

Ezekiel Devotionals

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Moody Bible Institute

Today in the Word

Ezekiel 1

Ezekiel 1:1–3

Bible scholar Richard Patterson has pointed out the numerous literary forms and genres present in Old Testament prophecy. His list includes announcements of judgment (typically revolving around human sin and God's justice), kingdom oracles (including themes of redemption, restoration, and blessing), instructional accounts (exhorting hearers to repentance and worship), prayers, hymns or psalms, satire, laments, and vision reports. In the book of Ezekiel, these literary forms and genres create a rich "kaleidoscope of material" that challenges interpreters to be diligent and alert about how language is used.

As we begin this month's book study of Ezekiel, we need to heed Patterson's admonition. Ezekiel is an exciting and complex book in which settings and literary genres shift rapidly. Chapters 15 through 18, for example, are instructional accounts. Chapters 25 through 32 are announcements of judgment. Chapter 37 is a kingdom oracle. Careful handling of God's Word will, as always, yield the best results (2 Tim. 2:15).

Like Jeremiah and Zechariah, Ezekiel was a priest in addition to being a prophet. His name means "God strengthens." Based on his literary style and wide knowledge of history, culture, and politics, he seems to have been well educated. Along with a cohort of fellow Israelites, he was exiled to Babylon in 597 B.C. He received his prophetic call in 593 B.C. at the age of 30. In chapters 1 through 24, he preached mainly about the coming destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, which took place in 586 B.C. Following that event, he continued prophesying for another fifteen years. In chapters 25 through 32 he brought messages of judgment to other nations. The final main section of the book, chapters 33 through 48, is a word of hope and promise for the humbled people of God. The book's main themes include judgment, repentance, worship, and God's sovereignty and glory. A refrain repeated often is "then they will know that I am the Lord."

Apply the Word

Ezekiel received his prophetic calling at age 30, which was also when a priest usually began his ministry. But at that time, he had already been in exile four years. Imagine the despair he must have felt—far from his homeland, far from the temple, far from the place where he had anticipated serving the Lord. He must have wondered what purpose God had for him now. If you're in a place of doubt and despair, take courage, God does indeed have a plan for you.

Ezekiel 1:1

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

I saw visions of God. Ezek. 1.1

Ezekiel is pre-eminently the prophet of hope. He was the contemporary of Jeremiah, but a much younger man. Probably Jeremiah was exercising his ministry when Ezekiel was born. His work lay among the exiles in Babylon. In the first three chapters we have the account of his preparation for that work. Then his messages fall into two clearly defined sections; the first dealing with the Reprobation of the nation, and the second fore-telling its ultimate Restoration. He saw clearly the righteousness of the reprobation; but he saw with equal clearness that the national purpose of God for His people would be gloriously realized. In the words emphasized we have the secret of this clear outlook in each case. This man's call to prophetic ministry began with visions of God. These preceded the voice which commissioned him. The symbolism of that vision of God is very wonderful, and is to be carefully pondered. That is not possible in a brief note. The arresting fact at the outset of our reading is that to a man in exile, and at a time when the national outlook was of the darkest, God granted these unveilings of Himself in mystic and marvellous imagery. The inspiration of all well-founded hope in days of darkness and desolation, is a clear vision of God. The reading of this chapter may have the effect of making us think, that if such visions were granted to us, we could have such confidence and hope. Let us think again. All that was suggested to Ezekiel by the fire, the living ones, the wheels, the spirit of life, has been more clearly revealed to us in the Son of His love. To have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus is to see the righteousness of all His judgments, and to be sure of the final victory of His love. In the Revelation we see again these symbols of Ezekiel gathered round a Throne in the midst of which is the Lamb, as it had been slain.

The Captive

Author: Mrs. Charles E. Cowman

Source: Streams in the Desert

Scripture Reference: Ezekiel 1:1-3

"As I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God . . . and the hand of the Lord was there upon me" (Ezek. 1:1,3).

There is no commentator of the Scriptures half so valuable as a captivity. The old Psalms have quavered for us with a new pathos as we sat by our "Babel's stream," and have sounded for us with new joy as we found our captivity turned as the streams in the South.

The man who has seen much affliction will not readily part with his copy of the Word of God. Another book may seem to others to be identical with his own; but it is not the same to him, for over his old and tear-stained Bible he has written, in characters which are visible to no eyes but his own, the record of his experiences, and ever and anon he comes on Bethel pillars or Elim palms, which are to him the memorials of some critical chapter in his history.

If we are to receive benefit from our captivity we must accept the situation and turn it to the best possible account. Fretting over that from which we have been removed or which has been taken away from us, will not make things better, but it will prevent us from improving those which remain. The bond is only tightened by our stretching it to the uttermost.

The impatient horse which will not quietly endure his halter only strangles himself in his stall. The high-mettled animal that is restive in the yoke only galls his shoulders; and every one will understand the difference between the restless starling of which Sterne has written, breaking its wings against the bars of the cage, and crying, "I can't get out, I can't get out," and the docile canary that sits upon its perch and sings as if it would outrival the lark soaring to heaven's gate.

No calamity can be to us an unmixed evil if we carry it in direct and fervent prayer to God, for even as one in taking shelter from the rain beneath a tree may find on its branches fruit which he looked not for, so we in fleeing for refuge beneath the shadow of God's wing, will always find more in God than we had seen or known before.

It is thus through our trials and afflictions that God gives us fresh revelations of Himself; and the Jabbok ford leads to Peniel, where, as the result of our wrestling, we "see God face to face," and our lives are preserved. Take this to thyself, O captive, and He will give thee "songs in the night," and turn for thee "the shadow of death into the morning." --William Taylor

"Submission to the divine will is the softest pillow on which to recline."

"It filled the room, and it filled my life,

With a glory of source unseen;

It made me calm in the midst of strife,

And in winter my heart was green.

And the birds of promise sang on the tree

When the storm was breaking on land and sea."

This classic devotional is the unabridged edition of Streams in the Desert. This first edition was published in 1925 and the wording is preserved as originally written. Connotations of words may have changed over the years and are not meant to be offensive.

Ezekiel 1:4-28

Industrial scientists have been working recently to create "sheets of light." Plastic panels are coated with chemicals known as organic light-emitting diodes (OLEDs), which light up when an electric current is run through them. Their light is soft and diffuse, unlike the bright light from normal incandescent bulbs. These plastic sheets are flexible and can be placed nearly anywhere. They might one day make lamps and light fixtures obsolete, and they are already being used in televisions and electronic gadget displays. One analyst predicts that by the year 2015 about \$6 billion worth of OLEDs will be sold.

Brilliant light is one of the central images in Ezekiel's awe-inspiring vision of heaven. This vivid and dramatic vision was a prelude to and divine validation of his prophetic call in chapter 2, and no doubt a turning point in his spiritual life. The symbolic descriptions

here can be generally divided into three parts: the four living creatures or cherubim (Ezek 1:4–14), the wheels (Ezek 1:15–21), and the throne of God (Ezek 1:22–28). Overall, the images convey God's power, purity, eternity, sovereignty, holiness, wisdom, mystery, and majesty.

As impressive as the cherubim are, it is notable that a glittering "expanse" separates them from God's throne in the vision. His person and glory are inexpressibly greater than anything in the created realm. Encouragingly, He appears as "a figure like that of a man" (Ezek 1:26). The language here is full of qualifiers and comparisons as Ezekiel struggled to express what he saw—a man made of glowing metal and fire, "brilliant light," a rainbow in the clouds (cf. Rev. 4:3). He could not apprehend God directly, of course—as a priest, he would have known that would mean death—only an "appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Ezek 1:28). Still, it was more than enough to put him facedown on the ground in reverence and holy fear. Though conquest and exile were testing the faith of Israel, God remained God.

Apply the Word

Today's reading also reminds us of the incredible origins of God's Word. This Book that we hold so lightly in our hands and sometimes take for granted did not just roll off a printing press somewhere—it came directly from the awesome place and Person described in Ezekiel's vision! No wonder the psalmist exclaimed, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! . . . Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Ps. 119:103, 105).

Ezekiel 1:22

The Third Firmament

And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the color of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above - Ezekiel 1:22

The English word "firmament" in the Bible is a translation of the Hebrew, *raqia*, meaning "expanse." Its meaning is not "firm boundary" as Biblical critics have alleged, but might be better paraphrased as "stretched-out thinness" or simply "space."

Its first occurrence in the Bible relates it to heaven: "And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. . . . And God called the firmament Heaven" (Genesis 1:6,8). This firmament obviously could not be a solid boundary above the sky, but is essentially the atmosphere, the "first heaven," the "space" where the birds were to "fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven" (Genesis 1:20).

There is also a second firmament, or second heaven, where God placed the sun, moon, and stars, stretching out into the infinite reaches of space. "And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth" (Genesis 1:17).

The firmament in our text, however, is beneath the very throne of God, and above the mighty cherubim (Ezekiel 1:23) who seem always in Scripture to indicate the near presence of God. This glorious firmament, brilliantly crystalline in appearance, must be "the third heaven" to which the apostle Paul was once "caught up" in a special manifestation of God's presence and power, to hear "unspeakable words" from God in "paradise" (II Corinthians 12:2-4).

All three heavens "declare the glory of God" and all three firmaments "sheweth His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). Therefore, we should "Praise God in His sanctuary" and also "praise Him in the firmament of His power" (Psalm 150:1).

Fluttering Spirit

Author: Mrs. Charles E. Cowman

Source: Streams in the Desert

Scripture Reference: Ezekiel 1:25

"And there was a voice from the firmament that was over their heads, when they stood, and had let down their wings" (Ezek. 1:25).

That is the letting down of the wings? People so often say, "How do you get the voice of the Lord?" Here is the secret. They heard the voice when they stood and let down their wings.

We have seen a bird with fluttering wings; though standing still, its wings are fluttering. But here we are told they heard the voice when they stood and had let down their wings.

Do we not sometimes kneel or sit before the Lord and yet feel conscious of a fluttering of our spirits? Not a real stillness in His presence.

A dear one told me several days ago of a certain thing she prayed about, "But," said she, "I did not wait until the answer came."

She did not get still enough to hear Him speak, but went away and followed her own thought in the matter. And the result proved disastrous and she had to retrace her steps.

Oh, how much energy is wasted! How much time is lost by not letting down the wings of our spirit and getting very quiet before Him! Oh, the calm, the rest, the peace which come as we wait in His presence until we hear from Him!

Then, ah then, we can go like lightning, and turn not as we go but go straight forward whithersoever the Spirit goes. (Ezek. 1:1, 20)

"Be still! Just now be still!

Something thy soul hath never heard,

Something unknown to any song of bird,

Something unknown to any wind, or wave, or star,

A message from the Fatherland afar,

That with sweet joy the homesick soul shall thrill,

Cometh to thee if thou canst but be still.

"Be still! Just now be still!

There comes a presence very mild and sweet;

White are the sandals of His noiseless feet.

It is the Comforter whom Jesus sent

To teach thee what the words He uttered meant.

The willing, waiting spirit, He doth fill.

If thou would'st hear His message,

Dear soul, be still!"

Ezekiel 1:26 (Ezekiel 10:1)

Eleven Visions of God

1. Jacob dreamed of "a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven....And, behold, the Lord stood above it" (Gen. 28:12, 13).
2. Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel...saw the God of Israel (Ex. 24:9, 10).
3. Moses saw the back of God (Ex. 33:23).
4. Micaiah "saw the Lord sitting upon his throne" (2 Chron. 18:18).
5. Isaiah "saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple" (Isa. 6:1).
6. Ezekiel saw "the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and...the likeness as the appearance of a man above it" (Ezek. 1:26).
7. Ezekiel again had a similar vision (Ezek. 10:1).
8. Daniel "beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit" (Dan. 7:9).
9. Stephen "looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55).
10. Paul wrote that he "knew a man" (likely himself), who was "caught up to the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2).
11. John "was in the spirit; and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne" (Rev. 4:2).

David Watson, *Called & Committed: World-Changing Discipleship*, (Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, IL; 1982), pp. 112-113

Ezekiel 1:28 - Just Imagine

Our Daily Bread

What will it be like when we see the Lord for the first time? The song ["I Can Only Imagine"](#) asks,

Surrounded by Your glory,

what will my heart feel?

Will I dance for You, Jesus,

or in awe of You be still?

Will I stand in Your presence,

or to my knees will I fall?

Will I sing hallelujah?

Will I be able to speak at all?

I can only imagine!

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Ezekiel was a priest among the Jewish exiles in Babylon and had visions of the Lord (see Ezekiel 1,8,10-11). He described God's presence as "the appearance of fire with brightness all around," "the color of amber," and like "a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day." Ezekiel's reaction was to fall on his face before Him and to listen to His instructions (Ezek 1:27-28).

The apostle John also saw a vision of God's presence. He may have been Jesus' closest friend here on earth. At the Last Supper, prior to the crucifixion, we read that John was "leaning on Jesus' bosom" (John 13:23). Yet when John saw a vision of the Son of God in all His glory and power, he had the same reaction Ezekiel had, and "fell at His feet as dead" (Revelation 1:10-17).

We cannot comprehend how brilliant and awesome the Lord's glory is, so we can't be sure of how we'll respond when one day we're in His presence. Will we dance or be still? Will we stand in awe or fall to our knees? Will we sing or not be able to speak at all? Just imagine! — by Anne Cetas

Now we see Jesus in the Bible, but then, face to face.

Ezekiel 2

Ezekiel 2–3; Ezekiel 3:16–23

When Jesus was a baby, there was a "righteous and devout" man living in Jerusalem named Simeon (Luke 2:21–35). Simeon was "waiting for the consolation of Israel," that is, the Messiah, and he had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would have the privilege of seeing Him before he died. "Moved by the Spirit" one day, he went to the temple and was led straight to the holy child. He took him in his arms and exclaimed: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

Like Simeon, Ezekiel was chosen by God to be a "watchman," one who sees what is coming and brings news or warning to everyone else. God commissioned him to bring words of warning to hardhearted people. Not only did God call him, He also equipped him for this task by giving him the words to say, as symbolized in the eating of the scroll (Ezek 2:9–3:3). He further promised to make him "unyielding and hardened" (Ezek 3:8), that is, strong, courageous, and persistent. Interestingly, the word for "harden" is embedded in Ezekiel's name—"God strengthens" and "God hardens" have the same root. God was playfully reminding this "son of man" to live up to his name.

God was not promising Ezekiel a popular and fulfilling ministry. Being a watchman would be a challenging and thankless task. The Israelites were characterized in today's reading as rebellious, stubborn, obstinate, and unwilling to listen. Prophesying to them would be like walking among briars and thorns and scorpions (Ezek 2:6). The message would be dominated by "words of lament and mourning and woe" (Ezek 2:10). Even so, God charged the young priest to speak His words boldly, to give warning to the wicked, and to be faithful even if no one listened (Ezek 3:27; cf. Luke 8:8).

Apply the Word

Another truth symbolized by Ezekiel's eating of the scroll was that he internalized God's words, taking them in, digesting them, and being nourished by them. The words at this time were sad ones. But because they were God's words, they "tasted as sweet as honey." As Jeremiah said: "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight" (Jer. 15:16). We can internalize God's words and be nourished by them as well through Bible study and memorization. Is God's Word your joy and heart's delight?

Ezekiel 2:1

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

And He said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee. Ezek. 2. 1.

After the vision come the voice; and the first command of the voice was that the man who, prostrated by the glory of the vision, lay upon his face, should stand upon his feet, and hear the words of Jehovah. Let us consider this carefully. First came the vision, and therefore, whatever was to be said would come to this man with the authority of all that was revealed in that vision. There is no doubt that through all his ministry, whether Ezekiel listened to the voice, or spoke the messages entrusted to him, he did so in the consciousness of the glory of Jehovah as he had seen it in those visions. But when that vision had been seen, and the soul had responded in the act of worship which expressed itself in prostration, there was something more to be done. That prostrate soul was called to a new attitude, for which it had been pre-pared by a vision and the prostration. It was that of standing erect before God in order that face to face he might receive the word of God. In order to the delivery of His message God requires more than the worship which at its highest consists of the cessation of activity. He needs a man erect, in the attitude of alertness and attention, ready for action. Remember this was not a call to stand erect to utter the word of Jehovah, but to hear it. And yet more carefully observe what follows: "The Spirit entered into me ... and set me upon my feet." This is the Divine energy, enabling a man to come to the height of his manhood, and so to find readiness to hear the word of Jehovah. Those of us who are called .to prophetic ministry might with profit have these words engraved before our eyes in the places of preparation for our work. Here are words to hang on study walls.

Ezekiel 2:1

Ezekiel - Son Of Man

And He said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee - Ezekiel 2:1

This is the first of more than 90 times in which the prophet Ezekiel is addressed by God as "Son of man." This seems quite remarkable, as this title also was Christ's favorite title (using it 80 times), always applying it to Himself.

In Christ's case, of course, it means "representative man," "perfect man," "heir of man, [and] all God's promises to man," "man as God intended man to be." As Son of man, Jesus as perfect man could take all the sins of sinful man upon Himself and redeem man.

David was the first to use the term when He asked: "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest Him?" (Psalm 8:4). That this was revealed to him in a Messianic sense becomes clear when it is quoted in the New Testament (Hebrews 2:6-9) and applied strictly to the Lord Jesus. The prophet Daniel also used the title in a Messianic sense when he saw "one like the Son of man," who came to "the Ancient of Days" to receive "everlasting dominion" over all men (Daniel 7:13-14).

Evidently the title as given by God to Ezekiel must also have been intended somehow in a Messianic sense, so that Ezekiel is, in effect, a type of the coming Savior. Ezekiel was a godly priest and scribe, but the Lord Jesus Christ is our "great high priest, that is passed into the heavens"--in fact, He is our "high priest for ever" (Hebrews 4:14; 6:20) and is "the Word of God" to the world (John 1:1,14; Revelation 19:13). It is significant that to Ezekiel was revealed more about the primeval fall of Satan (Ezekiel 28:11-19) and the glories of the coming kingdom (Ezekiel 40-48) than to any of the other Old Testament prophets. Truly, God "spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets," but now, He has "spoken unto us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Ezekiel 2:1-3:4 Social Stomachs

Our Daily Bread

Honey ants survive in difficult times by depending on certain members of their group, known as "honey pots." They take in so much nectar that they swell into "little round berries" hardly able to move. When food and water become scarce, they act as "social stomachs" and sustain the entire ant colony by dispensing what they have stored in their own bodies.

Similarly, the messenger of God must fill his heart and mind with the truths of Scripture. Only as he is faithful to apply the Word of God to his own life can he honestly give its nourishing encouragement and exhortation to help others.

The Lord told the prophet Ezekiel to eat a scroll that contained a message full of “lamentations and mourning and woe” (Ezek. 2:10). Because he was submissive to the Lord and applied the lesson to his own heart first, he could boldly present the life-giving message to all who would listen.

As believers, we too must develop a “social stomach” by digesting the truths of the Bible and allowing the Spirit of God to make them a part of our lives. Then, filled with God’s Word, we can speak effectively to others in need.— by Mart De Haan

After I have eaten, Lord,

And on Your Word have fed,

Help me share with others from

Your precious, living bread. —DJD

Before we can serve the Bread of Life to others, we must feast on it ourselves.

Ezekiel 2:7-3:4 Eating Words

Our Daily Bread

I read about an Australian woman who developed a craving for paper. She began her unusual diet as a child, and as she grew older she ate as many as 10 tissues and a half page of the newspaper every day. The woman had also consumed small quantities of blotting paper, sheets from exercise books, and petty cash vouchers.

Of course, there’s no relationship between that woman’s strange habit and the symbolic actions of the prophet Ezekiel. His eating of a scroll was meant to illustrate a spiritual exercise that all of us should engage in. If we are to declare God’s truth with meaning and power, we must take time to let it fill our hearts. We need to feel the implications of what God has said. We are to let His Word become a vital part of us so that we can’t talk about it glibly as uninvolved, detached students, but as those who have personally “tasted” it.

The actual words and thoughts of God are revealed in the Bible. Don’t just read them and repeat them. Think them. Feel them. Ask the Lord to clarify them, to make them a part of your experience, and to teach you.

Yes, today’s Bible reading contains a profound principle: We must “eat” the Word before we speak it. Maybe then we won’t have to eat our own words later on. — by Mart De Haan

Lord, teach us from Your holy Word

The truth that we must know;

And help us share the joyous news

Of blessings You bestow. —D. De Haan

Let God's Word fill your mind, rule your heart, and guide your tongue.

Ezekiel 3

Ezekiel 3:4

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

And He said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with My words unto them. Ezek. 3.4

This is the last stage in the preparation of the prophet. Mark the sequence—visions of God; prostration in worship; standing erect to hear; going to speak the words of God. The work for Ezekiel was not going to be easy, and this was made clear to him. He was going to a people who would not hearken, as was the case with Jeremiah. But his equipment was sufficient, and his responsibility was not that of producing obedience, but that of uttering the words of Jehovah. But that was, and is ever, a grave responsibility, how grave is revealed in the central paragraph of this chapter (Ezek 3:7-21). A phrase which our fathers often used, is not heard to-day frequently, about the work of the prophet. I refer to the phrase "blood-guiltiness." Yet that phrase finds its warrant in this paragraph. There is such a thing. If the wicked die in wickedness for lack of the prophetic word, the prophet is guilty of his blood. If the righteous man fall into sin because the prophet fails to warn him of his peril, the prophet is held responsible for his perishing. If the wicked or the righteous sin and die, in spite of the prophet's warning, then is the prophet not guilty. Verily to a prophet silence may be sin; to withhold the word of Jehovah from fear or for favour, is to be involved in the wickedness of the evil-doers. All this gives the most

solemn pause to those responsible for speaking the words of God to men. Nevertheless the whole teaching of this wonderful story of Ezekiel's preparation reveals the perfection of the provision which God ever makes for those whom He sends to the holy service.

Ezekiel 3:16-17 - Beware of Warnings

Our Daily Bread

Americans are getting warned to death. Manufacturers are growing increasingly wary of being sued when their products are misused, so they are attaching warning labels to hundreds of items.

For example, a Batman outfit bears this caveat: "Parents, please exercise caution—For Play Only. Mask and cape are not protective; cape does not enable user to fly."

So many warnings appear on items sold in our stores, say the experts, that they've lost their effectiveness.

While these kinds of warnings may fall on deaf ears, the Bible points out the importance of heeding God's warnings. Ezekiel's words in chapter 3 make it clear that a warning is vital not only for the person receiving it but also for the person giving it (vv.16-21).

