egypt."

40:2. This temple is on a **very high mountain**. Neither Jerusalem or anything around it is "very high." However, this aspect of Ezekiel's vision parallels with some visions reported by Isaiah and Daniel. Isaiah saw an exalting of Mt. Zion to a greater status. **Isaiah 2:2-3 ESV**, "*It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall 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 his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'*" Daniel saw a stone that became a great mountain (representing God's kingdom). **Daniel 2:35 ESV**, "*But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.*" While Mt. Zion wasn't anything great then and God's kingdom may appear to our eyes small now, the prophets saw that the mountain of the Lord would be exalted and "very high." Jerusalem is the center of the future world. It is the place everyone looks to. This temple on a "very high mountain" reverses Israel's fortunes from the valley of dry bones in chapter 37 (Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 472).

Jesus uses the image of a city on a hill to speak to our purpose. **Matthew 5:14-16 ESV**, "*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*" As the temple Ezekiel saw was set atop a very high mountain, we should perceive ourselves to be like a city (or temple) set on a hill. As the city-temple of God, we are to collectively shine our lights — openly doing good works and causing people to glorify our Father.

40:5; 42:20. This portion of the vision begins and ends with a look at **the walls** which surrounded the whole city-temple. They were over 10 feet tall and over 10 feet thick. Note: the height of the walls is mentioned, but we don't hear the height of anything else. These walls could certainly be seen as a protection from enemies; but, even more, they keep out defilement and separate the holy from the profane. This can serve as a reminder about the importance of keeping defilement separate from our holy temples (our body and our spiritual community) today (1 Corinthians 6:18-20; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). This is also an encouraging reminder of the security found in the city-temple to come: *Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life* (Revelation 21:27).

40:44-47; 41:5-11; 42. One of the repeated aspects of this vision are the **many rooms** (ESV: chambers) — presumably for priests and worshippers to stay in. David expressed that one day he would " *dwell in the house of the LORD forever,*" (Psalm 23:6 ESV; cf. Psalm 24; 27:4; 84). Jesus speaks of this hope in **John 14:2-3 ESV**, "*In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*" Jesus previously referred to the temple in Jerusalem as his Father's house (John 2:16), but here it seems he refers to the end times house of God that comes down from heaven (see Revelation 21). What a comfort image! As it seems Ezekiel alludes to here, a room is prepared for us in the Father's own house!

40-42. The temple in Jerusalem was a defiled, idolatrous mess previously. In their time, it was rubble. In the whole vision here we see order. What a breath of fresh air to these exiles that God could do something new and bring order to his house once again. In our chaotic mess of a world that yearns to be filled with God's glory, what a comfort to us as well. He can set things right.

EZEKIEL 43:1-12

43:1-7. The goal of all history is for God's glory to fill the earth (Numbers 14:21; Psalm 72:19), but that goal started by filling the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-38) and then the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11). Now that the temple structure is laid out, Ezekiel sees God's glory enter the temple from the east. This vision reverses the earlier vision of God destroying the city and departing the temple and city (10:18-19; 11:22-23). Ezekiel's response is to fall on the ground, only to be raised up by the Spirit as before (1:28-2:2; 3:23-24; cf. 37:10). With Ezekiel's eyes and ears, he can perceive some of the benefits God's presence will bring. *The sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters* — God's presence will later be depicted as life-giving water flowing out of the temple. *The earth shone with his glory* — God's presence brings light in the darkness. This vision would have certainly imparted great comfort and hope. Let's consider how to read it as believers in Jesus.

1. (43:1-7) Consider the following texts in light of the vision of God filling the temple with glory and making his dwelling with his people. Record what stands out to you as significant and/or instructive.

Jesus. Matthew 1:23; 17:1-2; John 1:14; 2:18-22; 14:10; Colossians 2:9

This Age. Isaiah 57:15; 66:1-2; John 14:17; Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:18-20; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:20-21; Colossians 2:9-10

Age To Come, etc. Numbers 14:21; Psalm 72:19; Habakuk 2:14; John 14:1-3; 2 Corinthians 4:14; Jude 24; Revelation 7:15; 21:3.

2. (43:6-9) What was part of the problem before when God made his dwelling with Israel? How did they need to make changes in light of the temple to come? How can this motivate us as God's temple?

3. (43:10-12) God wants Ezekiel to describe the temple to these exiles. What all does God hope to accomplish by this? How all do you find this instructive for us as we consider both this vision and the various ways it is fulfilled?

EZEKIEL 43:13-44:31

Let's imagine we are the children of a generation that carelessly allowed the meltdown of a nuclear plant. The nuclear plant was our community's one source of energy that kept everything running. But our parents didn't respect the plant as they should, it melted down and the whole land was completely devastated by it. But one day we hear plans that an even bigger and better nuclear plant will be built. We are excited for the restoration of the days our parents talked about, but we are equally nervous — what if it all goes wrong again? Commentator Ian M. Duguid suggests this is a helpful parallel to consider when thinking about Ezekiel's temple vision (*Ezekiel*, Duguid, pg. 504-505). Through Yahweh's sacred temple-presence, Israel was continually cared for and protected. But the fathers profaned the temple and "meltdown" resulted because of it. Now Ezekiel has laid out a vision of God's presence returning to an even more magnificent temple. Chapters 43-44 could be read to answer the question: will this turn out like before?

The Altar (43:13-27). As the tabernacle and temple had very altars with very detailed specifications for construction and cleanliness upkeep, the visionary temple Ezekiel sees is commissioned directly by God. In this instance, Ezekiel ("*son of man*") is taking the place of Moses in delivering God's instructions regarding the altar and even in taking part in the cleansing and consecration of the altar. It is possible Ezekiel's presence is one of the many clues as to why those who returned didn't attempt to build this temple and restore the specific sacrifices and festivals that surrounded it. We may even read Ezekiel's participation here as a symbolic pointer that even those who do not appear to have received God's promises now will participate in them in the resurrection and restoration.

Proper worship restored via the altar stands in contrast to King Ahaz who did whatever he wanted to the altar and the house of the Lord (2 Kings 16:10-18). The altar was the divinely ordained means by which people could bring their gifts and sacrifices before the Lord — for atonement and for celebration of God's blessings and of their fellowship with him. This ritual of "*purify[ing] the altar and mak[ing] atonement for it*" may seem odd to us, but the Hebrew writer tells us that even the heavenly vessels needed to be purified (Hebrews 9:21-24).

This reminds us of Leviticus' teaching that sin defiles. Sin isn't just the crossing of a line — it is like vandalism which trashes the creation. This defilement must be cleansed by blood. And so, in this vision, Ezekiel ("*son of man*") was to lead the sons of Zadok in purifying, atoning for and consecrating this altar. Worship would be restored in the right way. Before, God did not accept their offerings because of their religious and social sins. Imagine we knew God wasn't listening to any of our prayers and regarded all our righteous deed as menstrual rags (Isaiah 64:6). But now they have a confident dream of a future day when God would accept them and their offerings once again (*cf.* Ezekiel 20:40-44).

Similarly, we have defiled our own temple and even the heavenly temple, but God has provided Jesus as a sacrifice to cleanse both so that God's presence will not be forced away. Nuclear catastrophe won't result again. Instead, we will continue to have access to eat from the altar that even Levitical priests don't have the right to approach (Hebrews 13:10).

1. (43:12-27) *What further notes or thoughts do you have about this section and its significance?*

Access and Responsibility (44). Chapter 44 is about access — entrances, exits, who can do what and go where. The glory of the Lord has filled the temple, but faithful people must maintain it properly. Irresponsible Levites must never mess it up again. *“And you shall keep guard over the sanctuary and over the altar, that there may never against be wrath on the people of Israel.”* (Num 18:5 ESV)

God enters by the east gate which is then shut to never be opened again (people must use the north and south gates). God’s presence has returned to the temple for good. He will not leave as he did in 11:23 (*The Message of Ezekiel*, Wright, pg. 347).

The prince alone may sit in the east gateway to eat bread before the Lord. This depiction of table fellowship between the prince and the Lord would give hope of a world where — in contrast to past kings — the princes would not only be close to the Lord, but subservient to him.