God's words must be taken seriously. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit," we are told (Eph. 4:30). "Abstain from every form of evil," we are reminded (1 Th. 5:22). Jesus warned against adultery and lust (Mt. 5:27-28) and against judging others self-righteously (Mt. 7:1-5).

The Lord who made us knows how we should live. He longs to protect us from danger. Let's make sure we take all of His warnings seriously.— by Dave Branon

The devil is subtle, deceptive, and sly;

He cleverly tricks us to swallow his lie,

But his cunning methods we're sure to discern

By making God's warnings our daily concern. —DJD

God's warnings are to protect us, not to punish us.

Ezekiel 3:17

C H Spurgeon

Ezekiel 3:17 "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel."

The burden of the Lord hangs heavily on me. I must deliver myself from the blood of some of you who are living in impenitence, and who will probably die in it, and when, if you die unwarned, having often listened to my voice, may be able to reproach me in another world if I do not faithfully and earnestly bear my solemn testimony concerning the wrath to come.

Ezekiel 4

Ezekiel 4–5; Ezekiel 5:8–13

Last fall, the National Basketball Association (NBA) put its rule book online. Intended to educate fans, a new Web site features video clips from actual games that demonstrate such infractions as a charge, a discontinued dribble, or a second-degree flagrant foul. More than 100 NBA rule violations are defined and illustrated in this way. Said an NBA official: "It's very difficult, unless you've played the game at a very high level or better yet, officiated the game at a very high level, to understand the complexity of our rules simply by reading them."

Rules come with consequences, in sports and in life. By sinning, Israel had violated God's rules and covenant and would now bear the consequences. This was the message of judgment with which Ezekiel's ministry began.

Following God's instructions, the newly commissioned prophet performed five symbolic actions (4:1–5:4), which he then interpreted (5:5–17). First, he created a model of Jerusalem and represented it as under siege in order to give warning of the city's impending doom (fulfilled in 2 Kings 25). Then he lay on his left side for the sins of Israel and on his right side for the sins of Judah, all the while preparing, rationing, and eating ritually unclean food to illustrate how God's people were defiling themselves. Finally, he shaved his hair and beard and burned the hair in order to show again the coming judgment. One third of the people would die from famine during the siege, one third would be killed by Babylonian soldiers, and one third would be exiled and scattered among the nations.

These actions, which took over a year to complete, were mortifying for Ezekiel. He probably became something of a public spectacle, not to mention that no one likes bearers of bad news. The loss of his beard was culturally humiliating. God was mindful of such things and graciously granted the prophet's request not to have to cook with human excrement (4:14–15).

Apply the Word

Israel's idolatry had made God's name a mockery among the nations. Despite having God's law and God's love, the people had done worse evils than the pagan nations around them. Therefore, God's judgments were just and would restore His good name. "And when I have spent my wrath upon them," He said, "they will know that I the Lord have spoken in my zeal" (5:13). Similar phrases occur something like 65 times in this book. God wants His people to learn (or relearn) who He is!

Ezekiel 4:1

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile Ezek. 4.1

Here we have a clear instance of the mistakes made by those who divided these Holy Writings into chapters. In this chapter three signs are given, whereas in the sequence there were four. The fourth is found in the first four verses of chapter five. We have emphasized these opening words because they show that the prophet was in communion with God, and listening to His word. These signs were given him, and through him to the people, by Divine command. As these signs are pondered, their spiritual and moral significance is patent. The first set forth the actual fact of the siege of Jerusalem. The second emphasized the sin which had brought about this punishment, and the consequent inevitability of that punishment. The third illustrated the methods of punishment, and again laid stress upon the pollution of the people. The fourth illustrated the thoroughness of the retribution overtaking the nation, and at the same time insisted upon the discriminative justice of God in punishment. These were the signs which opened the ministry of Ezekiel, and introduced the first part of his prophetic message, that which was concerned with the reprobation of the people. It may be well to glance at the movement in its entirety. First the prophet dealt with these judgments which were the result of reprobation (Ezek 4-14); then he showed the reason of the reprobation (Ezek 15-19); and finally argued for the righteousness of it (Ezek 20-24). All these lines start from these four signs, which in their unity suggest all these facts. In these prophetic writings we have an arresting revelation of how care-fully God interprets Himself, and indicates His ways, for those called to be His messengers.

Ezekiel 5

Ezekiel 5:7

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Because ye are turbulent more than the nations that are round about you ...— Ezek 5.7

Terrible indeed are the descriptions which this chapter contains of the judgments to fall upon Jerusalem and the people of God; and here is the reason of those judgments: "Because ye are turbulent more than the nations that are round about you." The force of these words lies in their revelation of the complete sub-version of the Divine order and intention. This city was intended to be a city of peace, resulting from righteousness; and the people a people of quiet strength, because of their relationship with God; and all this in the interest of the surrounding nations, that they might have a revelation of the perfection of the ways of God through His people. Instead of that, the city had become more polluted than surrounding cities; and its people more turbulent than those of other nations. Thus the name of God was blasphemed. The history of the Hebrew nation is a witness to great truths, an illustration of abiding principles. Let us be careful, not only to understand these things in their application to Israel, but also to apply them to ourselves. We are called to be salt, to be light. If our light do not shine before men, that they, seeing our good works, glorify our Father, our failure is complete. For salt that has lost its savour, our Lord had only words of uttermost contempt: "It is fit neither for the land nor for the dunghill; men cast it out." Let us not count on the privilege of relationship as a safeguard against reprobation, if we fail to fulfil the responsibilities of that relationship. That is what Israel did, and for the doing of which the judgments of God overtook her.

Ezekiel 6

Ezekiel 6–7; Ezekiel 6:1–10

In 2006, Jacinta Marcial, an Otomi Indian and mother of six, was accused of kidnapping six Mexican police officers. Police had confronted street merchants about pirated CDs, and her picture had appeared on the margins of a newspaper photograph of the event. Despite the absurdity of the charges, she was found guilty and sentenced to 21 years in prison. Last fall, after much pressure from international human rights organizations, the Mexican courts changed the verdict and set her free after three years of wrongful imprisonment. "As far as I am concerned, I forgive them," she said.

Injustice angers the Lord. Perfect justice is what He's all about. Ezekiel 6 uses the literary device of addressing the land, which is told that the idolatrous places of worship that have been built on it and defile it will be destroyed. Ezekiel 7 takes "the end has come" as its refrain and is a vigorous indictment of the nation's sin of idolatry.

Worshiping other gods was a direct violation of God's covenant with Israel. It amounted to mocking the Lord, and justice demanded that He respond. He is the only One worthy of worship, and those who act otherwise learn the hard way of His irresistible power and absolute sovereignty. The people's wickedness was brazen and God's wrath would be entirely just.

The principle of reaping what you sow is part of divine justice. "I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices," God said (7:3). For example, the people were proud of their jewelry and used it to make idols, much as their forebears had done with the golden calf at Mount Sinai. God made the punishment fit the crime—foreigners would loot the jewelry when they conquered Israel (7:20–22). Poetic justice! The Israelites should not blame the Babylonians but realize that God was the one executing judgment.

Apply the Word

What about us? Do we also have "adulterous hearts" (6:9)? Is there anything we value more than the Lord? Good things we prize too highly, such as family or a professional career, might be idols. They might be sins we've rationalized, such as greed for money or gluttony. Let Ezekiel sound a warning trumpet for us as well—one way or another, God is going to teach us that He alone is Lord!

Ezekiel 6:9

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I have been broken with their whorish heart.—Ezek 6.9

The Kin James version rendered this "I am broken," while the English and American Revisions have translated in the same way "I have been broken." This is a change of tense only, and undoubtedly is justified. But there is no change in the verb. In each case the verb is passive and not active. I emphasize this because some expositors have felt the difficulty, and have changed this to the active form, saying that it should read, "I have broken their whorish heart." Such changes are always unjustifiable and pernicious. In this case, so to change the verb is to miss one of the supreme notes of this word of Jehovah to His people. The paragraph is one dealing with a remnant which through the processes of terrible judgment will be restored. Leaving the verb in its passive form, we have a revelation at once arresting and graphic, of the effect the unfaithfulness, of His people has upon Jehovah. The strongest figure possible is used to portray the Divine suffering. God is represented as broken. The suggestion is daring indeed, but the most daring and superlative of human words and figures of speech are needed to convey to the human mind the sufferings of the Eternal Love when those upon whom it is set, turn from Him in lewd or whorish practices. The amazing truth is most vividly brought out in the prophecy of Hosea, a man who was brought into an understanding of the suffering of God, by his own domestic tragedy. That is the force of these words. The same great unveiling of the Divine heart is created by this sentence in the course of Ezekiel's denunciation of sin and description of judgment.

Ezekiel 7

Ezekiel 7:2

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Thus saith the Lord God unto the land of Israel, An end. Ezek 7.2

This chapter consists of a denunciation of the Kingdom of Judah, a prediction of the dissolution of the State. The words here "An end" are exclamatory. That is the message in its entirety—"An end!" The time of patience was over, there was to be no more waiting. This denunciation has two movements; the first in short, sharp sentences, broken with emotion declares the Divine decision; the second in more measured manner describes the break' up of the nation. Thus the prophet told the exiles in Babylon, what Jeremiah was telling them in Jerusalem, that the opportunity for recovery was past, that the nation had overstepped the boundaries of the forbearance and waiting of God. The end was come. The consideration is full of solemnities. We are often amazed at the patience of God. Sometimes it makes us impatient. We cry, How long, O Lord, how long? as those who would hasten the action of Divine punishment. We have no need to fret our souls in such wise. There is a limit to the patience of God. It is set at the point where man's rebellion has so calloused him that there is no hope of his repentance. Then there is an end. When it comes, it is thorough, complete, final. Follow the prophetic message through and see how complete the end is when God says "An end!" It falls upon the land; upon the people; upon persons and property. A study of human history will yield many illustrations of this, outside the Hebrew race. God waits long for nations, and gives them opportunities of return to righteousness. If they persist in unrighteousness the hour comes when He says "An end!" And that is the end.

Harry Ironside - "Read Ezekiel 7:8, 9"

The following incident is vouched for by a Church of England clergyman who knew all the circumstances.

A young woman, who had been brought up in a Christian home and who had often had very serious convictions in regard to the importance of coming to Christ, chose instead to take the way of the world. Much against the wishes of her godly mother, she insisted on keeping company with a wild, hilarious crowd, who lived only for the passing moment and tried to forget the things of eternity. Again and again she was pleaded with to turn to Christ, but she persistently refused to heed the admonitions addressed to her.

Finally, she was taken with a very serious illness. All that medical science could do for her was done in order to bring about her recovery, but it soon became evident that the case was hopeless and death was staring her in the face. Still she was hard and obdurate when urged to turn to God in repentance and take the lost sinner's place and trust the lost sinner's Saviour.

One night she awoke suddenly out of a sound sleep, a frightened look in her eyes, and asked excitedly, "Mother, what is Ezekiel 7:8, 9?"

Her mother said, "What do you mean, my dear?"

She replied that she had had a most vivid dream. She thought there was a Presence in the room, who very solemnly said to her, "Read Ezekiel 7:8, 9."

Not recalling the verses in question, the mother reached for a Bible. As she opened it, her heart sank as she saw the words, but she read them aloud to the dying girl:

"Now I will shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee: and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations. And mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to thy ways and thine abominations that are in the midst of thee; and ye shall know that I am the Lord that smiteth."

The poor sufferer, with a look of horror on her face, sank back on the pillow, utterly exhausted, and in a few moments she was in eternity. Once more it had been demonstrated that grace rejected brings judgment at last.

Ezekiel 8

Ezekiel 8–9; Ezekiel 9:1–6

The Roman Empire believed itself to be "eternal and unconquerable." So when Rome was looted and pillaged by Alaric and an army of 40,000 "barbarians" in A.D. 410, the entire world was shocked. Ancient scholar Jerome stopped work on his Commentary on Ezekiel and wrote to a friend, "The city to which the whole world fell has fallen. If Rome can perish, what can be safe?" Augustine wrote *The City of God* to argue that Rome's defeat was not the revenge of the "gods" on Christians. God is not tied to any one city or state, he reminded the church. God is sovereign over all nations and deals with them as He pleases. His kingdom is much greater than any earthly empire.

Like the Romans, the Jews believed that Jerusalem and the temple could never fall. They symbolized God's presence and His covenant with His people, so surely He would never let anything happen to them, right? But they had neglected the truth that the covenant came with responsibilities. Their persistent sin presumed upon God's patience and grace and dishonored His holiness. Today's reading gives us further details concerning Israel's idolatry: In chapter 8, Ezekiel was given a vision of the evil going on in Jerusalem at that time. Chapter 9 continues the vision and depicts "six men" (guardian angels of the city) executing judgment on the wicked.

The "idol that provokes to jealousy" (8:3) was likely one of the Canaanite goddess Asherah, placed right in the temple as an open insult to the Lord. That alone was provocation enough! But there was more. Digging into the temple walls—an action showing that nothing is hidden from God's sight—the prophet uncovered the leaders of Israel bowing down before idols. Even his fellow priests were worshiping the sun (8:16)! They had brought judgment on themselves (9:9–10). Even so, God honored the fact that some remained faithful to Him. They received a mark of protection (9:4–6), reminiscent of the blood on the doorposts during the Exodus from Egypt.

Apply the Word

Sin deserves God's judgment. Since all of us are sinners, perfect justice means that all of us deserve death. Thankfully, in the gift of His Son Jesus Christ, God has provided a way by which we need not reap what we have sown. It's because Jesus reaped the judgment on our behalf, paying for our sins by His death and offering us life through His resurrection. He is our "mark of protection."

"By believing [we] may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

Comment on Ezekiel 8:6 - Today in the Word draws the following interesting analogy "Imagine walking into a church, ahead of you is a cross, to one side is a piano, and to the other side, a small organ. It looks pretty much like any other church you've been in. Suddenly you notice small voodoo dolls along window ledges--above them, crystals hang. Instead of hymnals, you find Tarot cards in the pew racks. A cold chill runs down your spine. Sadly, if people from Ezekiel's day could have traveled in time and space, they probably would have felt right at home in this "church." They go on to make this application "Idolatry is a problem of every human heart--sophisticated idols are still idols. One way to detect an idol is to ask, "What do I think I must have in order for life to be good?" For example, a successful career, a stable family, or a nice home. Or consider a specific element of your life, and ask, "If this item were taken away would I still believe that abundant life was possible?" Now take your answers to the only One who can release us from idols--Jesus Christ!"

Ezekiel 8:17

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Is it a light thing to the house of Judah, that they commit the abominations which they commit here?—Ezek. 8:17

In this question, Jehovah appealed to the prophet in such wise as to bring his consciousness, his reason, into agreement with the terrors of the determined end. Elders from Judah had come to see him in his own house, most probably to gain his view of the affairs at Jerusalem. While they were there the hand of the Lord Jehovah fell upon him. That is to say he was, either in a trance, or in open vision, given to see things. His first vision was again a vision of God as fire. Then he was carried in spirit to Jerusalem, and caused to look. In the Temple precincts he saw an image set up, which he called the image of jealousy, because it provoked the Lord to jealousy. Again he looked, and saw the elders practising the rites of abominable idolatries within the court. Again he looked, and saw the women engaged in the evil practices of the women of the surrounding idolatrous peoples. Finally he saw men, between the porch and the altar, and their backs to the altar, worshipping the sun. We are not to suppose that these things were going on in Jerusalem literally. One phrase explains the situation, the one which says: "Every man in his chambers of imagery." This makes the condition all the more terrible. While the external rites of the Temple of Jehovah were being observed, these very observances were made a cloak for the thoughts, desires, 'activities of the heart. This is the most hopeless stage and state of pollution. Such, indeed, is not a light thing. When men come to this pass, a true and righteous God can do none other than make an end.

Ezekiel 9

Ezekiel 9:4

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.—Ezek. 9:4

The band of Jehovah was still upon the prophet. Having seen the abominations of the people, and having been called into agreement with the righteousness of the fury of Jehovah, he saw the first process of that judgment in the slaughter of the dwellers in the polluted city. But the terror of the vision was further vindicated as righteous, by the discrimination of the activity of wrath. The man with the ink-horn setting a mark upon those who sighed and cried was the instrument of this discrimination. Those so marked were to be spared. In the most corrupt conditions God has never been without a remnant of loyal souls. They dwell among abominations, but have no share in them. They live in perpetual grief, they vex their righteous souls from day to day, they sigh and cry for the abominations. When the whirlwind of the Divine fury sweeps out from the Divine presence to make an end of the appalling corruption, it does not touch them. They are marked by the man with the ink-horn, and are exempt from the blast of the Divine wrath. Thus the question which Abraham asked has persistent answer. God does not destroy the righteous with the wicked. Dr. Davidson has pointed out something in connection with this oracle which for us to-day is full of suggestiveness. He says that the word "mark" (set a mark) is the Hebrew word TAv, which is the last letter of the alphabet, and the old form of it was a cross. Those to-day who sigh and cry amid prevailing abominations are surely those marked with a cross.

Ezekiel 9:8

C H Spurgeon

I WAS LEFT ALONE.

Beside Still Waters

I speak to believers who have been left behind when better saints were snatched from earthly ties, when brighter stars were clouded

in night. I speak to believers who were preserved when so many perished, who were sustained on the rock of life when the waves of death dashed about.

Why am I left? In sparing me, my Lord, have you something more for me to do? Is there some purpose that You will suggest? Will You give me grace and strength? Will You spare me a little longer? Am I yet immortal, or at least shielded from death's sorrow, because my work is incomplete? What would You have me do? Since I have been left, help me to be especially consecrated, to be reserved for some purpose.

Christian, always ask this question, especially if you are preserved in times of more than ordinary sickness and mortality, "Why am I left alone? Why am I not taken home to heaven? Why do I not enter my rest?"

Great Lord and Master, show me what You would have me do. Then give me the grace and strength to do it. Amen.

Ezekiel 10

Ezekiel 10–11; Ezekiel 11:16–23

While a Chinese couple slept, their three-year-old daughter was busy. She found her mother's purse and about \$1,100 in cash. She played with the money and ended up throwing the bills out the window of their family's 17th-floor apartment in Shenzhen, China. A restaurant owner on the first floor later told the mother that people had gladly grabbed the money as it rained down from the sky. "We're now hoping for magic, and that the people with our money will bring it back," she said. In the meantime, they've put wire mesh on the windows.

In the same way that this Chinese family's financial treasure went out the window, the true treasure of Israel, God's presence, departed from the temple in today's reading. The message of judgment against Israel's sin that has been building since chapter 4 reaches a climax. God's glory had begun to leave even in yesterday's reading (9:3), because He refused to share His temple with false gods. His presence would not remain with idolaters and covenant-breakers. Even more painfully, from Ezekiel's perspective, the departure wasn't abstract or vague, but a highly visible and purposeful exit by the same heavenly throne, cherubim, and wheels he had seen in his original vision of heaven. God's absence is the ultimate punishment! The coals scattered on the city indicate judgment by fire, as well as hinting at fire's purifying effects.

Following the departure of God's glory in chapter 10, Israel's leaders were again condemned in chapter 11. The image of the pot and meat (11:3) indicates that they were proud, considering themselves "choice cuts." Since they hadn't been exiled with Ezekiel's group, they thought they were safe. God reversed their metaphor and let them know that despite their attempts to devour Jerusalem's meat—that is, to use their power for selfish gain (11:7)—He was going to "turn up the heat" and their goose was cooked (11:11)! They were oblivious to the scales of God's justice and would pay the price.

Apply the Word

God's glory had departed. If ever there were a time for despair, this was it. But God is faithful to give hope to His people, even when they are undergoing deserved discipline or punishment. Ezekiel was glad to prophesy that judgment was not the end of the story. A day would come when God would gather His people and "give them an undivided heart" (11:19). Hearts of stone would be transformed into hearts of flesh. Even now, God Himself would be their "sanctuary" in exile (11:16).

Ezekiel 10.6

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim.—Ezek. 10.6

The prophet was still seeing in vision the judgment determined against the city and the nation, because of the idolatrous abominations of which they were guilty. He had seen those abominations and had observed the discriminative nature of the activity of God in wrath, and he watched the mission of the man with the ink-horn. He now saw the process of the judgment. This chapter gives the account of a preliminary vision. Its bearing on the whole is that of its revelation of the source of destructive fire which was to fall upon the city. It is largely a symbolical vision of God, of the Throne, of those manifestations of wheels, and faces, and energy which spoke of the authority, power, and majesty of God. The vision harmonizes with that described as having been granted to him by Chebar. It is highly pictorial and mystical, yet makes upon us the impression which undoubtedly it was intended to make, that namely of the awe-inspiring might, wisdom, and majesty of God. It was the God thus revealed Who had declared that "an end" had come; and the destructive fire was to proceed from Himself. This fact is full of dread solemnity, and at the same time of great comfort. The fire from God is the fire of perfect knowledge, and perfect holiness. No refuge of lies can constitute a hiding-place from its burning; it will make no terms with corruption. Fire that proceeds from Him will be absolutely just in its activity. It will harm nothing save that which is evil. The wrath of God is terrible, but it is never passion overleaping the boundaries of righteous action. It is

always restrained by the strictest justice.

Ezekiel 11

Ezekiel 11.6

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Yet will I be to them a sanctuary for a little while in the countries where they are come. Ezek. 11.16

In this chapter we have the account of the last phase of the vision given to Ezekiel while the elders were in his house. Notice the last two verses of this chapter. This phase was a revelation of the mingling of mercy with judgment. The words we have emphasized occur in the midst of the answer of Jehovah to a question of the prophet. That question is found in verse thirteen: "Ah, Lord Jehovah, wilt Thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" The question was inspired by the sudden death of Pelatiah, one of the leaders of the evil courses of Jerusalem (see verse 2). This sudden activity of Divine judgment brought home to the prophet most powerfully the terribleness of the Divine wrath, and for the moment it seemed to him, as though Israel would be completely destroyed, even the remnant. Hence his question. The answer of Jehovah was immediate, and unequivocal. The fiery judgment upon Jerusalem did not mean the destruction of Israel, nor the abandonment of God's purposes for His people. For the time being, the exiles constituted the nation in the purpose of God; and for the period of their absence from their land and the earthly temple, He would be their Sanctuary. Herein is revealed the grace of God. When His people are passing through discipline and chastisement, for the sake of their correction and purification, as was the case with those exiles, He is the place of their refuge and safety. How constantly the people of God have found it so. Cut off—and that often through their own wrongdoing from all the means of His grace, He has Himself been to them all they have needed of refuge and strength in their times of trouble.