Previously, Levites did not always do their duty in the temple. It seems foreigners — uncircumcised both in flesh and in heart — often replaced them. The holy things and the rituals were not safeguarded. So, the Levites who went astray will return and do their service as they should. We see here both a measure of punishment and grace. God allows these disgraced Levites to return to temple service, which is unfathomable apart from God’s grace. At the same time, their access is restricted. Verse 12-13: *“They... became a stumbling block of iniquity..., therefore ... they shall bear their punishment. They shall not come near to me... they shall bear their shame...”* This is challenging to interpret. We may recognize both God’s grace and his wisdom to protect the congregation from those who previously allowed temple defilement. This limited restoration offers a serious reminder that sin can cause others to stumble and have lasting consequences.

In contrast, the sons of Zadok are fully restored. In Samuel and Kings, Zadok (“righteousness”) was a righteous priest who started a new lineage of faithful priests to replace the blind and immoral priesthood of Eli and his sons. Before Zadok came, God warned Eli of this. 1 Samuel 2:35 (ESV). *“And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever.”* Eventually the family of Eli was removed completely from priesthood (1 Kings 2:26-27) and Zadok took prominence (1 Kings 2:35) and served faithfully. The people could have certainty that this righteous man’s sons would properly serve God on their behalf and prevent catastrophe from happening again.

Most of the regulations regarding the sons of Zadok were the same for the priests before, but there is some tightening. A prominent reminder is found in 44:23: *“They shall teach my people...”* Ezekiel had criticized the priests for failing to do this (22:26). This whole picture would give confidence to the people that truly, God was preparing for a permanent restoration.

We could see echoes of varying rewards and responsibilities in the contrast between the Levites and the sons of Zadok. The majority of the Bible emphasizes the sameness of our reward in the age to come, as does this vision (*cf.* 47:14). But, as in a couple of other texts, some are pictured as receiving more reward and/or responsibility based on their previous reliability. Compare with Luke 19:16-19 and 1 Corinthians 3:5-15.

The inheritance of the Levites is the same as it ever was: God (44:28). This demonstrates to us what we should see as the most important “inheritance” we could ever receive. Though we long for glory, honor and rest in the land to come, we long to inherit God most of all. This is reflected in the name of the city: The Lord Is There (47:35).

2. (44) *What further notes or thoughts do you have about this section and its significance?*

EZEKIEL 45-48

SEEING THE VISION OF EZEKIEL 40-48

The challenge of Ezekiel 40-48 is not figuring out what is said but understanding its significance. How should we read this vision? In contrast to being dead in a desolate valley in exile, God offers Ezekiel a vision of a future where God is dwelling with his people on a high mountain and filling the land with his restorative presence. This vision is not meant to be a precise literal checklist of what the land would look like after exile or of even of what the world to be will be like. It is an idyllic, poetic, dream-like vision of a land transformed by the return of God's temple presence. The accounts of creation (Genesis 1-2) and of new creation (Revelation 21-22) are not primarily intended to offer a scientific descriptions of past and future creation. These are crafted, organized, theological accounts meant to teach us about God and mankind's relationship to one another and the world. Similarly, this temple vision offers a theological word-picture of a temple to come.

Why? To ignite hope and holiness. **First**, hope. A grand temple on a high mountain filled with God's presence is better than languishing in a valley in Babylonian exile. A land ordered around and transformed by God's presence is far superior to a dead and desolate land ruined by the absence of God and his people. A pure temple is better than a defiled one. God's acceptance of your sacrifices is better than his rejection of them. **Second**, this hope of a restored holy temple on a holy mountain in a holy land would motivate them to holiness now. Ezekiel 43:10, "*Describe to the house of Israel the temple, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities...*"

The details of this vision would allow them to actually "*measure the plan*" and know "*its whole design.*" This would not only make their hope more tangible to them, but that more tangible hope would be the basis of a new, holy life. While the offer of details that may not always have much symbolic or allegorical significance may confuse us ("*Its vestibule had windows all around...*", "*And there were vestibules all around, twenty-five cubits long and five cubits broad.*"), they wouldn't have looked for spiritual significance in every single detail (nor should they have). They had seen the previous temple. They had seen other temples. The design of these temples was certainly intentional and filled with rich imagery and symbolism, but the carefully artistic and architectural design would have given an overall sense of order and of the significance of God's presence in the world (rather than amazement that *this* stairway has seven steps and *that* one has eight — though even that is intentional from an architectural standpoint).

Yes, the specifics of the vision may not always literally relate in the future, but they were certainly relatable in the past. God wanted to give these hopeless exiles hope that his Eden-temple-like presence would return in an even grander way than before. If the temple Ezekiel described didn't look like a temple at all, they would actually miss the message.

AN EXAMPLE VISION

Before we dive into the final chapters of Ezekiel's vision, let's consider another modern example that may help in reading these chapters. Imagine that the culture of our spiritual family completely falls apart. Unholiness and division run rampant. The building we meet in is vandalized beyond repair. People move away and stop talking to one another. Most fall away. The gospel isn't sounded forth. The spiritual community completely disintegrates.

But imagine that one of our family shared a vision from God with us of a restored spiritual family. You are driving down the road to where the church building once was and you see a large, beautiful new church building. When you walk inside, it is familiar, but different. The classrooms are how they should be, but better. Everyone shows up on time. Toddlers behave. Teens don't text. The elderly are honored.

In the auditorium, the seats have all been rearranged in a circle. God's presence fills the building and takes center stage. We all worship and we all know the song by heart. When we are done, we don't leave as we normally do — driving 30+ minutes away to our separate lives. Rather, the whole area around the church has been reorganized to perfectly fit our spiritual community. We share lives together. Justice is done. People who messed everything up before have been demoted. People who were always faithful have been exalted. Everything is decent and in order. Children don't die young. Funerals aren't unexpected or tragic. Holiness and life define the land — not defilement and death. Sounds great, right?

Now, many false assumptions could arise from this picture (e.g., the over-importance of a beautiful church building), but let's take it as it is. How would seeing or hearing of a vision like this impact a fractured spiritual community? I daresay it would give hope and that hope would inspire unity and holiness. It would be impossible to make this vision a reality in all its specific forms, but the vision might inspire a renewed effort to be a body together. Those efforts would take many twists and turns and be full of ups and downs, but the vision would still inspire us to hope and holiness.

And, imagine if one day God made that future a reality, except it was even better. Subtract the building and the funerals. Transform time. Expand the vision to include a whole new world that is completely filled with God's loving, life-giving presence.

Maybe this can give us a helpful way to think about the impact of Ezekiel 40-48 on those exiles. It could also help us think about the relationship between Ezekiel 40-48 and what follows — whether Ezra-Nehemiah, the days of Jesus, the church or ultimately Revelation 21-22.

EZEKIEL 45-48

Justice (45:7-12; 46:16-18). Past generations in Israel saw many injustices. Kings and rulers used their power to unjustly take the God-given inheritance of others (like Ahab did with Naboth in 1 Kings 21). People used unjust weights and measures in the marketplace. But God declares the end of these ways. Just weights and measures will be restored. The prince will have plenty of land. Even if he gives it away to people outside his family as a gift, it will eventually revert back to the family of the prince. This will prevent the temptation to kick anyone else off their land. *We see here a vision of justice that would have given them hope and motivated justice now.*

Consistent Prince-led Festivals and Sacrifices (45:13-46:15). Justice leads to God's acceptance of what Israel would do at the altar (*cf.* Isaiah 1:10-17). Previously, many kings led Israel in idolatrous worship. But this vision has the prince receiving offerings from the people that will allow the prince to lead and provide for the sacrifices that would take place during festivals, new moons and Sabbaths. The temple had previously been filled with idolatrous worship that almost certainly disrupted the flow of regular sacrifice before God (and God wouldn't have accepted much of what was offered). *This vision gives a picture of all things being done decently and in order. All would be done as God prescribed so that truly, God would accept them and their offerings (cf. 43:27).*

God's Life-giving Presence (47:1-12). When Ezekiel is led back to the door of the temple, he sees a trickle of water coming out of the temple. As he follows the trickle of water, it increases into a stream and eventually into an impassable river. The river goes into the Dead Sea and does the impossible. What makes the Dead Sea "dead" is the rivers that currently bring salt into it before evaporating. But this river makes the Dead Sea fresh and full of life.