Ezekiel 11:16

Faith's Checkbook - C H Spurgeon

God Is a Sanctuary

"Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come."—Ezekiel 11:16

BANISHED from the public means of grace, we are not removed from the grace of the means. The Lord who places His people where they feel as exiles will Himself be with them, and be to them all that they could have had at home, in the place of their solemn assemblies. Take this to yourselves, O ye who are called to wander!

God is to His people a place of refuge. They find sanctuary with Him from every adversary. He is their place of worship too. He is with them as with Jacob when he slept in the open field, and rising, said, "Surely God was in this place." To them also He will be a sanctuary of quiet, like the Holy of Holies, which was the noiseless abode of the Eternal. They shall be quiet from fear of evil.

God Himself, in Christ Jesus, is the sanctuary of mercy. The ark of the covenant is the Lord Jesus, and Aaron's rod, the pot of manna, the tables of the law, all are in Christ our sanctuary. In God we find the shrine of holiness and of communion. What more do we need? O Lord, fulfill this promise and be ever to us as a little sanctuary!

Ezekiel 12

Ezekiel 12; Ezekiel 12:21–28

Some Native American peoples have revived an ancient penalty for wrongdoing—exile or banishment from the tribe. Faced with serious and persistent problems of crime, alcoholism, and drug abuse, tribal councils have in some cases chosen this extreme response in order to try to improve their societies. Critics see exile or banishment as an excessive punishment, but some tribal leaders believe it reflects a traditional Native American emphasis on community. "We need to go back to our old ways," one told the New York Times. "We had to say enough is enough."

God also said, "enough is enough," and planned to punish His people Israel with defeat and exile. The wicked leaders in Ezekiel 11 felt safe because they weren't in the first group exiled, but divine justice would catch up with them. People have an amazing capacity for self-deception. Even the exiles listening to Ezekiel's prophecies wanted to believe that the destruction of Jerusalem and God's judgment were in the distant future, not close at hand (v. 27). Despite the pervasive idolatry and covenant unfaithfulness, despite the partial judgment already executed, and despite many prophetic messages, the people were unwilling to heed these warnings and repent (v. 1).

So God commanded Ezekiel to perform two symbolic actions. First, he was to pack his things as if for a sudden trip, then to dig

through his house wall as if trying to escape. This turned out to be a specific oracle about what was going to happen to King Zedekiah (see 2 Kings 25 for the prophecy's fulfillment). Second, he was to eat and drink while displaying fear and anxiety, as if disaster were imminent, because it was. God promised to destroy the popular saying "Every vision comes to nothing" with His word that "Every vision will be fulfilled" (vv. 22–23). Sin deserves punishment. Worship is serious business. God will not be mocked. In judgment, the people would learn that He alone is the Lord (v. 15).

Apply the Word

Some people treat the return of Christ like the Israelites treated God's warnings of judgment (Matt. 24:37–44; 2 Peter 3:3–10). They think either it can't happen soon or it won't happen at all. They doubt God can or will keep His promises. They scoff at the notion of judgment on sin. But Jesus said He would come like a thief in the night: "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matt. 24:44).

Ezekiel 12:22

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

What is this proverb?—Ezek. 12:22

' This was the question of Jehovah; and it challenged a popular mental attitude, which had expressed itself in a proverb which ran thus, "The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth." The mental attitude was that of disbelief of what the prophet had uttered as to the coming of judgment, and of the conviction that visions were vain, that is empty. God gave His servant another proverb to contradict this one, and it ran, "The days are at hand, and the fulfilment of every vision." They also had another saying which represented another attitude of mind. It ran, "The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of times that are far off" (verse 27). This was the view of those who did believe in prophecy, but comforted themselves by the assurance that there would be no immediate fulfilment. That view was contradicted by the declaration that there would be no further postponement. The heart of man, set upon evil courses, constantly adopts one of these two expedients to comfort itself. Either it mocks at the prophetic word, or says that fulfilment is postponed. Concerning how many sayings of men which express their views Jehovah may ask this question, "What is this proverb?" Many such sayings, which appear to be warranted by the outlook in existing circumstances, are entirely false and pernicious.

Ezekiel 13

Ezekiel 13–14; Ezekiel 14:1–6

Most Americans are familiar with the episode about whitewashing the fence in Mark Twain's famous book, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. In order to get out of doing a hated chore, young Tom persuaded his gullible friends that whitewashing the fence was a great privilege . . . but one that he was willing to part with for a price. In the end, most of the job was done by others and he ended up with his pockets full of his friends' stuff.

In today's reading, the false prophets' whitewashing couldn't hide the nation's moral filth. These two chapters are renewed indictments of Israel's sin, warnings of judgment, and a call to repent.

Ezek 13 deals with false prophets while Ezek 14 condemns idolaters. We know from chapter 12 that the false prophets told people judgment wouldn't happen. Here they were described as foolish, blind, liars, and jackals. They were motivated by greed and mixed up with witchcraft and the occult. They spoke words concocted by their prideful imaginations rather than messages revealed by God. They were so self-deceived that they actually thought their words would come true (Ezek 13:6). But to misrepresent the Lord is to profane His name—His wrath would come down on them like a terrible storm.

Idolaters were somewhat less obvious, especially those who did not openly worship pagan gods but instead set up idols in their hearts (Ezek 14:4). Leaders were doing the right things externally, but internally they were not cultivating attitudes of faithfulness and obedience. They had divided hearts (see Ezek. 11:19). Judgment on such people was certain (Ezek 14:12–23). The message is phrased in dramatic if/then conditional statements, but the "if" is rhetorical; that is, it was sure to happen. Israel's heritage of righteousness, as seen in the lives of Noah, Daniel (who may be the biblical Daniel, Ezekiel's contemporary), and Job, did not give the nation a free pass. A remnant would be saved, and God's justice and mercy would prevail.

Apply the Word

Like the people of Israel, we sometimes ignore the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin in our lives. We rationalize wrongdoing. We believe past good actions will somehow save us from the consequences of current sinful behavior. We neglect the many opportunities God gives us to hear the truth, come to our senses, confess our sins, and turn back to Him. If this is the burden of your heart today, heed the words of Ezekiel: "Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices!" (Ezek 14:6).

Ezekiel 13:10

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

When one buildeth up a wall, behold, they daub it with untempered mortar. —Ezek. 13.10

In this oracle the prophet of Jehovah denounced the false prophets and prophetesses who were misleading the people. The words we have quoted constitute a striking figure of speech. The word rendered "wall" is an unusual one. It describes a very weak structure, rather than a strong one. The phrase, "untempered mortar," is the translation of one word, which Dr. Davidson strikingly renders "whitewash." There is no doubt that this brings us nearer to the idea, which is not that of a cement holding together the material of which the wall is built, but rather that of a covering, or veneer with which the structure is hidden. This helps us to see the forcefulness of the figure, "One buildeth up a weak wall." That is a reference to the politicians or others who were devising means of preventing the coming of the Divine judgment. Then the work of the false prophets is described: "They daub it with whitewash," thus at once hiding its weakness, and giving it the appearance of strength. That is the essence of false prophesying. Men, who have no Divine message, but pose as though they had, seek to find favour with those to whom they speak, and so agree with them in their desires and policies. The unutterable wrong of this is at once patent. It gives a false sense of security to those who are in rebellion against God, in that it assures them that they are acting in accordance with the will of God. When the pernicious effects of such action are considered, it becomes doubtful if any sin of which man is capable, is so reprehensible and deadly as this. It is noticeable how constantly the Biblical revelation deals with this evil in no uncertain way. The Hebrew prophets denounced it in the most definite way; and our Lord with words of superlative significance warned us against it.

Ezekiel 14

Ezekiel 14:3-Idols in the Heart

Our Daily Bread

When my husband and I first went out as missionaries, I recall being concerned about the growth of materialism in our society. It never crossed my mind that I myself could be materialistic. After all, hadn't we gone overseas with almost nothing? Weren't we having to live in a shabbily furnished, rundown apartment? I thought materialism couldn't touch us.

Nonetheless, feelings of discontent gradually began to take root in my heart. Before long I was craving hungrily after nice things and secretly feeling resentful over not having them. Then one day God's Spirit opened my eyes with a disturbing insight: Materialism isn't necessarily having things; it can also be craving them. There I stood—guilty of materialism! God had exposed my discontentment for what it was—an idol in my heart! That day as I repented of this subtle sin, God recaptured my heart as His rightful throne. Needless to say, a deep contentment followed, based not on things but on Him.

In Ezekiel's day, God dealt thoroughly with this kind of secret idolatry. His throne on earth has always been in the hearts of His people. That's why we must rid our heart of anything that destroys our contentment with Him.— by Joanie Yoder

The dearest idol I have known,

Whate'er that idol be,

Help me to tear it from Thy throne

And worship only Thee. —Cowper

An idol is anything that takes the place of God.

Ezekiel 14:3 - The Heart of Idolatry

Our Daily Bread

When my husband and I first went out as missionaries, I was concerned about the growth of materialism in our society. It never even crossed my mind that I myself could be materialistic. After all, hadn't we gone overseas with almost nothing? Weren't we having to live in an old, shabbily furnished, rundown apartment? I thought materialism couldn't touch us.

Nonetheless, feelings of discontent gradually began to take root in my heart. Before long I was craving nice things and secretly feeling resentful over not having them. Then one day God's Spirit opened my eyes with a disturbing insight: Materialism isn't necessarily having things; it can also be craving them. There I stood—guilty of materialism! The Lord had exposed my discontentment for what it really was—an idol in my heart. That day as I repented of this subtle sin, God recaptured my heart as His rightful throne. Needless to say, a deep contentment followed, based not on things but on Him.

In Ezekiel's day, the Lord exposed the idolatry in the hearts of His people (Ezekiel 14:3-7). And today He longs for us to rid our hearts of anything that destroys our contentment with Him.— by Joanie Yoder

The dearest idol I have known,

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An idol is anything that takes God's rightful place.

Ezekiel 14:14

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God.—Ezek 14.14

These words occur in a message which Ezekiel delivered to a company of elders who came to him. Evidently they came to inquire about the state of affairs in Jerusalem; and the whole message would lead us to suppose that they were suggesting that the predicted doom might be averted by the fact that there were good people in the city. The reply of the prophet, received directly from Jehovah, was twofold. First it dealt with these men and denounced them. They were dishonest. While inquiring of Jehovah, they were secretly disloyal; "they had taken their idols into their hearts." Seeking to know the mind of Jehovah in the case of such men was hypocrisy. Here was, however, a message for them, and it foretold their destruction. Then the prophet answered their suggestion, the whole answer is focused in these words. Righteous men in an utterly polluted city cannot save the city, they can only save their own souls. The answer finds its superlative note in the mention of Noah, Daniel, and Job. It is very remarkable how evil men believe in goodness, and in hours of danger hope that its influence will protect them. I was once told by a multi-millionaire, who was completely materialized, and had become boastfully cynical concerning Christianity, that perhaps the piety of his wife would secure him entry into heaven. If that remark -was also cynical, it was by so much the more terrible. In any case, the thought is false; and the hope, if hope it be, is groundless. No man, even by his righteousness, can deliver his fellow-man from the penalty of his wrongdoing. Our Lord does not redeem by His righteousness, but by His death. "Without shedding of blood is no remission."

Ezekiel 15

Ezekiel 15–16; Ezekiel 15:1–8

Fiddler crab females are not easy to please. When they search for a mate, they may audition 100 or more males before finally selecting one. A research team in southern California studied these picky crabs and described how the males stand in front of their burrows and wave to attract a female's attention. The movement of their front claws looks much like a human "come here" gesture. The male crab's burrow must be exactly the right size for the female to lay her eggs, or she moves on to the next potential mate.

Israel is pictured in today's reading as an adulterous wife (chapter 16) as well as a barren vine (chapter 15; see also Ps. 80:8–16). A barren vine is good for nothing. It cannot be used to make even trivial items such as pegs to hang things on. It is fit only to become kindling for the fire. In the same way, the fire of God's judgment will consume the nation because the people had been unfaithful (Ezek 15:7–8).

The story of the adulterous wife has the same point: The nation's apostasy ignored God's love and doubted His justice, and therefore judgment would come. At the start, Israel was like an abandoned baby—unloved and helpless. The Lord rescued and redeemed her, and with His love and protection she grew up to be a beautiful woman.

Then came the wedding day, the formal inauguration of a covenant relationship (Ezek 16:8–14). Tragically, this lovely bride chose the path of prostitution. She took the very gifts God had given her to build high places and altars to idols. She ignored prophetic warnings and pursued perverse promiscuity in worse and worse ways, so that even the godless were shocked by her depravity. God had been very patient, but sin earns His wrath and so a day of judgment was coming (Ezek 16:35–43). Despite everything, the Lord never stopped loving His people and would one day atone for their sins and restore the covenant (Ezek 16:60–63).

Apply the Word

Reading the allegory of Ezekiel 16, we might feel amazed. How could Israel spurn and wound the One who loved them so much? Yet at times we as believers are guilty of the same behavior. If we desire to be fruitful rather than barren vines, we have only one hope—to abide in Christ, the true Vine (John 15:1–8). Only through His spiritual life and strength can we live lives that please the

Lord. Only by remaining in Christ can our words and actions bring glory to God.

Ezekiel 15:2

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

What is the vine tree more than any tree, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest?—Ezek. 15.2

With this chapter the note of the prophet somewhat changes. Not yet had he reached the great theme of restoration. He had much more to say concerning reprobation. So far his messages had been mainly concerned with the results of the Divine Reprobation of the nation in the actual calamities overtaking the city and the people. Now he commenced a series of messages dealing with the reason of that Reprobation, as it was found in the pollution of the people. This first message is most arresting. The prophet employed the familiar figure of the vine as setting forth the Divine ideal for Israel. (Consult Psa. 80, Isa. 5, Isa. 27, Jer. 2, Hosea 10, Matt. 22 and John 15.) He makes no allusion to that which is always the chief idea in the use of that figure, its fruit. He only thinks of it as wood. The reason is self-evident. The nation was barren of fruit, it had utterly and completely failed to bring forth the intended fruit. It was wood only. Then let it be compared to other nations in that way. The comparison is graphic in its revelation. As wood, the vine is useless. No man will employ it in work, not even a pin to hang a vessel on. What solemn pause these words must give to those who are branches in the True Vine. The only value of the Church is that it bears fruit. As wood for making works of other kinds it is useless. There can be no failure in Him Who is the True Vine; but if a branch in Him beareth not fruit, it is taken away, cast forth, and burned in the fire. Such is the teaching of our Lord.

Ezekiel 15:2 Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? - Ezekiel 15:2

These words are for the humbling of God's people; they are called God's vine, but what are they by nature more than others? They, by God's goodness, have become fruitful, having been planted in a good soil; the Lord hath trained them upon the walls of the sanctuary, and they bring forth fruit to His glory; but what are they without their God? What are they without the continual influence of the Spirit, begetting fruitfulness in them? O believer, learn to reject pride, seeing that thou hast no ground for it. Whatever thou art, thou hast nothing to make thee proud. The more thou hast, the more thou art in debt to God; and thou shouldst not be proud of that which renders thee a debtor. Consider thine origin; look back to what thou wast. Consider what thou wouldst have been but for divine grace. Look upon thyself as thou art now. Doth not thy conscience reproach thee? Do not thy thousand wanderings stand before thee, and tell thee that thou art unworthy to be called His son? And if He hath made thee anything, art thou not taught thereby that it is grace which hath made thee to differ? Great believer, thou wouldst have been a great sinner if God had not made thee to differ. O thou who art valiant for truth, thou wouldst have been as valiant for error if grace had not laid hold upon thee. Therefore, be not proud, though thou hast a large estate--a wide domain of grace, thou hadst not once a single thing to call thine own except thy sin and misery. Oh! strange infatuation, that thou, who hast borrowed everything, shouldst think of exalting thyself; a poor dependent pensioner upon the bounty of thy Saviour, one who hath a life which dies without fresh streams of life from Jesus, and yet proud! Fie on thee, O silly heart!

Ezekiel 16

Ezekiel 16:2

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Cause Jerusalem to know her abominations.—Ezek. 16.2

The message of Ezekiel, recorded in this chapter, was given in obedience to this command. The purpose was still that of setting forth the reason of her Reprobation. The chapter is one of the most Mn, ul. The allegory is that of a child borbut from birth neglected; this child, taken and cared for, and nourished to beautiful womanhood; this woman taken in marriage by the one who had found and reared her; this wife, playing the harlot, and worse, for she did not sell herself for hire, but paid her lovers; this unfaithful wife visited with poetic punishment; and at last this abandoned woman restored. Thus the abominations of Israel are seen, for this was the history of the nation. But the truth brought out is that of the heinousness of the sin, in view of the goodness and grace of Jehovah. As Israel is represented by the foundling, cared for, married, and beloved, Jehovah is represented by the Benefactor, who becomes Lover and Husband. It is a most arresting fact that God, through His prophets, and through His apostles, employs this figure of marital relationship as setting forth His relation to His people as He desires it, and feels it. In earthly inter-relationships, the marriage relation-ship is the highest in sanctity, because it is the highest in the experience of Love. By this figure, then, God sets forth for us what His heart feels for us, and what He desires from us in return. His love is of the strongest and tenderest, and He looks for a return of that love in uttermost loyalty. Here, then, was the deepest fact in the pollution of Israel. The prophet, called to make her know her abominations, did so by setting her conduct in the light of His love. While the discourse revealed the reason for Reprobation, it ended with the Divine purpose of Restoration. Such is the unfailing grace of the Divine heart.

Ezekiel 16:49 - What's the Real Problem?

Our Daily Bread

The escalating violence in our society is alarming. Brutality ranges all the way from domestic child abuse and spouse battering to unimaginable crimes and senseless murders. As a result, politicians and police chiefs are advocating better crime prevention and stiffer penalties for offenders.

These measures, while having some value, do not get to the underlying source of our social problems. The root problem is a wrong response to God's words and ways.

We see this in Ezekiel 16. God declared that Sodom was destroyed because her citizens responded to His goodness with pride, heartlessness, and all sorts of abominable conduct instead of gratitude and obedience (v.49).

When life is easy, we tend to take God's goodness for granted and focus on the earthly and temporal rather than on the heavenly and eternal. Idleness provides an environment in which pride, self-centeredness, and heartlessness can flourish. Therefore, as we look at all the problems in the world today, instead of calling for civic action to make the world safer it might be well for us to pray, "Lord, help me to be more thankful for Your goodness. I want to be a Christlike influence on those around me."— by Herbert Vander Lugt

Thinking It Over

Read Proverbs 30:7-9. What are the two extreme

conditions that may lead a person to dishonor the Lord?

Are you taking God's goodness for granted?

Society is improved one life at a time.

Ezekiel 16:49 - The Gift of Self-Indulgence

Our Daily Bread

An upscale London department store launched a new gift card with the slogan, "The Gift of Self-Indulgence." Throughout the store, signs, slogans, and even nametags called attention to the cards. According to one employee, sales of the gift cards during the first weeks of the promotion had been very strong, far exceeding company expectations. Generosity may prompt a person to give a luxurious gift to someone special, but too often we find it easier to purchase what we want for ourselves.

The prophet Ezekiel sheds light on an ancient city whose people suffered God's judgment, in part, because they embraced a self-indulgent lifestyle. "This was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit" (Ezek. 16:49-50).

Historically, the Lord has dealt harshly with His people who became arrogant, overfed, and unconcerned (v.49). The antidote to the poison of self-indulgence is the desire to please God and serve others, not ourselves (Phil. 2:4).

Self-indulgence is a gift we don't need. — by David C. McCasland

Some are discouraged and weary in heart,

Help somebody today!

Someone the journey to heaven should start,

Help somebody today! —Breck

The more we serve Christ, the less we serve self.

Ezekiel 16:60

Faith's Checkbook - C H Spurgeon

Back, Then Forward

"Nevertheless, I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting

covenant.”—Ezekiel 16:60

NOTWITHSTANDING our sins, the Lord is still faithful in His love to us. **He looks back.** See how He remembers those early days of ours when He took us into covenant with Himself, and we gave ourselves over to Him. Happy days those! The Lord does not twit us with them, and charge us with being insincere. No, He looks rather to His covenant with us than to our covenant with Him. There was no hypocrisy in that sacred compact—on His part, at any rate. How gracious is the Lord thus to look back in love!

He looks forward also. He is resolved that the covenant shall not fail. If we do not stand to it, He does. He solemnly declares, “I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant.” He has no mind to draw back from His promises. Blessed be His name! He sees the sacred seal, “the blood of the everlasting covenant,” and He remembers our Surety, in whom He ratified that covenant, even His own dear Son; and therefore He rests in His covenant engagements. “He abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself.”

O Lord, lay this precious word upon my heart, and help me to feed upon it all this day!

Ezekiel 16:63

C H Spurgeon

Ezekiel 16:63 “When I am pacified toward thee.”

When I am peace-ified; when I am made peace toward thee. God thinks of nothing but peace toward his children. “Peace, peace,” says he. He is the God of peace (Phil. 4:9), the fruit of his Spirit is peace (Gal. 5:22), the very name of his Son is peace (Isa. 9:6). The heaven to which he is bringing us is everlasting peace. And even now the peace of God which passeth all understanding keeps our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ (Phil. 4:7).

Ezekiel 17

Ezekiel 17; Ezekiel 17:22–24

In celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Institute of Cosmology at Tufts University in Massachusetts, a new apple tree was planted last fall. This was no ordinary apple tree—it was a descendant of the famous tree Isaac Newton sat under when an apple dropped on his head and helped him come up with the theory of gravity. Tufts received three branches from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which had previously received a cutting from the Royal Botanical Gardens in England, where a descendant of the original tree is said to reside.

In today’s reading, the planting of a new tree symbolizes a new beginning for Israel (vv. 22–24). First, though, Ezekiel gave an allegory or parable of an eagle and a seedling (vv. 1–10), followed by its interpretation (vv. 11–21). The first eagle was Nebuchadnezzar. The cedar tree represented the kingly line of David. Taking seeds from the top of the tree to a faraway land symbolized Jewish leaders, particularly King Jehoiachin, being taken to Babylon in exile. Then another seed, King Zedekiah, became a vine which tried to rebel against Babylon by relying on an alliance with Egypt (the second eagle). The east wind blew and the vine withered, meaning that the Babylonian armies would crush the revolt. (This prophecy was given about three years before it was fulfilled, as recounted in 2 Kings 24:8–25:30.) By breaking a treaty made in God’s name and putting their trust in a human ally, Israel would once again prove that human wisdom is foolish and faithless.

Despite everything, a day would come when God Himself would restore the nation. His care and loving-kindness would ensure the growth of a new cedar tree. Birds would roost in its branches, suggesting that all the peoples of the earth will benefit. Over all these plot twists of history, God was, is, and will be sovereign. He raises up and brings down. He causes failure and gives success. He is the Ruler of all!

Apply the Word

Faith, as Scripture tells us, “is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1). We sometimes speak of faith in God as if it were some kind of risk, when in fact it is the surest confidence there is. He will do what He says. He is in control. That’s one reason Jesus compared faith to a mustard seed in His kingdom, which, though a small seed, grows into one of the largest of garden trees (Matt. 13:31–32).

Ezekiel 17:2

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Son of man, put forth a riddle.—Ezek. 17:2

In the allegory of the foundling in the previous chapter Ezekiel was dealing with the spiritual and moral malady of Israel. In this message he was concerned with her political folly and wickedness. The riddle of the two eagles and the vine is explained. The

nation had looked to compromise with Babylon, and protection from Egypt, as means of restoring national being and fruitfulness. This had been her political sin. The prophetic message demonstrated the futility of such wickedness. The vine was still Jehovah's, and the eagles were also within His power. The things they did were all within His power, and under His government. Therefore the transplanting of the vine was of no avail. His east wind found it, wherever it was placed, and it withered in spite of all its attempts to maintain its life by these false means. Thus the political iniquity, resulting from the spiritual abomination, was visited with the Divine judgment. The reprobation of God could not be annulled by the policies which forgot Him. Here also the last note is one declaring the coming restoration, but clearly showing that it will be brought about, not by human policy, when the policy is conceived in rebellion, but by the action of His Own power, and in answer to the inspiration of His never failing grace. This chapter is full of light for statesmen and politicians if they will but consider its teaching. The one fact which abides is that of the Divine sovereignty. God is governing, and there is no escape from Him. Eagles, and vines, are under His control. Happy are they who frame their policies by consulting Him, and order their ways in His fear.

Ezekiel 18

Ezekiel 18; Ezekiel 18:19–23

As a young man, Dawson Trotman was a good student and a natural leader. In fact, he led the Christian Endeavor young people's group at his church. But he was living a double life in which he enjoyed drinking, smoking, and a partying lifestyle. When he and his girlfriend nearly drowned in a mountain lake, he took it as a spiritual wake-up call. Soon after, at age 20, he committed himself to following Christ. "Daws," as he became known, went on to found the Navigators, an organization committed to authentic discipleship.

"Repent and live!" is the message at the center of God's approach to justice and judgment. He takes no pleasure in punishing the wicked, but stands ready to forgive all who turn to Him. That's one of the main principles of Ezekiel 18. God's moral law is not as hard as iron, but is tempered by the softness of His mercy. A new heart and spirit are not something we can earn, but He stands ready to give them (v. 31).

A second main principle here is that we bear responsibility for our spiritual choices (cf. Jer. 31:29–30). The saying quoted in verse 2 reflects self-pity. The Israelites complained they would have no inheritance to pass on to their children. God contradicted this: First, He is in control, so the next generation's inheritance was ultimately His responsibility, not theirs. Second, He holds individuals accountable, so if the next generation acted differently, the results would be different.

To make sure the point was clear, Ezekiel gave a three-generation illustration of the principle that "the soul who sins is the one who will die" (v. 4). What about the Law's promise to punish the children for the sins of the fathers (Ex. 20:5)? Individual responsibility and collective responsibility are both present in Scripture. But God emphasized the former in this case because the Israelites were using His judgment as a cynical excuse to continue their disobedient ways, whereas He was calling them to repent and live.

Apply the Word

Verse 5 through 9 in today's reading, the first generation in Ezekiel's illustration, paint a vivid portrait of a righteous man. He is committed to justice, worship of the one true God, and faithfulness in his marriage. He does not exploit the poor but is generous to those in need. He is obedient to God's commands and thereby inherits life. How do we measure up in comparison to such a person? Our prayer today is that the Holy Spirit would enable us to live for Christ so that this description would be true of us.

Ezekiel 18:1-9 Dangerous Proverbs

Our Daily Bread

There is a hidden danger in any proverb. A proverb is a general principle—not an absolute truth—and it can be misused. "Like father, like son," we say, but it depends on who says it and why. There is truth in it, but when someone quotes it to justify the shambles he has made of life, the proverb serves as an excuse to play the victim.

The prophet Ezekiel wanted to get the Hebrew captives in Babylon to return not only to their homes but to their God. It was a tough sell. The people responded by taking refuge in a proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2).

This saying blamed their captivity on an earlier generation. "You can't be serious about asking us to repent," they protested. "It's our parents' fault. They ate the sour grapes and we have to bear the consequences."

So God declared through Ezekiel, "You shall no longer use this proverb in Israel" (v.3). Each person bore responsibility for his own actions. "The soul who sins shall die," God said (v.4). But "if he has walked in My statutes and kept My judgments faithfully—he is just; he shall surely live!" (v.9).

Proverbs are wonderful tools for guidance. They were never intended to excuse our bad behavior.

Don't hide your sin and cover up,

Pretending that there's nothing wrong;

Instead, confess it and repent,

And God will fill your heart with song. —Sper

A good test of character: When we do wrong, whom do we blame?

Ezekiel 18:1-22 Who's To Blame?

Our Daily Bread

A popular concept today is the idea that individuals can't be blamed for what they do or fail to do. Blame heredity or environment or parents or teachers or the government, but don't blame the individual himself.

For example, a fired Northwestern University professor was arrested for collecting his mother's social security checks for 6 years after her death. He blamed "extreme procrastination behavior" caused by depression.

God's Word gives the lie to this kind of blame-shifting and stresses personal responsibility. The Israelites had a popular proverb that stated, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18:2). But the Lord told Ezekiel not to use this proverb. Instead, He said that everyone was accountable for his own sin and responsible to turn from it (vv.20-22).

Scripture teaches that we are not irresponsible victims of circumstances. We will answer to the all-knowing Judge for any behavior that violates His holy law. Our only hope is to confess that we deserve God's eternal condemnation and to put our trust in Jesus Christ as our substitute. Then we can be assured that there is "no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

By Christ, the sinless Lamb of God,

The precious blood was shed,

When He fulfilled God's holy Word

And suffered in our stead. —Anon.

To escape God's judgment, we must first admit we deserve it.

Ezekiel 18:4 - No More Excuses

Our Daily Bread

When salmon travel hundreds of miles up rivers and streams to spawn, they are acting on instinct. They are in a sense being driven by an uncontrollable force.

I read about a young convict who thinks that human conduct is similar to that of the salmon. Referring to the murders he committed and to his own fate, he said, "Things just happen." He thinks some kind of force was responsible for his pulling the trigger and killing two people. But he is wrong. Man is free and cannot blame his sinful actions on an uncontrollable force such as instinct.

More than 2,500 years ago, some Israelites were using a similar excuse for their sin. They quoted a well-known proverb that placed the blame for their sins on their ancestors (Ezekiel 18:2). But God told them they were wrong. He said that a good man will not be punished for the sins of a wicked son. Nor will a godly son be punished for the sins of his evil father.

Make no mistake. No matter what your situation, you are responsible for what you do. Stop offering excuses for your sins. Instead, acknowledge your guilt to God and accept the forgiveness He offers (Psalm 32:5). That's the first step in exercising your individual responsibility.— by Herbert Vander Lugt

Our actions are accountable

In God's just court above,

So we must face this certain fact:

We need His pardoning love. —Branon

There's no excuse for excusing sin.

Ezekiel 18:25-32 A Father's Invitation

The Old Testament book of Ezekiel tells of God's judgment on His disobedient people. The Lord called them "a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me" (2:3) and "impudent and stubborn children" (v.4). The graphic descriptions of their sin and the violent images of their coming punishment are appalling. Yet in the darkest moments of God's lament over His people held captive in Babylon, His love shines through in His call for them to walk again on the path of life.

" 'Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,' says the Lord God. 'Therefore turn and live!' " (18:31-32).

God does not ask us to feel worse than we already do about our failures or to try harder to keep His commands. Instead, He invites us to receive a fresh source of motivation and strength—"a new heart and a new spirit" from Him (36:26-27).

If you're feeling that you've wandered too far away from God and that He is through with you, it's time to embrace the truth. Will you accept the Father's invitation to "turn and live" today?

If you've rebelled and turned away

From what you know is true,

Turn back to God—He will forgive;

He waits to pardon you. —Sper

To enjoy the future, accept God's forgiveness for the past.

Ezekiel 18:23 Jonah 3:1-4:11

Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? . . . Am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? - Ezekiel 18:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

At the height of the Soviet Union's power, it controlled territory from the Baltics to the Balkans, and controlled a circle of Central Asian republics. Soviet troops often used brutal tactics to suppress challenges to Soviet domination. For residents who lived in Soviet satellite countries, the Soviets were feared and hated. Yet believers from countries such as Romania and Poland risked their lives to bring the gospel into the heart of the Soviet Union.

Although most people only think about Jonah and his encounters with a big fish, this book is a compelling example of God's love for even the most hated of nations. Assyria at that time was known for its gruesome cruelty. Assyrians were so proud of their ability to terrorize that they left numerous monuments boasting of their sadistic practices. To the average Israelite, the most logical object of God's wrath would be Nineveh. It's no wonder, then, that Jonah felt that he had to run from God's call. If he went to Nineveh, he was sure to be killed; and even if he were successful in his mission, no one would rejoice at home that anything good had happened to these hated people.

After much resistance, Jonah went to Nineveh, and the results of his preaching were nothing short of miraculous (Jonah 3:5, 10). The Lord's concern for Nineveh shows that His love was not confined to a particular nation or place. This is the most likely reason why Jonah tried to run away. It was unthinkable to him that God could love even the Assyrians. In Jonah's mind, these people deserved God's wrath because of all they had done. But, apart from God's intervention, all people are deserving of His wrath. God's heart is that all people might repent and turn toward Him.

Jonah was a very human prophet. God's ways were difficult for him to understand—and he was not afraid to let God know that. But God's response to Jonah cut to the core: Jonah cared more about his comfort than the fate of a 120,000 people.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The book of Jonah forces us to ask some hard questions. Are we like Jonah and become angry if God extends mercy to those who we feel deserve judgment? Perhaps this is how we feel about outreach to hardened criminals or prayer for terrorists. Or are we going to take God's perspective, which asks, "Should I not be concerned about that great city?" Jonah pushes us to see how great God's love is for all nations and peoples, even those whom we consider enemies deserving His wrath

Ezekiel 18:4

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Behold, all souls are Mine.—Ezek. 18.4

This is a tremendous chapter, and is of the utmost value in our modern life. It consists of the prophet's discussion, under Divine command, of a false outlook on life which had found expression in a proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Its present importance is created by the fact that men are still using this proverb, and so using it as to show that they think the saying is true. As a matter of fact, no saying more false was ever coined. It is based upon a one-sided philosophy of heredity. Evil, whether as a moral malady, or personal suffering, is accounted for by the sins of the fathers. The proverb is at once an attempt to escape from responsibility for sin; and a protest against punishment. The false and pernicious conception is inclusively answered in these words of the prophet, which he uttered as the spokesman of God; "All souls are Mine." The rest of the message consists in the illustration and application of this saying. The great truth revealed is that every individual has a relationship with God available, which is mightier than all the facts resulting from physical relationships. It may be true that in my physical being I have inherited tendencies to some forms of evil from my father; but in the fact of my essential relation to God there are forces available to me more and mightier than all these tendencies. Therefore if I die, it is not because of the sin of my-father, but because I fail to avail myself of my resources in God; and if I live, it is because I have availed myself of these resources. Neither righteousness nor evil is hereditary. The former results from right relationship with God, and the latter from failure to realize that relationship. All souls are His, and that means that every soul is made for first-hand personal dealing with Him.

Ezekiel 18:31 - A Father's Invitation

Our Daily Bread

The Old Testament book of Ezekiel tells of God's judgment on His disobedient people. The Lord called them "a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me" (2:3) and "impudent and stubborn children" (v.4). The graphic descriptions of their sin and the violent images of their coming punishment are appalling. Yet in the darkest moments of God's lament over His people held captive in Babylon, His love shines through in His call for them to walk again on the path of life.

" 'Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,' says the Lord God. 'Therefore turn and live!' " (18:31-32).

God does not ask us to feel worse than we already do about our failures or to try harder to keep His commands. Instead, He invites us to receive a fresh source of motivation and strength—"a new heart and a new spirit" from Him (36:26-27).

If you're feeling that you've wandered too far away from God and that He is through with you, it's time to embrace the truth. Will you accept the Father's invitation to "turn and live" today?— by David C. McCasland

If you've rebelled and turned away

From what you know is true,

Turn back to God—He will forgive;

He waits to pardon you. —Sper

To enjoy the future, accept God's forgiveness for the past.

Ezekiel 18:31 Hosea 11:5-7

Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart. - Ezekiel 18:31

TODAY IN THE WORD

Hugh Latimer once offended King Henry VIII with one of his sermons, and the king demanded that the bishop publicly recant his words in the following week's message. A week later, Latimer opened with a brief introduction in which he said that he feared God's wrath more than the king's. He then repeated the previous week's sermon word for word.

By now, parts of Hosea may be giving you a case of Israel's sin was repetitive, and the prophet repeatedly proclaimed the allegations against them to drive his point home. God was building His case against Israel to prove that the guilty verdict was just. No matter how many times the facts were analyzed or from what angle the story was viewed, Israel's betrayal was obvious and God's faithfulness was impeccable. If anything, the destruction and exile that awaited the nation were overdue.

Israel was "determined" to turn from God, a Hebrew phrase that could literally be translated "hung up on" or "impaled on." Israel's

pursuit of idolatry was not an occasional slip. Their hearts had a singular focus on rebellion.

The second half of verse 7 is difficult to interpret because it is difficult to translate. Scholars are divided on the correct phrasing. One interpretation is that even if Israel were to call on God, He would not lift them up. A second view is that no one in Israel would exalt God, even if they did call out to Him for help. Yet another possible reading is that Israel would call out to Baal, who was incapable of helping them in their time of need. Despite the confusion, each interpretation arrives at the same conclusion: Israel was so entrenched in their sin that genuine repentance was not going to happen, and divine help would not come.

The case against Israel was lopsided. The likelihood of repentance had vanished. God's judgment was certain. Despite all that, God's mercy continued to rain down on them. His love for His people would not allow them to be completely destroyed.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Israel's propensity for sin was not unique to them. More was expected of them because they were God's chosen people, but without an intimate relationship with Him and commitment to serving Him alone, slavery to sin is inevitable. We are not immune to falling into the same traps that ensnared Israel because we are afflicted with the same condition: the depravity of sin. Use this study of Israel's sin as an example of what life apart from God is like, and make a renewed commitment to unwavering devotion to Him alone.

Ezekiel 18:32

C H Spurgeon

DEATH'S SHALLOW VICTORY.

Beside Still Waters

In a little while, I shall slumber in the tomb. Yet, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25–26). My eyes, which soon will be glazed in death, will not always be closed in darkness. Death will be forced to give back its prey. I see death, and it has the bodies of the just locked in its dungeons. It has sealed their tombs and marked them for its own. Oh death, foolish death, your caskets will be seized and your storehouses broken open.

The morning is come! Christ has descended! I hear the trumpet! "Awake! Awake!" From the tomb, the righteous spring and death sits in confusion and howls in vain, for its empire is deprived of its subjects. "Precious shall be their blood in His sight" (Ps. 72:14). Precious shall be their bones; their very dust is blessed. Christ will raise them.

Think of that, you who have lost loved ones. Weeping children of sorrow, your redeemed friends will live again. The hand that grasped yours with a death clutch will grasp you again in paradise. Those eyes that wept away in tears will wake in the noon-day of great happiness. The frame that you sorrowfully buried, yes that same body, will be raised incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:52).

If you are redeemed, you will see that loved one. Death will not keep one bone of the righteous, not a particle of their dust, not a hair of their heads. Christ has purchased every part of our bodies; the whole body will be complete and united forever in heaven with the glorified soul.

Ezekiel 18:32 What Are the Possibilities?

Our Daily Bread

He was born into wealth and raised in a mansion. Yet he traded in his stylish clothes for dull prison gray after being convicted of planting a car bomb that took the lives of two members of his family. He had tried to get control of a \$10-million family estate. The impact of his own foolish choices became clear the day he sat in a state of shock as the verdict of guilty was read before a hushed courtroom. What irony! This man could have been rich. He could have had so much if he had been willing to wait.

Yet, that doesn't have to be the end of the story. Think about the possibility that still remains. As long as he has breath, he can, like the thief on the cross, acknowledge his sins and ask Christ for help. And just as that thief, who was considered unfit for society, was made fit for Paradise, this man can become "a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17), a citizen of heaven.

Such a turnaround is always possible for the sinner. This is what God was saying to Israel through the prophet Ezekiel. Because He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, He pleads with them to repent.

Perhaps you've been thinking you're too bad to be forgiven. You're not. Turn from your sin and trust Jesus as your Savior, and you'll make that possibility a reality.— by Mart De Haan

How can you go another day?

Accept God's gift, do not delay;

Just trust in Christ—His Word believe,

Eternal life you will receive. —JDB

No one is so good that he can save himself; no one is so bad that God cannot save him.

Ezekiel 18:32 - Warning!

Our Daily Bread

During the past year, cars, trucks, tires, window blinds, and toy xylophones have been recalled by their manufacturers. In every case, the message was similar: "This product is defective or dangerous and could cause serious injury or even death. Return it to us and we will correct the problem." But it's up to the consumer to heed the warning and return the dangerous item.

Suppose God put this warning on the heart and soul of every person: "Because of a fatal attraction to sin and willful misuse, this item is defective. Failure to correct this problem will result in certain spiritual death."

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God said that the hearts of His people had become adulterous (Ezekiel 6:9) and as hard as a rock (11:19). Yet the Lord longed for their hearts to be softened, and for them to come back to Him. He made this impassioned plea: "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. . . . Get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies Therefore turn and live!" (18:30-32).

Today, by turning from sin to God through faith in Jesus Christ, anyone can have a new heart. — by David C. McCasland

The power of God can turn a heart

From evil and the power of sin;

The love of God can change a life

And make it new and cleansed within. —Fasick

Salvation is not turning over a new leaf, but receiving a new life.

Ezekiel 19

Ezekiel 19–20; Ezekiel 20:39–44

Responding to today's passage, Nate Wilson wrote in *Ezekiel: A Devotional Commentary*: "Dear God, please help me to not be rebellious against you! Help me to put away the filthy idols of my eyes and love You wholeheartedly! . . . Oh God, help me to hate the evil I and my fathers have done and let me be part of an acceptable generation to You who worships You rightly and makes the nations know Your holiness."

Rebellion and idolatry dishonor the Lord, while obedience and worship bring glory to His name. That's the spiritual message Ezekiel conveyed throughout his ministry. In today's reading, chapter 19 is a prophetic lament, a sad poem commemorating the day when Ezekiel's prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction would come true. The first part of the poem (Ezek 19:1–9) pictures the king and people as a pride of lions and lionesses that get trapped and caged. The second part (Ezek 19:10–14) imagines the nation as a tall and fruitful vine that gets uprooted, stripped, and burned. This lament poem is God's and Ezekiel's way of mourning the necessity of the coming judgment.

What made it necessary? Ezek 20 answers that question with a history lesson on Israel's faithlessness. During the Exodus from Egypt, the people defiled themselves through idolatry. They ignored the promises and commandments of the God who had just freed them from four centuries of slavery. He had been inclined to destroy them then, but for the sake of His name He did not do so. The same thing happened over and over. The people would ignore God's blessings, plunge into idolatry, dishonor the covenant, and provoke the Lord to anger, but He patiently kept giving them another chance. He is love, and though Israel's sin invited judgment, He would redeem and purify them in spite of themselves (Ezek 20:32–38). They didn't listen to these warnings (Ezek 20:45–49)—but we can. To understand who God is and act in a manner worthy of our calling is to please and glorify Him.

Apply the Word

Like Nate Wilson in the devotional commentary referenced in today's illustration, we should always be alert to the meanings and applications of Scripture for our spiritual lives. What are your personal responses to the book of Ezekiel as we've studied it so far? What poetic figures of speech or symbolic actions remain most vividly in your imagination? Which aspects of the life of faith has the Holy Spirit been bringing to your attention during this study? Which dimensions of God's character have stood out most clearly?

Ezekiel 19:4

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

This is a lamentation; and shall be for a lamentation.—Ezek. 19.4

Thus ends Ezekiel's elegy on kingship. Let us very carefully note that this phrase "elegy on kingship" correctly defines the song or message. Expositors agree in the view that the first young lion was Jehoahaz, the second Jehoiakim, and the final reference was to Zedekiah; and there is no doubt that they are right. But observe that the prophet mentioned none of these by name. He was not thinking of them as men, but as princes, or kings. Observe, further, that he did not speak of Judah but of Israel; he was thinking of "the princes—that is the kings—of Israel." Whereas the Northern kingdom of Israel had passed into slavery and only the Southern kingdom of Judah remained, and it was about to pass, that was for the moment the nation of Israel, and its last kings were the last of the long succession resulting from the clamour of Israel for "a king like the nations." In taking these, as illustrations, he referred to those who passed into the hands of Egypt, and Babylon, omitting Jehoiakim, who died in peace. Just glance at the page and note the nations mentioned: Israel, Egypt, Babylon. Now the song becomes clear. The nation of Israel is the Mother. That in itself implicates the relation of Jehovah as Father. That Mother couches among lions; and brings forth young lions, the kings. With what result? Their stature was exalted, and they were seen; but she was plucked up, cast down, her fruit was dried up, and her strong rods—these same kings—were destroyed. At last she is planted in the wilderness, with no "strong rod to be a sceptre to rule." That is the story of the monarchy in Israel. The nation produced kings, who became conspicuous, but thus she destroyed herself, for they destroyed her.

Ezekiel 20

Ezekiel 20:36 Deuteronomy 4:44-5:5

As I judged your fathers in the desert of the land of Egypt, so I will judge you, declares the Sovereign Lord. - Ezekiel 20:36

TODAY IN THE WORD

Israel received the Law of God while they camped in the valley of Beth Peor in the land of the Amorites. They defeated Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites. They had been summoned by God to Mount Sinai, referred to here as Horeb, a term that comes from a Hebrew word meaning "desolate region" and sometimes used to speak both of the area in which Sinai is located and of the mountain itself (cf. Ex. 3:1; 33:6). It was here that Israel personally encountered the Living God and entered into a covenant with Him.

In view of this, it is surprising to read Moses' statement in today's passage claiming, "It was not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today" (Deut. 5:3). The parents of those who heard these words were present when the Law was given on Sinai. When they heard the commandments they replied, "Everything the Lord has said we will do" (Ex. 24:3). What, then, did Moses mean?