Around the river are all kinds of trees that will provide fruit for eating and leaves for healing. This mimics the description of the river that flowed from Eden that acted as a tributary for other rivers that watered the whole land (Genesis 2:10-14). This foreshadows the image of the

river of life that flows from the throne of God in the new creation (Revelation 22:1-2). God's life-giving presence was not intended to simply transform the temple, but to flow out, fill and bring life to the whole world (cf. Psalm 72:19).

Water is life. Where there is an absence of water, there is thirst and death. But this river brings life wherever it goes. Consider the number of ways images like this are used in the New Testament. **First**, Jesus declares that he has water that will eternally quench thirst (John 4:14). Furthermore, as the river made the Dead Sea fresh, Jesus touched the dead and unclean and made them clean and alive (Luke 7:11-17; 8:43-48). *Jesus is the one we ought to turn to in order to find real life, satisfaction and "thirst-quenching."*

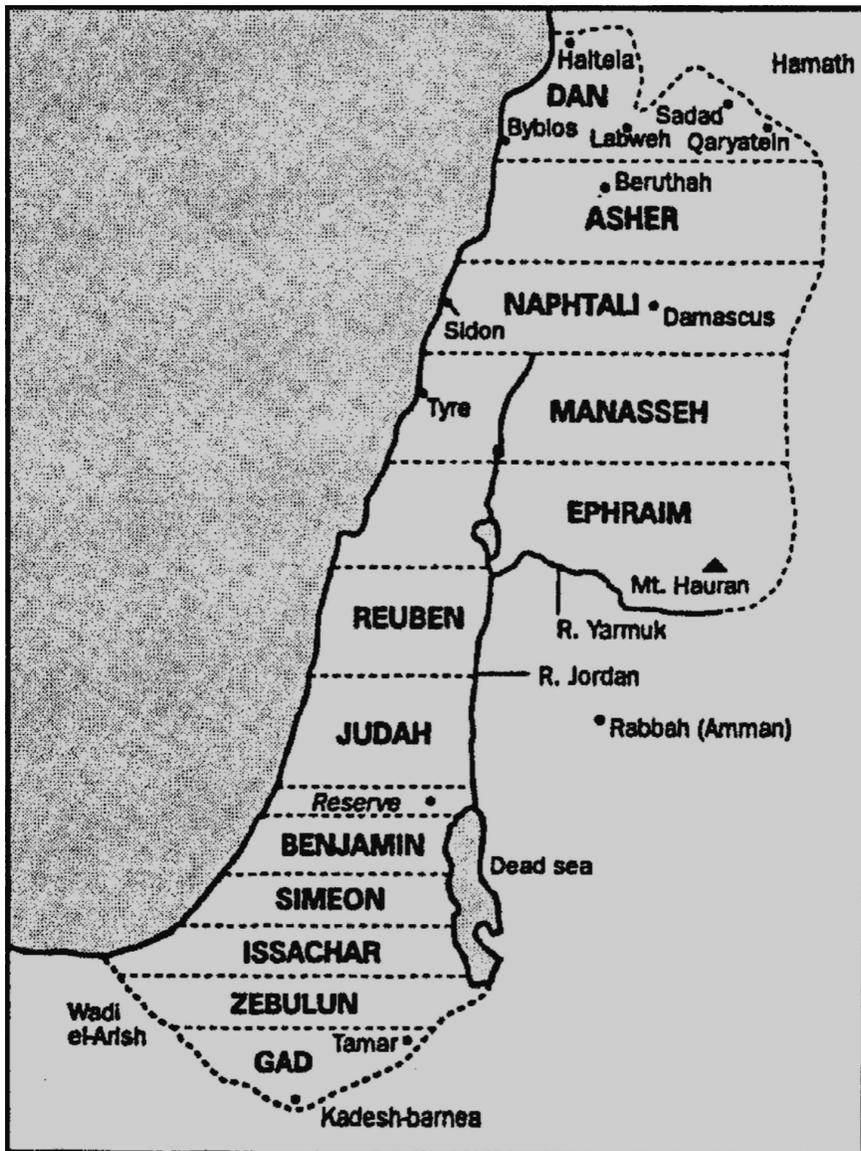
Second, Jesus enables us through the Holy Spirit to become sources of living water ourselves (John 4:14; 7:37-39). This is an image of how we bless and bring healing and life to the world. We are the temples who, through the Spirit, are filling the earth with the knowledge and glory of God. Jesus was the original temple preaching the truth and doing good (Acts 10:38), but we do even greater works than Jesus (John 14:12). *We are to live out and sound out the gospel — bringing the healing waters of salvation and of God's presence to the world.*