Moses could not have meant that God had never entered into a covenant with Israel's ancestors. Nor could he have meant that the Law somehow did not apply to the parents of those who were being addressed at that moment. In effect, his message was simply this: "God isn't dealing with them now, He is dealing with you. It is time for you to commit yourself to obedience."

The previous generation heard God's Word and promised to obey it, but they failed to follow through on their commitment. Even if they had obeyed, it still would have been necessary for the generation that followed them to make a personal commitment of their own.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

A religious heritage from one's parents is a great benefit, but it is no substitute for personal faith.

Ezekiel 20:9

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

I wrought for My Name's sake.—Ezek. 20.9

This and the next four chapters contain the messages constituting the last movement in Ezekiel's dealing with the Reprobation of the nation. In the first of these movements (Ezek 4-14), he had dealt with the Fact of this Reprobation; in the second 15-19), he had dealt with the Reason of it, as found in the pollution of the people; now he argued for the Righteousness of it. This first message was called for by the coming of certain of the elders of Israel. The word of Jehovah to His servant declared that He would not be inquired of by them; but the prophet was charged to

judge them. This judgment is expressed in this message. It has three movements; first, a review of the past (Ezek 5-26); second, an examination of the present (Ezek 27-32); and, finally, a foretelling of the future (Ezek 33-44). The whole argument is a vindication of the righteousness and inevitability of their reprobation, in view of the nature of their sin. The purpose of Jehovah in dealing with them is revealed in the words we have emphasized: "I wrought for My Name's sake." Note the recurrence of the idea (Ezek 20.14, 22, 44) as it illumines the message. For His Name's sake He had delivered them from Egypt, had disciplined them in the wilderness, had showed mercy to their children, and was now dealing with them in judgment. The deepest note in their sin was not that of the actual deeds of evil, but that by such deeds they were blaspheming the Name; which they had been created to extol and glorify. This fact was the vindication of the righteousness of Reprobation. To have permitted that people to remain a nation among the nations, would have been to perpetuate a misrepresentation of God among those nations. The principle is of abiding application to all those who receive from God privileges and blessings in order to the revelation of Himself to others.

Ezekiel 20:43

Faith's Checkbook - C H Spurgeon

Precious Repentance

"And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed."—Ezekiel 20:43

WHEN we are accepted of the Lord, and are standing in the place of favor, and peace, and safety, then we are led to repent of all our failures and miscarriages toward our gracious God. So precious is repentance that we may call it a diamond of the first water, and this is sweetly promised to the people of God as one most sanctifying result of salvation. He who accepts repentance also gives repentance; and He gives it not out of "the bitter box," but from among those "wafers made with honey" on which He feeds His people. A sense of blood-bought pardon and of undeserved mercy is the best means of dissolving a heart of stone. Are we feeling hard? Let us think of covenant love, and then we shall leave sin, lament sin, and loathe sin—yea, we shall loathe ourselves for sinning against such infinite love. Let us come to God with this promise of penitence, and ask Him to help us to remember, and repent, and regret and return. Oh, that we could enjoy the meltings of holy sorrow! What a relief would a flood of tears be! Lord, smite the rock, or speak to the rock, and cause the waters to flow!

Ezekiel 21

Ezekiel 21–22; Ezekiel 22:23–31

Guest worker policies in some countries create a legalized equivalent of slavery. For example, as reported in Newsweek, labor brokers guarantee international workers jobs and salaries in Malaysia in exchange for hefty placement fees. When they arrive, however, the workers find they've been scammed. The salaries are far lower than promised—after deductions for room and board, as little as \$14 per month. But the workers can't leave because Malaysian law requires them to sign multiyear contracts and their employers hold their passports. The workers are trapped. The United Nations estimates that at least 12.3 million people worldwide are enslaved in such forced labor arrangements.

God hates injustice in any form, and when He draws His sword of judgment we can be sure justice will be swiftly done. Ezek 21 is an extended discourse on this topic. It might be an answer to Ezekiel's complaint that the people were dismissing his "parables" (Ezek 20:49)—this word from the Lord was much more direct! There were still dramatic elements, such as the command to groan loudly and to make some kind of map or model (Ezek 21:6–7, 19–20). But the meaning was plain: Babylon would conquer and destroy Jerusalem. In this case, Babylon was the sword of the Lord, and His judgment would be righteous and terrible.

Ezek 22 reiterates or makes plain the sins that were the reason for judgment. As compared to the historical angle of chapter 20, this condemnation is framed as a court case against the present generation, especially the leaders. Their sins were extensive: idolatry, abuse of power, violence or bloodshed, slander, desecration of the Sabbath, sexual immorality, taking bribes, and other forms of social injustice and self-indulgence. Leaders should serve rather than prey on others for personal gain. Priests should serve the Lord rather than leading the way to the altars of false idols. The furnace of God's judgment would burn away these sins and purify His people (22:18–22).

Apply the Word

God looked for but could not find a single righteous person to “stand in the gap” (Ezek 22:30). To “stand in the gap” means to intercede for a larger group, as when Moses prayed for the Israelites (Num. 21:4–9) or when Jesus prayed for His disciples (John 17). Are we as followers of Christ standing in the gap for our country? Social injustices such as racism and abortion anger the Lord, but we have the privilege and responsibility of interceding in prayer for our nation and its leaders.

Ezekiel 21:27

J C Philpot

Are there not seasons in our experience when we can lay down our souls before God, and say, “Let Christ be precious to my soul, let Him come with power to my heart, let Him set up His throne as Lord and King, and let self be nothing before Him?” Well, we utter these prayers in sincerity and simplicity, we desire their fulfilment; but oh, the struggle! the conflict! when God answers these petitions. When our plans are frustrated, what a rebellion works up in the carnal mind! When self is cast down, what a rising up of the fretful, peevish impatience of the creature! When the Lord does answer our prayers, and strips off all false confidence; when He does remove our rotten props, and dash to pieces our broken cisterns, what a storm—what a conflict takes place in the soul! Angry with the Lord for doing the very work we have asked Him to do, rebelling against Him for being so kind as to answer those petitions that we have offered up, and ready to fume and fret against the very teaching for which we have supplicated Him. But He is not to be moved; He will take His own way. “I will overturn, let the creature say, let him think what it will. Down it shall go to ruin, it shall become a wreck, it shall be overthrown. My purpose shall be accomplished, and I will fulfil all my pleasure. But I will overturn, not to destroy, not to cast into eternal perdition, but I will overturn the whole building to erect a far more goodly edifice. Self is a rebel, who has set up an idolatrous temple, and I will overturn and bring the temple to ruin, for the purpose of manifesting My glory and My salvation, that I may be your Lord and your God.”

Ezekiel 21:27

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; this also shall be no more, until He come Whose right it is; and I will give it Him.—Ezek. 21.27

This prophetic message begins in the previous chapter at verse 45, where in the Hebrew Bible the chapter begins. Its whole theme is that of the activity of the wrath of Him Whose name has been blasphemed by the sin and failure of the people. The central movement in the message is that of the Song of the Sword (verses 8-17). The first paragraphs led up to that, and those after depend upon it. The vision of that glittering, furbished, active sword is indeed a terrible one. But it is the Sword of Jehovah. Observe how that fact is kept in mind. The king of Babylon is seen halting at the parting of the ways, endeavouring to decide by divination whether he shall proceed against Ammon or Judah. The arrow directs him to Jerusalem. This was by the act of God. In the end of the chapter, Ammon is portrayed as drawing a sword, but by the will of God she is to put it in the sheath. The whole message is full of force as it reveals to us the prophetic vision of Jehovah enthroned over all the doings of men. Israel, Babylon, Ammon are all made to contribute to the accomplishment of His purpose. The method and meaning of this Divine activity is revealed in these words we have emphasized. God "overturns, overturns, over-turns" nations, and dynasties, and civilizations. They appear, they disappear, and all by His power. And all until He come, Whose right it is. The reference was patently Messianic. The prophet saw God overturning false nations, dynasties, civilizations, in order at last to establish His own Kingdom under His appointed King. His operation did not cease when He came in lowliness for human redemption. It is still proceeding, and will do so until He appear again, and establish the kingdom of heaven on earth.

Ezekiel 22

Ezekiel 22:30

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

I sought for a man among them, that should make up the fence, and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none.—Ezek. 22.30

In this message the prophet set forth the utter evil of the city, as vindicating the righteousness of its reprobation. Depicting the sins of the city, he described the fiery process of the judgment. The outlook was, indeed, of the darkest. Priests, princes, prophets, people, were involved; all were utterly corrupt. In these particular words, the utter hopelessness of the situation, so far as any chance of recovery as from within the national life, was revealed. The man needed was one who would interpose himself against the prevailing tide of iniquity, and hold it back. Such men have appeared in dark hours of human history; they have been men of clear vision, of pure life, of strong character; they have been able to halt a nation in its downward way, and turn it back into the paths of obedience. But at this time, God sought for such a man; but none was to be found. In all the national life there was not a man, either priest, or prince, or prophet, or son of the people, with enough spiritual discernment or moral passion, to enable him to turn the thoughts and

actions of the nation back toward God. In such an hour the methods of patience and mercy are useless; it is only by the fiery furnace that the dross can be destroyed, and the corrupted silver be recovered. Thus the reprobation of Israel was vindicated, not only on account of its pollution, but in order to its ultimate restoration, for there was no force in her which could lead her back to the God from Whom she had departed.

Ezekiel 23

Ezekiel 23–24; Ezekiel 24:9–14

Once a lobster is caught by a fisherman, its fate is all but certain—a cooking pot, a garlic butter sauce, and a comfortable bed on the plate of some lucky diner. Fiona, however, is an exception. Fiona is a rare yellow lobster caught in 2009 off the coast of eastern Canada. How rare? One in 30 million. “In 57 years, I have never seen a yellow lobster and I doubt that I will ever see one again,” said restaurant owner Nathan Nickerson. Actually a bright orange in color, Fiona will live in a tank in his restaurant, where he hopes she will attract many new customers.

A yellow lobster may escape the cooking pot, but the leaders of Israel had no escape. They could be sure their sins would find them out (Num. 32:23). Today’s reading concludes the first major section of Ezekiel—the prophecies preceding the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C.

These chapters can be divided into four parts. First is a parable of two sisters who were prostitutes (23:1–21). These sisters stand for Israel and Judah in the days of the divided kingdom. Idolatry and political alliances with pagan nations constituted unfaithfulness to the Lord. The people should have been relying on God alone and worshiping Him alone. Instead, their disobedience is seen in the sisters’ lustful, indiscriminate lewdness.

Second is an exposition of God’s just judgment on Israel and Judah (23:22–49). The cup of God’s wrath was full. The people had no excuse. Knowing full well God’s law and character, they chose wickedness. Third is a picture of a cooking pot as a metaphor for God’s judgment (24:1–14; see also June 7). This vision came on the exact day the siege of Jerusalem began.

And fourth is the death of Ezekiel’s wife (24:15–27). This event took place on the exact day the temple was destroyed. The quiet but deep mourning of the prophet for the heartbreaking loss of his wife reflected at a personal level what the loss of Jerusalem and the temple meant to Israel.

Apply the Word

Throughout the prophecies of impending judgment, God through Ezekiel continuously urged the Israelites to confess their sins and return to Him. As Christians, we also have this privilege—and we know we need it. If we think we’re walking without sin, we’re kidding ourselves. God’s work of sanctification in our lives is not yet complete; therefore, confession needs to be a regular spiritual discipline. When we confess and repent, we enjoy God’s forgiveness and walk again in His light (1 John 1:5–10)

Ezekiel 23:4

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

And as for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem Oholibah.—Ezek. 23.4

Thus at the beginning of this message, the prophet gave the key to its application. Samaria and Jerusalem were the capitals respectively of the northern kingdom of Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah. These capital cities were the centres of government—the places of the politicians. This particular message was concerned, not so much with the sins of the people in their evil practices, as with their national policies. The whole history is passed in review. Samaria had sought alliances with Assyria and Egypt; and Jerusalem with Assyria, Babylon and Egypt. These policies had been the direct result of turning away from God, and constituted attempts to secure national safety by intrigues with these nations. The nature of that sin is set forth in this graphic chapter. It was a sin of infidelity, and of harlotry. This was so because of the peculiar relation of the Israelitish people to Jehovah. They were His creation; He had made them in a peculiar way to be a people for Himself. He had delivered them from bondage, and given them a place and a power. They needed no defence other than Himself, and they owed everything to Him. Egypt might with propriety make alliance with Assyria; or Babylon with either. They were, to use a very suggestive modern phrase, "world-powers." But Israel was separated from the nations by her relationship to God; and for her to follow policies of alliance with these powers, was to be guilty of national harlotry. The principle involved is of application to the Church as "the holy nation" to-day. Whenever she seeks enrichment or strength or stablishing, by alliance with the world, she is unfaithful to her God, and is guilty of the sin of spiritual adultery. Such was the meaning of James when he wrote: "Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God."

Ezekiel 24

Ezekiel 24:25-26

Octavius Winslow

What is the history of creature idolatry, but a mournful record of beautiful and inviting cisterns of happiness, which, nevertheless, God has destroyed? This is a wide and an affecting circle. We enter it cautiously; we allude to it feelingly and tenderly. We touch the subject with a pen that has often sought (though in much feebleness it is acknowledged), to comfort the mourner, and to lift the pressure from the bowed spirit. We enter the domestic circle—oh! What beautiful cisterns of creature good, broken and empty, meet us here! The affectionate husband, the fond wife, the devoted parent, the pleasant child, the faithful friend, laid low in death. They were lovely cisterns, and the heart loved to drink from them its bliss. But lo! God has smitten, and they are broken, and the sweet waters have passed away! Was there not a worshiping of the creature, rather than the Creator? Was not the object deified? Was not the attachment idolatrous? Did not the loved one occupy Christ's place in the heart? Ah! The wound, the void, the desolateness, the lonely grief of that heart, but too truly tell who was enthroned upon its strongest and its best affections.

Turn every loss of creature-good into an occasion of greater nearness to Christ. The dearest and loveliest creature is but a cistern—an inferior and contracted good. If it contains any sweetness, the Lord put it there. If it is a medium of any blessing to your soul, Jesus made it so. But do not forget, beloved, it is only a cistern. And what more? Shall I wound you if I say it? Tenderly do I speak—and if, instead of leading you to, it draws you from, the Fountain, in unerring wisdom, in tender mercy, and in faithful love, the Lord will break it, that you might learn, that while no creature can be a substitute for Him, He Himself can be a substitute for all creatures. Thus His friendship, His love, and His presence are frequently the sweetest, and the most fully enjoyed, when He has taken all things else away. Jesus loves you far too much to allow another, however dear, to eclipse and rival Him. "The day of the Lord will be upon all pleasant pictures," and then the poor, imperfect copy will retire, and give place to the divine and glorious Original; and God in Christ will be all in all.

Ezekiel 24:1

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

In the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month. —Ezek. 24.1

Some dates fasten themselves upon the mind without any effort. This was such a date. The historic recorder, and the writer of the appendix to Jeremiah's prophecy, give this date with the same accuracy. (See 2 Kings 25.1 and Jeremiah 52.4.) It was the day when the armies of Nebuchadnezzar encompassed and invested the city of Jerusalem. It was the beginning of the end. For Ezekiel it was a date doubly significant, for on that very day at eventide, the desire of his eyes, his wife, suddenly died. The high dignity and solemn responsibility of the prophetic office is seen in his action. In the presence of the national calamity he refrained from all manifestation of private sorrow. Indeed, he went further, and under Divine command, made his abstention a sign to those to whom he ministered. In a graphic figure, that of the caldron, he described the judgment about to fall upon the city: and he commanded the people not to mourn for it. The reason for such a command was the very thing he had been enforcing, that namely of the righteousness of that Divine judgment. They were not to mourn nor weep. This was perhaps the darkest day for Ezekiel in all his ministry, and the most difficult. There is a gleam of light in the word of Jehovah to him, which in commanding him thus to abstain from outward expressions of grief, yet said: "Sigh, but not aloud." In that we see the understanding heart of God. He knew the sorrow of His servant's soul, both personal and public, and did not rebuke it. In days when public testimony demands that we rise superior to private sorrows, it is good to know that He understands the difficulty, and does not forbid the sigh.

Ezekiel 24:16 Sin is Serious

Our Daily Bread

People from different cultures mourn the death of a loved one in various ways. In some places, it is customary to hire people to wail in sorrow at the wake. In others, the death of a family member leads to elaborate rituals of mourning.

In no culture, however, is it natural to do what God asked Ezekiel to do when his wife died. The Lord told him that his wife, the "desire of [his] eyes," would succumb to a sudden death (24:16). Yet Ezekiel was not to mourn openly, but he was to remain silent (v.17).

Why did God ask Ezekiel to do something that seems so unfair, difficult, and unnatural? He wanted to illustrate to the people of Jerusalem that just as the prophet's delight was taken from him, so also their delight—the temple—would be taken from them. Ezekiel pronounced God's judgment on Israel, stating that they would lose their temple to the Babylonians.

Like Ezekiel, they were told that they would not mourn in the normal way (v.23). The destruction of the temple would be so horrifying, and their guilt and grief so overwhelming, that normal expressions of sorrow would be inadequate.

What a lesson! When we don't obey God, we should mourn (James 4:8-9). Sin is serious. —Dave Branon

I pray, O Father, by Your Word,

Reveal my sins to me,

For then I can confess to You

And from those sins be free. —D. De Haan

You never win when you play with sin.

Ezekiel 25

Ezekiel 25; Ezekiel 25:1–7

Sin can now be mapped. Forbes magazine published a 2008 special report on "America's Most Sinful Cities." For each of the seven deadly sins, researchers chose a statistical stand-in—wrath or anger was measured by the murder rate, greed or avarice by the number of billionaires per capita, gluttony by obesity rates, and so on. In a related study, geographers from Kansas State University examined available data such as the number of reported cases of sexually transmitted diseases per capita (for lust) and the number of fast food restaurants per capita (for gluttony).

No single group has a monopoly on evil—we are all fallen. Though most of Ezekiel is aimed at Israel, the prophet also delivered messages of judgment against her neighbors. These are found in chapters 25 through 32, the second main section of the book. It was comforting to Israel that her enemies would be punished as well, and for us it is reassuring that God's justice is impartial and His power is absolute.

Four countries are targeted in today's reading—Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia. Ammon (Ezek 25:1–7) lay east of Israel in modern-day Jordan. The Ammonites had been opportunistic raiders who preyed on Israel at moments of weakness. To rejoice in the downfall of God's people, however, was the same as laughing at God (Ezek 25:6). As a result, they themselves would be conquered and destroyed.

Moab (Ezek 25:8–11) lay south of Ammon. The Moabites saw Judah as no different from pagan nations, and for their disrespect they would also be destroyed. Edom or Seir (Ezek 25:12–14) lay south of Moab and earned God's judgment by harassing instead of welcoming refugees after the Babylonian conquest. Finally, Philistia (Ezek 25:15–17) lay west of Judah and also had a long history of hostility with God's people. They acted as the others had and would earn a similar fate. Just as the Lord promised long ago, whoever cursed His people would themselves be cursed (Ge 12:3).

Apply the Word

Today's verse begins a psalm you might consider reading in full. Psalm 79 prays for judgment on Israel's enemies in much the same way as is true in Ezekiel's prophecy. It is also a prayer for forgiveness and for the restoration of a close covenant relationship: "Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake. . . . Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever" (Ps 79:9, 13).

Ezekiel 25:5

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Ye shall know that I am Lord.—Ezek. 25.5

The messages of Ezekiel now turned to the theme of Restoration; and that theme was introduced by prophecies concerning the nations which had been the enemies of Israel. These prophecies occupy chapters 25 to 32. Seven nations are dealt with: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Zidon, and Egypt. A glance at the map will show that the prophet's outlook passed over the enemies of Israel as they encompassed her. He first dealt with those on the East, passing from North to South—Ammon, Moab, Edom; then with those in the West, passing from South to North—Philistia, Tyre, Zidon, then to the South—Egypt. In order to the restoration of Israel to the Divinely-appointed land, all these must be dealt with and removed. These "burdens" declared that this was what God would do. Such action was necessary. In this chapter we have the first four of these messages, those concerning Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia. The words we have emphasized are arresting in the fact of their repetition through these oracles concerning the nations. They are employed in every one of them. Concerning Ammon, Ezek 25.5 and 7; concerning Moab, Ezek 25.11; concerning Edom, Ezek 25.14; concerning Philistia, Ezek 25.17; concerning Tyre, Ezek 26.6; concerning Zidon, Ezek 28.22-24; concerning Israel (parenthetically), Ezek 28.26; concerning Egypt, 29.6, 9,16; concerning Israel (parenthetically), Ezek 29.21; concerning Ethiopia (parenthetically), 30.8; concerning Egypt, 30.9, 25, 26 and Ezek 32.15. That is a Bible-reading, but it is worth while. Here is

the one purpose of Jehovah in His dealings with all nations. Those who fail to find Him in the light, of His revelation of Himself by law or in the natural order, He brings to know Him through judgment.

Ezekiel 25:1-7; Matthew 5:43-48 When Not to Rejoice

The Akan people of Ghana have a proverb: "The lizard is not as mad with the boys who threw stones at it as with the boys who stood by and rejoiced over its fate!" Rejoicing at someone's downfall is like participating in the cause of that downfall or even wishing more evil on the person.

That was the attitude of the Ammonites who maliciously rejoiced when the temple in Jerusalem "was desecrated and over the land of Israel when it was laid waste and over the people of Judah when they went into exile" (Ezek. 25:3). For spitefully celebrating Israel's misfortunes, the Ammonites experienced God's displeasure, which resulted in grim consequences (vv. 4-7).

How do we react when disaster befalls our neighbor or when our neighbor gets into trouble? If she is a nice and friendly neighbor, then, of course, we will sympathize with her and go to her aid. But what if he is an unfriendly, trouble-making neighbor? Our natural tendency may be to ignore him or even secretly rejoice at his downfall.

Proverbs warns us: "Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when they stumble, do not let your heart rejoice" (24:17). Instead, Jesus tells us that we show His love in action when we "love [our] enemies and pray for those who persecute [us]" (Matt. 5:44). By so doing, we imitate the perfect love of our Lord (5:48).

Lord, open my eyes and my heart to be honest about my attitude toward those who are unkind or unfair to me. Fill my heart with Your love, Lord, and help me pray for them.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Ezekiel 26

Ezekiel 26–27; Ezekiel 27:29–34

In 2003, salvage explorers found the wreck of the S.S. Republic about 100 miles southeast off the coast of Savannah, Georgia. The vessel sank in 1865 as the result of a hurricane, and although 42 of the 59 passengers made it into lifeboats and survived, \$400,000 in coins sank with the ship. Today those coins are worth an estimated \$150 million. The finders also planned to recover and put on display historical artifacts from the wreck.

Metaphorically speaking, Tyre was a ship loaded with riches that God promised to sink to the bottom of the ocean. Their wealth and achievements wouldn't save them. Tyre was the capital city of Phoenicia (located in modern Lebanon), north of Israel. In part an island city, Tyre was very active in business and trade. But like the nations in yesterday's reading, they rejoiced in the downfall of Jerusalem and even planned to profit from it (Ezek 26:2). Ezekiel's prophecy in chapter 26 exposed their pride—they believed they could not be conquered. They made their business plans and threw noisy parties and thought the good times would never end (Ezek 26:13). But God said otherwise. Destruction was coming. Tyre was besieged and humbled by several invading armies, and eventually destroyed by Alexander in 332 B.C. The world would see and tremble at the spectacle of God's judgment on this proud city.

Ezek 27 is a prophetic lament for the city's destruction. The first part of the poem builds a picture of the greatness of Tyre and celebrates her wealth, beauty, and economic and military power (Ezek 27:1–11). The second part expands the picture even further to show a thriving city with which the entire world was eager to trade (Ezek 27:12–25). The third and final section shows that the bigger they are, the harder they fall (Ezek 27:26–36). They trusted in their riches, as symbolized by a trading ship, but that object of faith was headed to the bottom of the sea. Only the Lord is worthy of human trust. He is the Rock on which we stand!

Apply the Word

Pride is the enemy of God. Pride focuses on self to such an extent that one's thoughts do not even have room for God (Ps. 10:4). Pride seeks glory for self rather than glory for God. That's why "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). Pride has the potential to creep into every area of our lives—some people are even proud of being humble! What's the cure? "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5–11).

Ezekiel 26:3

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyre. Ezek. 26.3

The prophet's message concerning Tyre occupies nearly three chapters in our arrangement, Ezek 26-28.24. This is an arresting fact. Tyre's strength and influence were commercial rather than military, and it is interesting and suggestive that in this connection we find the most graphic and illuminating portrayal of Satan to be found in the whole Bible. To that we come presently (Ezek 28). This message of Ezekiel is dated so as to help us to understand the situation. Jerusalem had fallen, and the news had reached the prophet and Tyre. In Tyre that 'news caused great jubilation, and for one reason, which is clearly stated in her own words: "Aha, she is broken; the gate of the peoples; she is turned unto me; I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste" (Ezek 26.2). All this is perfectly plain. The kingdom of Judah lay across the great routes by which the people from Egypt and the south-lands traveled north to Tyre. Undoubtedly this had put some restriction on the commercial enterprise of Tyre. When Jerusalem fell to Babylon, the only thing that interested Tyre was that an obstacle to her commercial activities was removed. What a revelation of the sordid condition of soul which was hers! It was this exultation which called forth the prophetic word containing the declaration of Jehovah: "Behold I am against thee, O Tyre." It is for ever so. God is against any nation whose life has become so materialized by commercial prosperity that she can rejoice over the calamities of other nations, because such calamities increase her opportunities of barter and amassing of wealth. Any nation to-day which gauges her attitude towards other nations by what their rise or fall may contribute to her wealth has God against her.

Ezekiel 24-26, 1 Peter 2

Against the Odds by Tony Beckett and Woodrow Kroll

Key Verse: Ezekiel 26:3

Lottery tickets are sold in grocery stores, convenient food marts and gas stations. People buy the tickets even though the chances of them winning are infinitesimally small. The odds are against them, just as with all forms of organized gambling. If the odds were not in favor of the "house," the casinos and lotteries would all go out of business. Still, with just a slight possibility of winning, people will gamble away their money.

Consider these odds: 1 in 400 million. Doesn't sound very favorable, does it? Yet in Ezekiel 26 there is a situation that would occur against similar odds. In verses 3-6 there are seven prophecies: many nations will come against the city of Tyre; its walls will be destroyed, and its towers pulled down; the rubble will be scraped away, leaving a bare rock; the place will be used to spread fishnets; it will become plunder for the nations; and the settlements on the mainland will be ravaged by the sword. Someone has calculated that the possibility of all of that happening as prophesied was 1 in 400 million.

The betting person would not like those odds, but this is not about gambling. Instead, this prophecy draws our attention to the certainty of the Word of God. God's prophets could say something that looked impossible but in reality was more than possible. It was a sure thing because God said it.

Ezekiel 26 is just one of many examples of fulfilled prophecy. The complete accuracy of the Bible in regard to the prophecies it contains as well as its accuracy regarding events of the ancient world are added evidence to the truthfulness of God's Word.

Actually, the odds were not 1 in 400 million. Since God said it, the odds were 1 in 1. What God says is a sure thing. Never doubt the Word of God. ([Back to the Bible](#))

Ezekiel 27

Ezekiel 27:2

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

A lamentation for Tyre.—Ezek 27.2

That is the true title of this chapter. The prophecy was a dirge, an elegy. It is a description of the city that said "I am perfect in beauty," in the complete desolation to which she is brought because of her self-centred pride. This is a case where the word "lamentation" does not suggest sorrow, but merely description of tragedy. Merely from the standpoint of literature this chapter is incomparable in its descriptive force, both as to the prosperity of the city, and as to the complete and =regretted catastrophe which overwhelmed her. Because of her position by the sea the prophet employed the figure of a ship as personifying the life of the city. She is first described in the splendour of her outfit (Ezek 27:1-11); then in the wonder of her cargoes (Ezek 27:12-25); and finally in her wreckage, and the consternation produced thereby among other seafaring men (Ezek 27:26-36). The whole theme is that of commercialism and may thus be set out; her commercial supremacy, Ezek 27:1-7; her commercial enterprises, Ezek 27:8-25; her commercial ruin, Ezek 27:26-36. It is impossible to read this message of the prophet without a twofold consciousness resulting. The first is that of the lure of material advantage which results from successful commercial enterprise. The other is that such lure, yielded to until it destroys all other inspiration of life leads to the uttermost ruin. The Bible and history make one cause in their revelation of

the peril of material prosperity. There is nothing more calculated to destroy a people. And yet how slow man is to learn the lesson.

Ezekiel 28

Ezekiel 28; Ezekiel 28:24–26

Jesus once encountered a rich young man who wanted to obtain eternal life (Matt. 19:16–30). Jesus told him to keep the commandments, and the man naively responded that he did so. “If you want to be perfect,” Jesus then told him, “go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” But the man could not bear to part with his money—in truth, wealth held first place in his heart. Jesus explained to His disciples, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” They thought wealth was God’s stamp of approval rather than a potential competitor for the heart’s allegiance.

The kingdom of Tyre had achieved great commercial success. Riches and success had led to pride, as we learned yesterday. Ezekiel 28 continues with two more oracles against Tyre (Ezek 28:1–10 and Ezek 28:11–19), plus a short prophecy against Sidon (Ezek 28:20–23) and a promise for Israel (Ezek 28:24–26). The first oracle begins by recapping the theme of pride. The king of Tyre was so proud he thought he was a god and trusted completely in his own wisdom and wealth. God would judge him by stripping away his pride and taking away his riches. He would die a shameful and violent death.

The second oracle is a lament that charts the spiritual sequence of pride, temptation, and fall. In words suggesting Satan, the father of all pride and thus the power behind the throne of Tyre, Ezekiel described a perfect “guardian cherub” in Eden who sinned and was expelled from heaven. The short prophecy against Sidon, a sister city to the north of Tyre, emphasizes that judgment will likewise teach them who is the true God.

Against this backdrop, God’s promise to Israel is a genuine word of comfort. He will regather the exiles and restore them to their land, where they will live in peace. The covenant relationship will be renewed. Then the people will “know that I am the LORD their God” (Ezek 28:26).

Apply the Word

The spiritual sequence of pride, temptation, and fall is one we need to be aware of as well. Satan took pride in his own beauty and wisdom, but instead of using them for God’s glory he embraced the self-centered falsehood that he was equal to God. His fall was unsurprising, for God’s justice makes the fate of the proud inevitable. No matter what gifts and abilities God has given us, we need to be always on guard against temptations to pride and self-centeredness. All His gifts are to be used for His glory, not our own.

Ezekiel 28:11-19

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his classic work, *Paradise Lost*, poet John Milton depicts the rebellion of Satan and a great war lasting three days. On the first two days, Satan and his followers wage war against the unfallen angels under the leadership of the archangel Michael. But on the third day, God the Father sends the Son in glorious power to do single-handed combat with the enemy. The Son rides out in His Father’s chariot, and the fallen angels flee heaven in terror. With the omnipotent One at work, there was really no battle at all.

Although the Bible does not detail the fall of Satan, Milton’s account tells the truth about the power of God. His heavenly throne was never in danger. Ezekiel 28 reminds us of something we tend to forget: spiritual warfare began in heaven, not on earth.

When Satan exalted himself in pride, challenged God for the rulership of creation, and was thrown down (v. 17), he landed on earth as the furious enemy of God and of anyone who bears the name of His Son. He began lashing out at God and at us, bent on wrecking God’s program and people.

No wonder Satan is so angry. Verses 12-15 describe him as an angelic being of great beauty and power, “the model of perfection” (v. 12). He was ordained by God as a “guardian cherub” (v. 14), that is, he served near God’s throne. When Lucifer allowed pride to overwhelm him, he lost his exalted position in heaven (Is. 14:12, KJV).

One reason we may overlook Ezekiel 28 is that it seems so remote from our daily experience. After all, what does the rebellion and defeat of Satan in eternity past have to do with the struggles we face today? In a word, everything! Satan is our sworn enemy. Whatever temptations or spiritual struggles we may be wrestling with today, we can be sure Satan and his demons have a hand in them.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to “all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:2). We are included in

this greeting! We may not be struggling with the In warfare, it is dangerous to underestimate your enemy's strength. But it is also harmful to overestimate your foe. This is what too many believers do when it comes to the devil. Several decades of television soaps and sitcoms, along with an endless string of Hollywood films, have convinced most people that it is useless to try to resist our inner urges.

Ezekiel 28:11-19 Isaiah 14:12-15;

TODAY IN THE WORD

The famous story of how gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill in California in 1848, triggering the great California gold rush, is a familiar one to many people. What is not as well-known is that the discovery, made on January 24, 1848, occurred just nine days before Mexico formally ceded the California territory to the United States. The transaction was part of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended a war between Mexico and the United States.

Even though Mexico possessed great riches when it possessed California, the Mexican government had to yield the territory. Mexico was a defeated foe. In much the same way, the angel Lucifer had to surrender his heavenly glory after leading a rebellion in heaven against the rule of God Himself.

Even though Satan's sin is well-documented in Scripture, it still boggles the mind to realize that rebellion began in heaven. But the record is there in the prophets, couched in terms that cannot apply merely to a human leader such as the kings of Babylon or Tyre.

Without explaining the mystery completely, these texts supply much in the way of indictment against the angel called ""Lucifer"" (Isa. 14:12, KJV) or the ""morning star."" The problem clearly began in Satan's heart. He said in his heart (v. 13) that he would exalt himself above the throne of God. The five ""I will"" statements of Isaiah 14 outline his sinister plan. Ezekiel 28 reveals that pride entered Satan's heart because of his great beauty (Ezek. 28:17).

Satan's rebellion was doomed to fail, of course; and his judgment was sure. One of the most exalted angels in heaven was cast out of God's presence and thrown to the earth (Isa. 14:12; Ezek. 28:17).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Unfortunately, our battles against Satan do not always end in decisive spiritual victory.

But that's due to our humanity, not to any lack in God's daily provision for our spiritual lives. Knowing the kind of enemy Satan is, God has given us all the armor we need to defeat the devil.

Ezekiel 28:12

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

A lamentation for the king of Tyre. —Ezek. 28.12

This chapter contains the end of the burden concerning Tyre, and the burden concerning Zidon. The end of the burden of Tyre consists of a message to its prince, and a lamentation for its king. While closely related, these must not be confused. That is too often done. One expositor says: "The prophet appears to use the terms king and prince indifferently." If that be true generally, and I think it is very doubtful, it certainly is not so here; and to fail to discover the difference is to miss the point of this burden. The prince of Tyre was the reigning prince at the time; but the king of Tyre was the awful and sinister power behind the throne, the personality who is ever the inspirer of such pride of heart, and deification of self as that of which the prince was guilty. Ezekiel in clearest vision saw this being, and saw the whole truth concerning him; and as we saw in a previous note, here we have the most graphic and illuminating portrayal of Satan to be found in the whole Bible. His original power and greatness, wisdom and beauty, and exalted position are all set forth. Then the secret of his fall is declared without explanation: "Unrighteousness was found in thee." No details are given. Perhaps here we have the sentence which takes us further back than any other on the mysterious subject of the genesis of evil in the universe. We must leave it there. Finally, God's dealing with this fallen one is described. He is cast out from his exalted position. Out of the midst of his own being the fire proceeds which ultimately destroys him. So is he cast out and cast down. The revelation of the diabolical inspiration behind all human pride is clear; its wisdom, seductive beauty, and tremendous power are patent. But God is seen as still governing, and casting down this king of evil kings, involving them in the ruin of the one to whom they have yielded themselves.

Ezekiel 28:15 - Blackbeard

Our Daily Bread

As a young man in the late 1600s, Edward Teach joined the crew of a British ship that was headed to the Caribbean. Much later in

his nautical career, he managed to capture a merchant vessel and turn it into a 40-gun warship. Teach soon became known as Blackbeard—the most feared pirate in the hemisphere.

Blackbeard had some success as a pirate, but his “career” abruptly ended when he encountered a contingent of the British Royal Navy. In a desperate battle, he and his fellow pirates were killed, putting an end to their terrorizing exploits.

Long ago in the heavenly places, an angel fell into spiritual piracy. Lucifer was a cherub who stood in the radiant glory of God (Ezekiel 28:11-15). But his own self-love replaced love for his Creator. Desiring to be like the Most High, he led a rebellion and was cast out of heaven (Isaiah 14:12-15). Today he and his henchmen are doing whatever they can to commandeer the lives of human beings (Luke 8:12; 2 Corinthians 4:4).

Even so, we don't need to be afraid. Satan is a dangerous enemy, but Jesus sealed his ultimate fate when He rose from the dead. And He has given us everything we need to withstand the devil's attacks (Ephesians 6:10-18).— by Dennis Fisher

And though this world with devils filled

Should threaten to undo us;

We will not fear, for God has willed

His truth to triumph through us. —Luther

He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. —1 John 4:4

Ezekiel 29

Ezekiel 29–30; Ezekiel 30:20–26

One of the ancient Egyptian gods was Sobek, the crocodile god. Represented either as a crocodile or as a man with the head of a crocodile, he symbolized the strength of the ruler and was considered to be in control of the waters, especially the Nile River. He was associated with fertility and rebirth for both people and crops. Many mummified crocodiles and paintings of crocodiles have been found in Egyptian tombs. In *The Book of the Dead*, he says, “I am Sobek, and I seize my prey like a ravening beast.”

Given that crocodiles symbolized the might of Egypt, Ezekiel's prophecy of Egypt as a doomed crocodile hunted by the Lord is shocking. Rather than seizing his prey, Sobek or Egypt became the prey. Ezekiel prophesied that Egypt was going to be hooked and netted by the Lord and stood no chance of escaping His judgment. Egypt was a powerful nation to the south of Judah, an ally the nation had relied upon in its bid to rebel against Babylon.

Egypt then was larger than it is now and included other areas of northern Africa. Due to its size and strength, it represented the temptation to trust in human strength rather than in God. Egypt rated four chapters of prophetic judgment in Ezekiel. These chapters are divided into seven oracles, each of which begins, “The word of the LORD came to me.” Each emphasizes the sovereignty of God in dealing with nations as He pleases.

Today's reading covers the first four oracles. The first prophecy condemns Egypt's pride and failure to help Israel (Ezek 29:1–16). For this, its power and status will be broken—the crocodile will become road kill. The second prophecy reveals that Babylon will be Egypt's conqueror and the instrument of God's justice (Ezek 29:17–21). The third prophecy is a lament poem that graphically describes the devastating judgment that is on the way from God's hand (Ezek 30:1–19). The fourth prophecy proclaims that God will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon so that he will break the arms of the king of Egypt (Ezek 30:20–26).

Apply the Word

God's sovereignty is a terrible truth to sinners but an encouraging one for believers. Rather than fearing His judgment, we look forward to spending eternity with Him. At the end of history, when God's plans for the nations have been fulfilled, here's how it will be in the new Jerusalem: “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life” (Rev. 21:27).

Ezekiel 29:1-9 That Is Mine!

The Nile of Africa, which spans 6,650 kilometers (more than 4,100 miles) and flows northward across several northeastern African countries, is the world's longest river. Over the centuries, the Nile has provided sustenance and livelihood for millions of citizens in the countries it passes through. Currently, Ethiopia is building what will become Africa's largest hydro-power dam on the Nile. It will be a great resource for the area.

Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, claimed to be the Nile's owner and originator. He and all Egypt boasted, “My River is my own; I have

made it for myself" (Ezek. 29:3,9). They failed to acknowledge that God alone provides natural resources. As a result, God promised to punish the nation (vv.8-9).

We are to care for God's creation, and not forget that everything we have comes from the Lord. Romans 11:36 says, "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever." He is the One who also endows humanity with the ability to manufacture and invent man-made resources. Whenever we talk about a good thing that has come to us or that we have accomplished, we need to remember what God says in Isaiah 42:8, "I am the Lord; that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another."

Praise the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does such wonderful things. Praise Your glorious name forever! Let the whole earth be filled with Your glory.

To God be the glory—great things He has done!

INSIGHT: The psalmist says, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Ps. 24:1 NIV). Ezekiel underscores this point to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Pharaoh claimed to have created the Nile (Ezek. 29:3), but Ezekiel shows that God is angry with Pharaoh's arrogant claim. God is the true Creator and He controls the beasts of the field and the fish of the sea (vv. 3-5).

Ezekiel 29:3

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

I am against thee, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself.—Ezek. 29.3

We now come to the last of Ezekiel's prophecies concerning the nations, and it has to do with Egypt. It occupies four chapters (Ezek 29-32); and consists of seven oracles, all of them dated but one. The reader must observe these dates, for that enables him to realize the situation. All of them—except one—were uttered in connection with the fall of Jerusalem; four of them in the year preceding it, two of them during the year after it; while the exception to which I have referred, was delivered fifteen years later, though incorporated here. As we have realized in reading this prophecy and that of Jeremiah, the political peril had been that created by the looking of these people toward Egypt. This accounted for the length and definiteness of these messages. In this chapter we have the prophet's message concerning Pharaoh, as representing the power of Egypt (Ezek 29:1-16). Here also is inserted the prophecy uttered more than fifteen years later concerning the conquest of Egypt by Babylon. In these words the central sin of Pharaoh and of Egypt is laid bare. The Nile was in every way the secret of the wealth and power of that land and people. Here Pharaoh is represented, not as worshipping the River, but as claiming to possess it, and to have created it. It is a graphic method of again drawing attention to the fact that all forgetfulness of God amounts at last to self-deification. That is the sin of every king and of every people who fail to recognize God, and to deal with Him.

Ezekiel 30

Ezekiel 30:25

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

I will hold up the arms of the king of Babylon, and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down.—Ezek. 30.25

In this chapter we have two of the Egypt prophecies. The first (Ezek 30.1-19) is undated. It was most probably delivered in close connection with the first (Ezek 29.1-16). It is concerned with the coming judgment of God upon the helpers of Egypt, and upon Egypt itself. The fourth message (Ezek 29.20-26) was delivered about four months before the fall of the city. Many were still looking to Egypt in hope of help from her. Indeed; as we saw in reading Jeremiah (Jer 37), Pharaoh had made a movement with his hosts out of Egypt, and this had caused the Chaldeans temporarily to abandon the siege of Jerusalem. That action of Pharaoh had met with defeat. Most probably this was what Ezekiel had in mind when he said that the word of Jehovah to him said: "I have broken the arm of Pharaoh, king of Egypt." He now declared that Jehovah would break both his arms, so that he would be unable to bear the sword. In the words we have emphasized, the whole situation was declared. These apparently mighty monarchs of Egypt and Babylon were both in the hands of Jehovah: Their apparent successes and failures resulted from His action. They were completely in His power. The uplifted arms of the one, were uplifted by God; and the broken, helpless arms of the other were so -by the act of God. Ezekiel was a prophet in the truest sense. He interpreted current events in the light of eternal and unchanging facts. The false prophet ever attempts to interpret a situation by considering current events. .As we have constantly said, all this is very modern in its values.

Ezekiel 31

Ezekiel 31–32; Ezekiel 32:28–32

In *The Inferno*, Part I of Dante's *Divine Comedy* ("comedy" here indicates a narrative with a happy ending), Dante and his guide, the Latin poet Virgil, descend into hell. In each of the nine circles of hell, they see sinners being punished for sins they committed during their lives on earth. For example, the second circle contains lustful people, the fifth circle wrathful people, and the eighth circle fraudulent people such as flatterers and hypocrites. It is a dark journey filled with horrifying scenes and spiritual warnings for Dante and his readers.

As in Dante's classic work of literature, part of Ezekiel's prophecy in today's reading is an imagined descent into the underworld. The seventh out of seven oracles spoken against Egypt narrates Pharaoh's journey to Sheol (32:17–32). This is not a doctrinal description of the afterlife but a poem highlighting God's control over history and His judgment on human pride. When Pharaoh arrives, he finds Assyrian kings there ahead of him, no longer fear-inspiring empire-builders but impotent victims of God's judgment. The grave is in fact full of fallen, formerly mighty kings and rulers. Their pride now appears foolish—they have all returned to dust.

Going back to the start of today's passage, the fifth oracle against Egypt features a splendid, impressive cedar tree representing Assyria (31:1–18). Assyria had been a superpower, but God used Babylon to bring her down. That downfall should be a lesson to Egypt: Military power and political supremacy guarantee nothing.

The sixth oracle is a lament over the king of Egypt and again pictures him as a crocodile that gets hunted, caught, and gutted (32:1–16). The pride of Egypt will be shattered by a ruthless killer, Babylon. Interestingly, darkness is part of this judgment, an echo of the ten plagues in the days of Moses and the Exodus. The point is that God is in control of history—He raises up kingdoms and brings them down as His justice decrees.

Apply the Word

If God is sovereign, is there any point at all to human planning? Yes, as long as that planning is done in submission to Him. Planning can be part of good stewardship and obedience. As Proverbs 14:22 reminds us: "Do not those who plot evil go astray? But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness." Actually, the book of Proverbs contains a great deal of wisdom about making spiritually sound plans, including such references as Proverbs 16:3; 19:21; 21:30.