Third, these pictures culminate in the vision of the new heavens and new earth where all things have been made new (Rev 21-22). Though an all-consuming fire is coming (2 Pet 3), God's aim is not to simply destroy the world. He has subjected the creation to futility now with the aim that it too might one day share in the glory of the children of God (Rom 8:18-25). Now, we enjoy the firstfruits of the Spirit (Rom 8:23) and taste the powers of the age to come (Heb 6:5), but then we will enjoy the results of the fullness of God's presence that has filled the whole world.

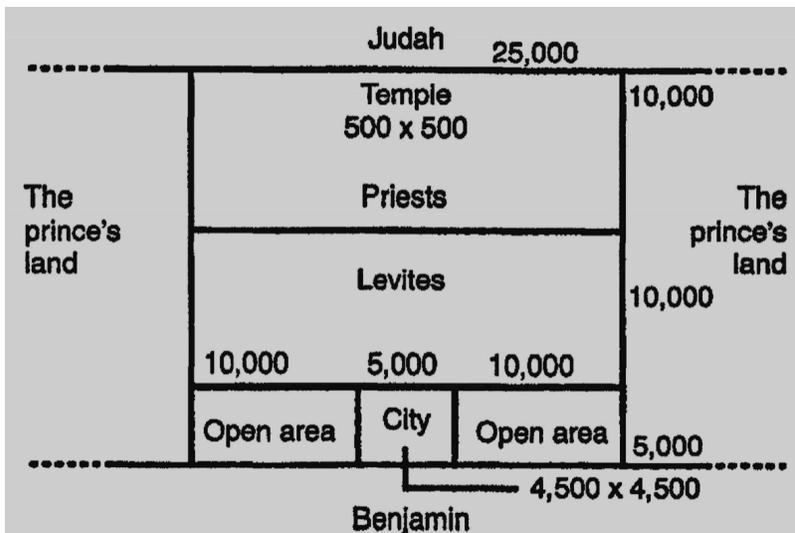
Equality and Inclusion (47:13-48:35; see next page for image). The land of inheritance is not something that will be enjoyed by some of God's children in the time to come to the exclusion of other children of God. God declares that the land will be divided "*equally*" (47:14) — none need envy another's inheritance. Shockingly, this land will not be for Israel only, but also for any foreigners who join up with the people of Israel. They will be equal heirs. Paul speaks to this blessing for the Gentiles in **Ephesians 2:12-13, 3:6 (ESV)**. "*Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.... The Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*" But as with all things in this vision, the final fulfillment seems to be expanded beyond a limited temple in a limited land.

Romans 4:13-14 (ESV), "*For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.*" (cf. Matt 5:5; Heb 2:5ff)

Conclusion. Through their bloodshed and spiritual adultery Israel pushed God's presence from his temple and his land. The people too were exiled to Babylon. But God's presence joined his people in exile to show them the lewd ways of their whoring. Once the city and temple was destroyed, the people finally saw themselves as they were — cut off and without hope. But Ezekiel urged them to repent: don't die in your sins. He called them to repent in view of the days we have started to enjoy in Jesus Christ now — days we will all fully enjoy together in the resurrection. He promised David would return, their enemies would be crushed, their land would be restored, their hearts would be renewed and their dead would be raised. God's temple presence would return and raise the land to life. All humanity can sit dejected with these exiles, "*For all have sinned,*" (Rom 3:23) and all have been "*dead*" in "*trespasses and sins*" (Eph. 2:1). But praise God, all can repent and receive new life in view of eternal resurrection life in a new world transformed by God's presence.



Dividing up the land
 from Christopher J.H. Wright's
"The Message of Ezekiel"
 (The Bible Speaks Today)



The Holy Portion
 from Christopher J.H. Wright's
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 (The Bible Speaks Today)