Ezekiel 31:18

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

To whom art thou thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden?—Ezek. 31.18

This chapter contains the fifth of the oracles concerning Egypt. It was spoken about two months before the fall of Jerusalem, and was the last before that event. It foretold the downfall of Pharaoh and the State of Egypt. The word Assyrian in verse 3 is surely wrong. As Dr. Davidson has pointed out, the word is "Asshur," and is the name of a tree, so that it should read, "Behold a great tree of a cedar." The language is poetic and full of force. Pharaoh and his multitude are portrayed as a tree towering over the tops of the other trees, so that fowls and beasts took refuge in its branches, and beneath its boughs. This tree is brought down, nations depart from under its shadow. The proud king is seen passing to Sheol, the underworld of the dead, and commotion is caused there by his coming, and the other fallen ones find satisfaction in that he too is brought low. This question, asked at the close, can have but one answer. In his greatness Pharaoh was like that awful and mighty one, described as king of Tyre. The question is a flash of light, bringing to mind once more, what had been so forcefully declared in the Burden concerning Tyre, that behind these great and mighty tyrants of earth, there was always the same sinister and awful personality. Their pride of place and power was of his inspiring, and indeed was his method of opposing himself to the will and purpose of God. It was no use; it is no use; it never will be! God has cast Satan out of the mountain; and every successive representative of his revolt will be cast down and cast out. Thus have we seen it in history. Thus shall we see it still, until the last tyrant, the Man of Sin himself, will be destroyed by the brightness of the coming of the Lord.

Ezekiel 32

Ezekiel 32:3

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

I will spread out My net over thee with a company of many peoples.—Ezek. 32.3.

In this chapter we have the sixth and seventh of the Egypt messages. Each is dated. They were delivered about a year and seven months after the fall of the city. In the seventh no month is given, but we may presume that it was the same month as the sixth, and

so about two weeks later. The sixth foretold the down-fall of Pharaoh; and the seventh that of his people. He and they are seen removed from earthly power and place, to the dark underworld, where they are impotent. The conception of that underworld is suggestive and terrible. The kings and nations are gathered there, but they are represented as at the end of activity. They do not deed. They are broken. They are conscious, for they speak to Pharaoh when he arrives, and they are ashamed, and filled with shame. The great purpose of the message was that of showing how the defeat and discomfiture of mighty people should speak to men so as to amaze them and fill them with fear. The figure of these particular words is a forceful one. The kings of the nations, and the nations, are seen in the turbulent waters, and troubling those waters; but over and around them all, are the meshes of the net of God. At His will they are drawn forth from the waters and cast to die and rot upon the land. Thus the Kingdom of God, that is the rule over human affairs, is a dragnet swaying to the tides. When He will, He is able to draw that net in, and separate between the good and the bad. See Matthew 13: 47-48, where the application is to Kingdom processes in this age, but the principle has ever had application.

Ezekiel 33

Ezekiel 33; Ezekiel 33:10–16

Usually pop songs on the radio are here today, gone tomorrow. Yesterday's top hit, played hourly to keep pace with album sales, is tomorrow's forgotten tune. Somewhere in Nashville or Los Angeles, musicians and marketers are already crafting the next hit, probably something about romantic love, probably something that appeals to a 20-something or younger demographic, probably something not too long and not too complicated so that the radio stations will play it.

In Ezekiel's day, God's people treated His messages as though they were pop songs, as background noise but not divine words to heed and obey (v. 32). They were not doers of the Word, but hearers only (James 1:22–25). Today's reading begins the third and final main section of the book of Ezekiel 33-48 deliver a message of comfort and promise to the Jewish exiles.

Ezekiel's commission as a "watchman" was renewed at the start of the passage (Ezek 33:1–20). As a man with a message from God, he must share it. If he didn't, the people's blood would be on his head, but if he did and no one listened, it would be on their heads. Ezekiel may have been tired of being a misunderstood doomsayer, but God encouraged him to continue taking seriously his responsibility as a prophet of the Most High.

Ezekiel was doubtless glad his message was vindicated when a messenger arrived confirming the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple (Ezek 33:21–33). The people had chosen to ignore his prophetic warnings and put their confidence in their status as "chosen people," despite their idolatry. Perhaps because of their faithless response, the prophet had been temporarily muted by God, but now his tongue was released. Surely the people would listen now! Now that all they loved seemed dead—the promised land, the holy city, the temple, and the kingly line of David—perhaps they would actually listen to what God had to say.

Apply the Word

The point of Ezekiel's prophecies was not for the people to feel depressed about their wrongdoing or even for the prophet to exult in divine justice, but rather for sinners to repent and live (v. 11)! God takes no pleasure in wielding His sword of judgment or in punishing people. He would much rather extend forgiveness and grace to those who put their trust in Him. The God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament—delighting to show mercy and inviting people to embrace His love.

Ezekiel 33:22

Morning and Evening - Spurgeon

In the way of judgment this may be the case, and, if so, be it mine to consider the reason of such a visitation, and bear the rod and Him that hath appointed it. I am not the only one who is chastened in the night season; let me cheerfully submit to the affliction, and carefully endeavour to be profited thereby. But the hand of the Lord may also be felt in another manner, strengthening the soul and lifting the spirit upward towards eternal things. O that I may in this sense feel the Lord dealing with me! A sense of the divine presence and indwelling bears the soul towards heaven as upon the wings of eagles. At such times we are full to the brim with spiritual joy, and forget the cares and sorrows of earth; the invisible is near, and the visible loses its power over us; servant-body waits at the foot of the hill, and the master-spirit worships upon the summit in the presence of the Lord. O that a hallowed season of divine communion may be vouchsafed to me this evening! The Lord knows that I need it very greatly. My graces languish, my corruptions rage, my faith is weak, my devotion is cold; all these are reasons why His healing hand should be laid upon me. His hand can cool the heat of my burning brow, and stay the tumult of my palpitating heart. That glorious right hand which moulded the world can new-create my mind; the unwearied hand which bears the earth's huge pillars up can sustain my spirit; the loving hand which incloses all the saints can cherish me; and the mighty hand which breaketh in pieces the enemy can subdue my sins. Why should I not feel that hand touching me this evening? Come, my soul, address thy God with the potent plea, that Jesu's hands were pierced for thy redemption, and thou shalt surely feel that same hand upon thee which once touched Daniel and set him upon his

knees that he might see visions of God.

Ezekiel 33:23-33 For Now--or Forever?

Our Daily Bread

Cold terror gripped the heart of a GI as mortar rounds whistled overhead, rifles cracked, and the Vietcong closed in. Suddenly he felt ripping pains as a bullet tore into his chest and arm. Yet it wasn't the end for this soldier. According to an article in The New York Times, the bullet was slowed by a New Testament he was carrying in his shirt pocket. Years later, the young man still treasured the blood-stained book with the ragged hole through the middle. He believes it saved his life.

This is a nice story, but it says nothing about the life-saving spiritual help the Bible was designed to give. In Ezekiel 33, we read that the ancient Israelites used the words of the prophets to make them feel good but not to change their lives. They took passages out of context to support their confidence (v.24). They found pleasure in listening to the words of the prophet (v.30), yet the Lord said, "They hear your words, but they do not do them" (v.31). The result? They came under divine judgment.

Then as now, God's Word is not to be cherished as a good-luck charm or to soothe the mind by bringing temporary relief from anxiety. It was given to be obeyed so that its help would not be just for this life—but forever.— by Mart De Haan

Thy Word is a lamp to my feet,

A light to my path alway,

To guide and to save me from sin

And show me the heavenly way. —Sellers

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We don't really know the Bible until we obey the Bible.

Ezekiel 33:31

Octavius Winslow

Few, save those who have been taught of the Spirit, and who have accustomed themselves to analyze closely the evidences of true conversion, are aware how far an individual may go, not merely in an outward reformation of character, and an external union to Christ, but in a strong resemblance to the positive and manifest evidences of the new birth, without the actual possession of a single one. In the exception that we make, we refer to a knowledge of the truth that is not saving in its effects, is not influential in its character, and which has its place in the judgment only, assented to, approved of, and even ably and successfully vindicated; while the soul, the seat of life-the will, the instrument of holiness-and the heart, the home of love, are all unrenewed by the Holy Spirit. Beloved reader, you cannot be too distinctly nor too earnestly informed, that there is a great difference in Divine knowledge. There is a knowledge of the truth, in the attainment of which a man may labor diligently, and in the possession of which he may look like a believer; but which may not come under that denomination of a knowledge of Christ, in allusion to which our dear Lord in His memorable prayer uses these words, "This is life eternal, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." The fatal error to which you are exposed is-oh that you may have escaped it!-the substituting a knowledge of Divine truth in the judgment, for the quickening grace of God in the heart. It is surprising how far an outwardly moral individual may go in Divine attainments-spiritual knowledge-eminant gifts-and even great usefulness; and yet retain the carnal mind, the rebellious will, the unhumbled and unbroken heart. If the volume of Divine truth had not informed us of this, and supplied us with some striking cases in proof, we should be perpetually beguiled into the belief that a head filled with rational, speculative, theoretical truth, must necessarily be connected with some degree of Divine grace in the affections. But not so. Balaam's knowledge of Divine things was deep; he could ask counsel of God, and prophesy of Christ, but where is the undoubted evidence that he "knew the grace of God in truth?" Saul prophesied, had "another spirit" given him, and asked counsel of God; but Saul's heart was unchanged by the Holy Spirit. Herod sent for John, "heard him gladly, and did many things," and yet his heart and his life were strangers to holiness. Addressing the Pharisees, the apostle employs this striking language, "Behold, you are called a Jew, and rest in the law, and make your boast of God, and know His will, and approve the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law:" and yet deep hypocrisy was their crying sin. Oh let no man be so deceived as to substitute knowledge for grace. Better that his knowledge of the truth should be limited to its mere elements, its first principles, and yet with it be enabled to say, "Behold, I am vile," but "He has loved me, and given Himself for me," than to possess "all knowledge," and live and die destitute of the renewing grace of God upon the heart.

Ezekiel 33:32 - Live It!

Our Daily Bread

Each year, one of my goals is to read the entire Bible. While listing it among my New Year's resolutions, I noticed a bookmark on my desk. On one side was a brief appeal for people to take in foster children. On the other side were these words referring to that appeal: "Don't read it. Live it. Real children. Real stories. Real life." The people who produced the bookmark knew how easily we absorb information without acting on it. They wanted people to respond.

Regular intake of God's Word is a worthy practice, but it's not an end in itself. The prophet Ezekiel spoke to an audience who loved to listen but refused to act. The Lord said to Ezekiel: "Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them" (33:32).

Jesus said: "Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matt. 7:24).

How will each of us read the Bible this year? Will we read it quickly to achieve the goal of getting through it? Or will we read it with the aim of doing what it says?— by David C. McCasland

Don't just read it. Live it!

The Bible gives us all we need

To live our lives for God each day;

But it won't help if we don't read

Then follow what its pages say. —Sper

The value of the Bible consists not only in knowing it but obeying it.

Ezekiel 33:7

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at My mouth, and give them warning from Me.—Ezek. 33.7

Having delivered his messages concerning the doom of the nations opposed to Israel, as necessary to her restoration, Ezekiel turned to the nation itself. There is only one date in the series of prophecies on that subject, which begin here and end with chapter 39. That date is found in the twenty-first verse of this chapter, and in all probability the series was given at that time. The date of the arrival of the fugitive was about six weeks before the final messages concerning Egypt's doom (Ezek 32.1 and Ezek 33.21). There is some confusion about these dates, which need not concern us, as the progress of the prophecy is natural. The situation was that Israel, both as to the Northern and Southern sections of the one nation, was in captivity. Ezekiel was among the captives in Babylonia. Jeremiah was with the remnant, probably now in Egypt. The desolation was complete. Now Ezekiel came to these messages of hope. This first one was concerned wholly with the function of the prophet, and that function is inclusively defined in these words. He gave a watchman, having one function, and a twofold responsibility. First he is to listen; then he is to speak. He must hear the word of Jehovah; and then proclaim it. If he do this, he has no further responsibility. If he fail, he is accountable to God for the calamities overtaking the people he failed to warn. The full message makes very clear the moral intention of prophetic ministry. He is to speak to men in order that the righteous may be prevented from turning away from righteousness; and that the wicked may be persuaded to turn from wickedness, in order, in each case, that they may live. The will of God is life for His people; that is ensured by righteousness; the prophet calls men to that righteousness.

Ezekiel 34

Ezekiel 34; Ezekiel 34:11–16

Political scientist Alan Houston was at the British Library doing archival research for a book on Benjamin Franklin, one of the most studied figures in American history. There he made an incredible find—47 letters written by, to, and about the great man. No one had seen these letters before; no one even knew they existed! Professor Houston spent two years verifying their authenticity and examining their contents, and then published them last year in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, accompanied by an essay by him. The letters provide new information about historical events and in some cases show new sides of Franklin.

Just as historical documents help us understand historical figures, so also God's Word guides us in understanding who He is. Having just received confirmation of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, this was what the Israelites needed to understand most of

all: When all else is gone, God remains. Yes, He hates and judges sin, and the nation paid the price for their persistent idolatry. But as Ezekiel 34 teaches, He keeps His promises and remains the faithful and loving Shepherd of His people (cf. Psalm 23).

This chapter is built around a contrast between God and the false shepherds, who were the political and religious leaders of Israel. These leaders had failed to care for the flock, instead looking to profit at its expense (Ezekiel 34:1–6). Naturally, the sheep had been scattered and preyed upon by wild animals. God opposed such “shepherds” and would hold them accountable as “sheep” who had gotten fat while others starved (Ezekiel 34:7–10, 17–24). As the divine Shepherd, He would rescue His people from this horrible situation—searching for the lost, binding up the injured, finding them safe pasture, and in general shepherding the flock with justice (Ezekiel 34:11–16). The covenant would be renewed and the land restored (Ezekiel 34:25–31). “Showers of blessing” would rain down. Harvests would be plentiful and the people would dwell in peace.

Apply the Word

Ezekiel 34:24 indicates that the Shepherd will be a descendant of David and God Himself. This messianic riddle is solved in Jesus Christ. He is our Good Shepherd and we are His sheep (John 10:1–16). We follow His voice as He leads us to green pastures and quiet waters. Whereas a hired hand runs away when a wolf comes, Jesus proved He is the true Shepherd by laying down His life for us. Those who follow Him can “have life, and have it to the full.”

Ezekiel 34:25-31 Extraordinary Showers

What do fish, tadpoles, and spiders have in common? They have all fallen from the sky like rain in various parts of the world. Fish fell on the Australian town of Lajamanu. Tadpoles pelted areas of central Japan on multiple occasions. Spiders showered down on the San Bernardo Mountains in Argentina. Although scientists suspect that the wind plays a part in these intriguing showers, no one can fully explain them.

The prophet Ezekiel described a far more extraordinary downpour—a shower of blessing (Ezek. 34:26). Ezekiel spoke of a time when God would send blessings like rain to refresh His people. The Israelites would be safe from enemy nations. They would have enough food, be liberated from slavery, and be freed from shame (vv.27-29). These gifts would revive Israel’s relationship with God. The people would know that God was with them, and that “they, the house of Israel, [were His] people” (v.30).

God blesses His modern-day followers too (James 1:17). Sometimes blessings abound like rain; sometimes they trickle in one by one. Whether many or few, the good things we receive come with a message from God: I see your needs. You are mine, and I will care for you.

“There shall be showers of blessing”—

This is the promise of love;

There shall be seasons refreshing,

Sent from the Savior above. —Whittle

Daily blessings are daily reminders of God.

INSIGHT: In today’s passage, the prophet Ezekiel offers a message of future hope and peace to a nation that had suffered defeat and was living in exile far from their homeland. Ezekiel 34:20-24 speaks of the shepherd who God will raise up to lead His people in the wonderful age described in verses 25-31. Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-18), and the joy and peace described in Ezekiel 34 are ours only in Him.

Ezekiel 34:11

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Behold, I Myself, even I, will search for My sheep, and will seek them out. — Ezek. 34.11

Having defined the function of the prophet as that of bringing men to rectitude, by uttering the word of Jehovah, Ezekiel turned to the idea of the corporate, or national life of the people. This message was concerned with the royal house, that is, with the kings of the nation, the shepherds of the people. The shepherd is ever the type of the king, rather than of the priest or prophet. The failure of kingship is set forth in the first part of this message (verses 1–10); and as we read it, if we carefully consider all that these kings of Israel did not do, we shall know what they ought to have done, and thus understand the kingly office according to the Divine ideal. The description of failure was the prelude to the prophet’s declaration that what their kings had failed to do for the people, Jehovah would Himself do, and that by setting up one Shepherd over them, even David, the name being employed idealistically, and in reference to Messiah. As we read this chapter, our minds inevitably travel on to the New Testament, and that paragraph at the close

of the ninth chapter of Matthew, in which the writer describes for us Christ's vision of the multitudes, the compassion of His heart, and His consequent sending out of the Twelve. In Him we see the fulfilment of this old-time prophecy. In Haim, Jehovah, Himself, even He came to search for the sheep, and to establish the true Kingdom. Again we read the first part of the message, and find in it a perfect description of His work. Not yet is it completed; but it will be; for Israel, and for the "other sheep," not of that fold; whom also He will bring, so that there shall be one flock, one Shepherd.

Ezekiel 34:11

Max Lucado

He's waiting for you. God is standing on the porch of heaven, expectantly hoping, searching the horizon for a glimpse of his child. You're the one God is seeking. God is the waiting Father, the caring Shepherd in search of his lamb. His legs are scratched, his feet are sore, and his eyes are burning. He scales the cliffs and traverses the fields. He explores the caves. He cups his hands to his mouth and calls into the canyon. And the name he calls is yours....The message is simple: God gave up his Son in order to rescue all his sons and daughters. To bring his children home. He's listening for your answer.

Ezekiel 34:11

Faith's Checkbook - C H Spurgeon

An Expert Searcher

"For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out."—Ezekiel 34:11

THIS He does at the first, when His elect are like wandering sheep that know not the Shepherd or the fold. How wonderfully doth the Lord find out His chosen! Jesus is great as a seeking Shepherd as well as a saving Shepherd. Though many of those His Father gave Him have gone as near to hell-gate as they well can, yet the Lord, by searching and seeking, discovers them and draws nigh to them in grace. He has sought out us: let us have good hope for those who are laid upon our hearts in prayer, for He will find them out also.

The Lord repeats this process when any of His flock stray from the pastures of truth and holiness. They may fall into gross error, sad sin, and grievous hardness; but yet the Lord, who has become a surety for them to His Father, will not suffer one of them to go so far as to perish. He will by providence and grace pursue them into foreign lands, into abodes of poverty, into dens of obscurity, into deeps of despair; He will not lose one of all that the Father has given Him. It is a point of honor with Jesus to seek and to save all the flock, without a single exception. What a promise to plead, if at this hour I am compelled to cry, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep!"

Ezekiel 34:11-16 Meet Shrek

By Julie Ackerman Link

Read: Ezekiel 34:11-16

I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. —Ezekiel 34:11

Shrek was a renegade sheep. He went missing from his flock and remained lost for 6 years. The person who found him living in a cave on a high and rugged place in New Zealand didn't recognize him as a sheep. "He looked like some biblical creature," he said. In a way, he was. Shrek was a picture of what happens to sheep who become separated from their shepherd.

Shrek had to be carried down the mountain because his fleece was so heavy (60 lbs or 27 kg) that he couldn't walk down on his own. To relieve Shrek of the weight of his waywardness, he was turned upside down so that he would remain still and not be harmed when the shearer removed his heavy fleece.

Shrek's story illustrates the metaphor Jesus used when He called Himself the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), and when God referred to His people as His flock (Ezek. 34:31). Like Shrek, we do not make good choices when we're on our own, and we become weighed down with the consequences (Ezek. 33:10). To relieve us of the weight, we may have to be on our backs for a time. When we end up in this position, it is good to remain still and trust the Good Shepherd to do His work without hurting us.

The King of love my Shepherd is,

Whose goodness faileth never;

I nothing lack if I am His,

And He is mine forever. —Baker

God's training is designed to grow us in faith.

Insight - Today's reading uses the metaphor of God as one who cares for His people as a shepherd cares for his sheep: "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick" (v.16). When God became a man in the Person of Christ, similar language was used about Him: "But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. 9:36). As our Good Shepherd, Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27).

Ezekiel 34:15

Food and Rest

Faith's Checkbook - C H Spurgeon

"I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down saith the Lord God."—Ezekiel 34:15

UNDER the divine shepherdry, saints are fed to the full. Theirs is not a windy, unsatisfying mess of mere human thought; but the Lord feeds them upon the solid, substantial truth of divine revelation. There is real nutriment for the soul in Scripture brought home to the heart by the Holy Spirit. Jesus, Himself, is the true life-sustaining Food of believers. Here our Great Shepherd promises that such sacred nourishment shall be given us by His own self. If, on the Lord's Day, our earthly shepherd is empty-handed, the Lord is not.

When filled with holy truth, the mind rests. Those whom Jehovah feeds are at peace. No dog shall worry them, no wolf shall devour them, no restless propensities shall disturb them. They shall lie down and digest the food which they have enjoyed. The doctrines of grace are not only sustaining, but consoling: in them we have the means for building up and lying down. If preachers do not give us rest, let us look to the Lord for it. This day may the Lord cause us to feed in the pastures of the Word and make us to lie down in them. May no folly, and no worry, but meditation and peace mark this day.

Ezekiel 34:16

J.C. Philpot

Are there not seasons in our experience when we can lay down our souls before God, and say, "Let Christ be precious to my soul, let Him come with power to my heart, let Him set up His throne as Lord and King, and let self be nothing before Him?" Well, we utter these prayers in sincerity and simplicity, we desire their fulfilment; but oh, the struggle! the conflict! when God answers these petitions. When our plans are frustrated, what a rebellion works up in the carnal mind! When self is cast down, what a rising up of the fretful, peevish impatience of the creature! When the Lord does answer our prayers, and strips off all false confidence; when He does remove our rotten props, and dash to pieces our broken cisterns, what a storm—what a conflict takes place in the soul! Angry with the Lord for doing the very work we have asked Him to do, rebelling against Him for being so kind as to answer those petitions that we have offered up, and ready to fume and fret against the very teaching for which we have supplicated Him. But He is not to be moved; He will take His own way. "I will overturn, let the creature say, let him think what it will. Down it shall go to ruin, it shall become a wreck, it shall be overthrown. My purpose shall be accomplished, and I will fulfil all my pleasure. But I will overturn, not to destroy, not to cast into eternal perdition, but I will overturn the whole building to erect a far more goodly edifice. Self is a rebel, who has set up an idolatrous temple, and I will overturn and bring the temple to ruin, for the purpose of manifesting My glory and My salvation, that I may be your Lord and your God."

Ezekiel 34:16 Jeremiah 23:1-11; Matthew 23:13-39

I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak . . . I will shepherd the flock with justice. - Ezekiel 34:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

A few years ago, the country watched with shocked disbelief as the huge corporation Enron seemed to crumble overnight. But as details emerged indicating how company executives had deceived their shareholders and employees, shock turned to anger. When people on the street were interviewed, there was widespread disgust that a handful of people could be so greedy and unfeeling to wipe out the financial security of so many faithful employees.

Leaders have obligations toward those whom they manage. This is true in the corporate world, and it's no less true for spiritual leaders. Two days ago (see Oct. 13) we saw Jeremiah's deep outrage against the false prophets who had misled God's people. Recall how he cried out that his heart was broken within him (v. 9). We're looking at part of this same prophecy again, but from a slightly different perspective today, focusing on the Lord's promise concerning the One who would lead His people with perfect justice.

First, however, let's look at similar outrage expressed by our Lord Jesus over Jerusalem's leaders in His day. Matthew 23 lists seven "woes," or denunciations, directed at leaders who failed to lead justly. Even a quick read over this list shows how angry Jesus was when teachers and spiritual leaders crushed the people under unnecessary burdens and deadly hypocrisy. We also see that wicked leaders change very little over time. Just as Jerusalem's leaders sought to kill Jeremiah, whom God had sent to them, so too, the religious leaders of Jesus' day crucified the One whom God had sent to them. In Matthew 23:37–39, we find a lament on the lips of Jesus that sounds much like something we could have heard from Jeremiah.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As Jeremiah and Jesus observed leadership that had gone bad, they both responded with outrage and sorrow—outrage for those who led unjustly and sorrow for those who had been deceived.

Ezekiel 34:22

He of Tender Conscience

Faith's Checkbook - C H Spurgeon

"I will judge between cattle and cattle."—Ezekiel 34:22

SOME are fat and flourishing, and therefore they are unkind to the feeble. This is a grievous sin and causes much sorrow. Those thrustings with side and with shoulder, those pushings of the diseased with the horn, are a sad means of offense in the assemblies of professing believers. The Lord takes note of these proud and unkind deeds, and He is greatly angered by them, for He loves the weak.

Is the reader one of the despised? Is he a mourner in Zion and a marked man because of his tender conscience? Do his brethren judge him harshly? Let him not resent their conduct; above all let him not push and thrust in return. Let him leave the matter in the Lord's hands. He is the Judge. Why should we wish to intrude upon His office? He will decide much more righteously than we can. His time for judgment is the best, and we need not be in a hurry to hasten it on.

Let the hard-hearted oppressor tremble. Even though he may ride roughshod over others with impunity for the present, all his proud speeches are noted, and for every one of them account must be given before the bar of the Great Judge.

Patience, my soul! Patience! The Lord knoweth thy grief. Thy Jesus hath pity upon thee!

Ezekiel 34:25

Faith's Checkbook - C H Spurgeon

Peace Whatever Exposure

"I will make them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods."—Ezekiel 34:25

IT is the height of grace that Jehovah should be in covenant with man, a feeble, sinful, and dying creature. Yet the Lord has solemnly entered into a faithful compact with us, and from that covenant He will never turn aside. In virtue of this covenant we are safe. As lions and wolves are driven off by shepherds, so shall all noxious influences be chased away. The Lord will give us rest from disturbers and destroyers; the evil beasts shall cease out of the land. O Lord, make this thy promise good even now!

The Lord's people are to enjoy security in places of the greatest exposure: wilderness and woods are to be as pastures and folds to the flock of Christ. If the Lord does not change the place for the better, He will make us the better in the place. The wilderness is not a place to dwell in, but the Lord can make it so. In the woods one feels bound to watch rather than to sleep, and yet the Lord giveth His beloved sleep even there. Nothing without or within should cause any fear to the child of God. By faith the wilderness can become the suburbs of heaven, and the woods the vestibule of glory.

Ezekiel 34:27

C H Spurgeon

THE BANDS OF THE YOKE.

Besides Still Waters

We look cheerful and happy, but we do not know the burden of the person sitting in the pew with us. There is a merchant, here, who

has been driven to his wit's end; he scarcely knows what to do. Tonight he said, "I will just run into the house of God and hear what the Lord may have to say." Often a sweet promise has come to God's bewildered children as the Master has sent a message through His servant.

There is a housewife in the same condition. One child is sick and another falling ill. Her husband is walking in a way that grieves her heart. Home affairs are not good. Yet while she sits before the Lord, a word of comfort comes.

Many of our brothers and sisters have a perpetual cross to carry. If we knew what they suffer in business, in body, or in their domestic circle, we would express words of comfort. We do not know, however, and so they are left without Christian sympathy.

You have been forced to carry a heavy yoke. Suddenly the Lord breaks the bands of your yoke (Ezek. 34:27). He delivers you, and you know that He is the Lord (Ezek 34:30).

I can bear witness that trials are a great blessing. I would not have learned much except for trouble. When in painful difficulty and unable to see my way, I knew that the Lord was God when He appeared and broke the bands of my yoke. With a song I have magnified His surprising grace and blessed His delivering love.

Ezekiel 34:30

Faith's Checkbook - C H Spurgeon

Necessary Knowledge

"Thus shall they know that I the Lord their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord God."—Ezekiel 34:30

TO be the Lord's own people is a choice blessing, but to know that we are such is a comfortable blessing. It is one thing to hope that God is with us, and another thing to know that He is so. Faith saves us, but assurance satisfies us. We take God to be our God when we believe in Him, but we get the joy of Him when we know that He is ours and that we are His. No believer should be content with hoping and trusting; he should ask the Lord to lead him on to full assurance so that matters of hope may become matters of certainty.

It is when we enjoy covenant blessings and see our Lord Jesus raised up for us as a plant of renown, that we come to a clear knowledge of the favor of God toward us. Not by law, but by grace, do we learn that we are the Lord's people. Let us always turn our eyes in the direction of free grace. Assurance of faith can never come by the works of the law. It is an evangelical virtue and can only reach us in a gospel way. Let us not look within. Let us look to the Lord alone. As we see Jesus we shall see our salvation.

Lord, send us such a floodtide of thy love that we shall be washed beyond the mire of doubt and fear.

Ezekiel 35

Ezekiel 35–36; Ezekiel 36:24–32

About 35 years ago, two baby boys were given up for adoption. They were adopted into two different families, attended rival high schools, and lived in neighboring towns in Maine . . . all the while unaware of each other's existence. One of them eventually got a job as a furniture mover for a bedding store. Then amazingly, the other was hired for the same job by the same store. As the two men drove their truck around town completing deliveries, customers would ask them if they were brothers. "We thought they were just trying to razz us," one said. Then they dug into their adoption records and discovered it was true—they actually were brothers!

The joy of being reunited with family is comparable to the joy Israel would feel upon returning to the land of promise. Today's reading begins with a chapter of prophecy against the nation of Edom (cf. 25:12–14). The enmity between Edom and Israel extended all the way back to Jacob and Esau. When the Edomites looted Jerusalem after the Babylonian conquest (Obad. 1:11–14), they angered the Lord and incurred His judgment.

Why is this chapter here in the section of Ezekiel devoted to messages of comfort and promise? The Edomites intended to capitalize on their enemy's defeat and seize the Israelite's land for themselves (Ezek 35:10–13). These plans showed disrespect for God because He had given the land to Jacob as an inheritance. In truth, it was God's land (Ezek 36:5).

Therefore, the prophecy against Edom is an appropriate introduction to God's promise in chapter 36 to restore Israel to her land. One day they would return from exile—homes would be built, crops would be grown, the people would live in peace again (Ezek 36:8–12). Just as the honor of God's name demanded the justice of judgment, so it also meant that He would give the people new hearts and restore them as a witness to the nations (Ezek 36:20–28). "Then they will know that I am the LORD" (Ezek 36:38).

Apply the Word

No discipline lasts forever (36:15). God's justice aims not to take vengeance on sinners but to restore them to fellowship with Him. The same is true today for Christians: "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:10–11). We should rejoice in God's "tough love" for us—He's preparing us for full fellowship with Him!

Ezekiel 35:10

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Because thou hast said, These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it, whereas the Lord was there.—Ezek. 35.10

Ezekiel now uttered a message descriptive of the new order to be established under the true Shepherd. The first part of this message however was of the nature of a parenthetical turning aside to deal with Edom. Edom is represented as having a perpetual enmity against Israel, as rejoicing in her calamities; and in these words the inspiration of that rejoicing is unveiled. It was that of cupidity, lust for territory. In the troubles of Israel and Judah, Edom had seen the opportunity of enriching herself, by gaining possession of the land. In their calculations the politicians of Edom had made the mistake which politicians have so often made, that of leaving out a supreme quantity. They had looked at the desirable territory, and had seen it held only by a weak and broken people. They had failed to see, or had ignored the fact, or had counted it as of no moment, that "the Lord was there." Yet this was the supreme fact, the only one which mattered. Edom as descended from Esau, as was Israel from Jacob, was not ignorant of the Divine election of Israel. But here the very spirit of Esau was manifested, that of ignoring, or deliberately setting aside, Divine purposes for the sake of material advantage. If Edom forget that the Lord is there, that forgetfulness does not change the fact. That land was, and is, sacred to the carrying out of a Divine purpose, for the world, and through Israel; and God has never abandoned It. He is still there; and whosoever may covet it cannot hold it, for He will dispossess them.

Ezekiel 36

Ezekiel 36:16-30

On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. - Ezekiel 36:33

TODAY IN THE WORD

On October 30, 2005, nearly 60,000 people gathered for a celebration in Dresden, Germany. Sixty years after the city's famed cathedral was destroyed by Allied bombs during World War II, the church reopened for the first time. The original structure had remained in large piles of rubble, untouched, during nearly fifty years of Communist rule. Restoration began with Germany's reunification in 1990. With more than half of the necessary funds coming from U.S. and British donations, the church's restoration was hailed as a "great work in the spirit of reconciliation."

The newly restored Dresden cathedral reminds us of God's work of spiritual restoration among His people. As we continue to look at the Spirit's role in the coming of Jesus, we turn today to Ezekiel 36 for some of God's promises to His people during their exile in Babylon. Speaking through Ezekiel, the Lord reminded His people that their terrible sin caused their exile (v. 16). Their bloodshed and idolatry so defiled the land that the Holy God could no longer dwell with His people. But along with this was the reality that the fact of His people living in exile instead of the Promised Land dishonored God's holy name among the nations, and for the sake of His name, the Lord promised that He would regather the nation and restore them to their land.

There was no point in bringing the people back to the land, however, unless they were cleansed of their impurities and idols (v. 25). But even this cleansing wouldn't last unless the people were radically changed. So the Lord promised to remake their very hearts, removing their stony, sinful hearts, and replacing them with new ones. We might think of this as a divine heart transplant operation! But even this wouldn't be enough, so God promised to put His own Spirit within His people so that they could truly obey His decrees and laws. Apart from such transformation, restoration would be utterly impossible. Once the nation was changed, God promised to restore it fully (vv. 28-30).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Although the complete fulfillment of the promised restoration outlined in today's passage lies in the future, God gives us evidence of His restoration through the Spirit in our lives right now. First, God's work begins with the purification from our sins and anything that we trust in more than Him. Second, the Lord gives us a new heart and spirit. Third, He causes His own Spirit to dwell within us. Apart from this transformation, it's impossible to live lives that please Him.

Ezekiel 36:20 - The Name

Our Daily Bread

Companies that compete for consumer dollars know the importance of protecting their name and reputation. Shoddy quality or poor service can cause profits to plummet.

While on a trip, I saw a car rental company experience a customer-service disaster. When people arrived at the rental counter to pick up their keys, they faced long lines, discourteous staff, and inconvenient conditions. Their reaction was predictable: frustration and anger. I doubt that many of those customers would ever rent cars from that company again. The agency's name had become an object of mockery.

This reminds me of how Israel's behavior brought disrepute to God's name. Because they had lived like their pagan neighbors, the Lord scattered them among the nations. The unbelieving world laughed at both Israel and the name of her God.

Let's bring this situation up-to-date. As Christians, we bear the name of our Savior Jesus Christ. What does the world think of Him by what they see in us? Bringing honor to His name is more important than a great corporation living up to its name. Our lives really have only one purpose—to reflect our Lord. We must guard against doing anything that will cause others to profane His holy name.
— by Mart De Haan

Teach us that name to own

While waiting, Lord, for Thee;

Unholiness and sin to shun,

From all untruth to flee. —Cecil

When others get to know you, will they want to know Christ?

Ezekiel 36:22-31 Transformed Hearts

During the early 1970s in Ghana, a poster titled "The Heart of Man" appeared on walls and public notice boards. In one picture, all kinds of reptiles—symbols of the vile and despicable—filled the heart-shaped painting with the head of a very unhappy man on top of it. In another image, the heart-shape was clean and serene with the head of a contented man. The caption beneath the images read: "What is the condition of your heart?"

In Matthew 15:18-19, Jesus explained what pollutes a person. "The things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (niv). That is the condition of a heart separated from God—the situation ancient Israelites found themselves in when their sins forced them into exile (Ezek. 36:23).

God's promise in Ezekiel 36:26 is beautiful: "I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart" (nlt; see also 11:19). God will take away our stubborn hearts that have been corrupted by all kinds of evil and give to us a clean heart that is responsive to Him. Praise God for such a wonderful gift.

Father in heaven, thank You that when we confess our sin to You, You give us a new heart and a new life. I pray that the life I live reflects the goodness of Your gift and that others may see the difference a new heart has made in me.

For a new start, ask God for a new heart.

INSIGHT: Today's text gives two reasons why God is going to rescue and redeem the people of Israel. He will do it for the sake of His holy name (v. 22) and so the nations will know He is the Lord (v. 23).

Ezekiel 36:20 - A Help or a Hindrance?

Our Daily Bread

An 86-year-old retired insurance broker says that after much careful thought he has concluded that "there is no personal God and no life after death." He says there's no evidence to support these beliefs. But he's wrong. Scholars have shown that the New Testament books are authentic documents and that Christ's resurrection is a historical fact.

Like the people Paul spoke of in Romans 1, this man chose not "to retain God in [his] knowledge" (v.28). His decision came from his own rebellious heart and was reinforced by bad experiences.

The factors that contributed to this man's conclusion should challenge us who believe in Christ. He indicated that he has seen little Christlikeness among the Christians he has met and done business with. And this has occurred in a city filled with churches. He has

observed that many are just as greedy, dishonest, unkind, ungrateful, and discontented as those who don't claim to be Christians. Like the Israelites in Ezekiel's day, such believers "profane the Lord's name" and give unbelievers an excuse to reject God.

Lord, make me the kind of Christian who will give unbelievers no excuse for concluding that You do not exist. I want my life to be a help, not a hindrance.— by Herbert Vander Lugt

If Christians hide their shining light

And don't reflect God's Son,

Then how will people in sin's night

Be guided, helped, and won? —JDB

Christians are either Bibles or libels.

Ezekiel 36:21 - God's People, God's Honor

Our Daily Bread

God's reputation is either enhanced or maligned by the attitudes and actions of His people. Today's Bible reading illustrates this truth.

During the reign of David, God punished Israel with a 3-year famine because David's predecessor King Saul had attempted to exterminate the Gibeonites (2 Samuel 21:1). His action violated a solemn promise Joshua and the rulers of Israel had made with Gibeon in the name of "the Lord God of Israel" (Joshua 9:18). God's honor was at stake.

When David asked the Gibeonites how he could make amends, they demanded that seven men from the descendants of Saul be handed over to them to be hanged. The Bible does not tell us that the Lord demanded this retribution, and the death of Saul's sons and grandsons must have grieved God's heart. Yet He allowed the executions to go forward so that the agreement His people had made in His name would be renewed. The Gibeonites therefore knew that God was a God of honor.

Just as Israel profaned God's holy name by their wickedness (Ezekiel 36:22), so too we can dishonor God today by the way we live. Let's pattern our lives after Jesus. Then we will bring honor to God's name.— by Herbert Vander Lugt

God's reputation is at stake

In all we say and do;

So let us pray for grace to live

A life that's good and true. —D. De Haan

We honor God our Father when we live like His Son.

Ezekiel 36:23 - For His Name's Sake

Our Daily Bread

In a New York Times interview, a widely recognized man voiced his displeasure with a fast-food chain in whose TV commercials he had appeared. He felt that the quality of some of the items he advertised had been diminishing. Since people associated his name with the product, he didn't want the corporation's lowered standards to damage his own name.

The Lord is also jealous for His name. In Ezekiel 36, He declared that He had been disgraced by the rebellious practices of His chosen people Israel. They had "profaned" His name among the nations (v.21).

The same thing happens today when we as Christians live in disobedience to the Lord. Our sinful actions reflect poorly on Him. We're not just hurting our own reputation when we fail to live up to God's holy standards—we're giving unbelievers an excuse for their low opinion of Him.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus carefully protected the name of His heavenly Father. If we fall short of His example, we can be sure that the Lord will keep His promise to discipline His people for His "holy name's sake" (v.22). God's jealousy for His character should motivate us to live more faithfully for Him.

Let's live for the Lord—for His name's sake. — by Mart De Haan

His name above all names shall stand,

Exalted more and more,

At God the Father's own right hand,

Where angel-hosts adore. —Clark

We honor God's name when we call Him our Father and live as obedient children.

Ezekiel 36:23

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

The nations shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.—Ezek. 36.23

Having uttered his message concerning Edom, the people coveting the land of Israel, the prophet foretold the restoration of the land, and the people to the fulfilment of the Divine purpose. The first movement of the message was an oracle concerning the land itself, but considered as the dwelling-place of Israel. Then followed a wonderful prediction as to the way of restoration. The land would be restored by the salvation of the people. That salvation would consist in moral and spiritual renewal. First, they would be cleansed from their pollutions; then changed in nature; and then energized by the Spirit of God within them. Very impressive is the prophet's insistence upon the fact that this is to be done, not for the sake of Israel, but for the sake of the Name of God. In such regeneration and restoration Israel would find blessing; but the purpose of blessing is always the honour of the Name of God, and the interpretation of that honour to the nations. Yet what higher honour could any nation have than that intended for Israel, that, namely, of sanctifying God in them, that is, of setting Him apart so that He may be seen and understood? Israel has never yet fulfilled that function. But she will do so; and the geographical base of her national life will be that very land, still kept within the purpose and power of God for her. For the present age the Church—whose ultimate vocation is in the ages to come—is the holy nation, whose office it is to show forth the excellencies of Him Who has called her out of darkness into His marvellous light. Let her also remember that her gifts and calling are not for her sake, but for the honour of the Name; that, being sanctified in her, God may make Himself known to the nations.

Ezekiel 36:25

Faith's Checkbook - C H Spurgeon

Thorough Cleansing

"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you."—Ezekiel 36:25

WHAT an exceeding joy is this! He who has purified us with the blood of Jesus will also cleanse us by the water of the Holy Spirit. God hath said it, and so it must be: "Ye shall be clean." Lord, we feel and mourn our uncleanness, and it is cheering to be assured by thine own mouth that we shall be clean. Oh that thou wouldst make a speedy work of it!

He will deliver us from our worst sins. The uprisings of unbelief, the deceitful lusts which war against the soul, the vile thoughts of pride, and the suggestions of Satan to blaspheme the sacred name—all these shall be so purged away as never to return.

He will also cleanse us from all our idols, whether of gold or of clay, our impure loves, and our excessive love of that which in itself is pure. That which we have idolized shall either be broken from us, or we shall be broken off from it.

It is God who speaks of what He Himself will do. Therefore is this word established and sure, and we may boldly look for that which it guarantees to us. Cleansing is a covenant blessing, and the covenant is ordered in all things and sure.

Ezekiel 36:26

C H Spurgeon

Ezekiel 36:26 "A new heart also will I give you."

True religion begins, then, with the heart, and the heart is the ruling power of manhood. You may enlighten a man's understanding and you have done much, but as long as his heart is wrong, the enlightenment of the understanding only enables him to sin with a greater weight of responsibility resting on him. He knows good to be good, but he prefers the evil. He sees the light, but he loves the darkness, and turns from the truth because his heart is alienated from God.

Ezekiel 36:25ff

The Covenant

The Lord proclaims His grace abroad!

“Behold, I change your hearts of stone;

Each shall renounce his idol-god,

And serve, henceforth, the Lord alone.

“My grace, a flowing stream, proceeds

To wash your filthiness away;

Ye shall abhor your former deeds,

And learn my statutes to obey.

“My truth the great design ensures,

I give myself away to you;

You shall be mine, I will be yours,

Your God unalterably true.

“Yet not unsought, or unimplored,

The plenteous grace I shall confer;

No—your whole hearts shall seek the Lord,

I'll put a praying spirit there.

“From the first breath of life divine

Down to the last expiring hour,

The gracious work shall all be mine,

Begun and ended in my power.”

Olney Hymns, by William Cowper, from Cowper's Poems, Sheldon & Company, New York

Ezekiel 36:26 How To Get A New Heart

By Dave Branon

Read: Ezekiel 36:26-31

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. —Ezekiel 36:26

A friend who is a heart transplant cardiologist has an appreciation of Ezekiel 36:26 that not many of us can understand. Mike manages the pre-operation and post-operation care for heart-transplant patients. He's often in the operating room as surgeons remove diseased, discolored hearts and replace them with vibrant, pink “new” donor hearts.

Mike explains that the process for selecting who gets a “new” physical heart is similar to who can get a “new heart” from God (Ezek. 36:26). In both cases, need alone is the criterion.

Ezekiel's mention of the people of Israel someday getting a “new heart” is a foreshadowing of the change that takes place at salvation. Ephesians 4:24 and 2 Corinthians 5:17 refer to it as “new man” and “new creation.” For the Israelites of Ezekiel's day and for those of us living today, only one criterion must be met for us to acquire a “transplant.” We must need it. It matters not whether we're rich or poor, respected or scorned. Citizenship, social status, and ethnicity are inconsequential. If we need a new heart from God, we can have one through faith in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

What indicates that need? As sinners, all of us need a new heart. Have you had a spiritual heart transplant?

Christ asks you for nothing—

Come just as you are;

Come sinful, come guilty,

Come give Him your heart. —Anon.

We need more than a new start— we need a new heart!

Ezekiel 36:26

Daily Help - C H Spurgeon

And I will give you an heart of flesh.—Ezekiel 36:26

The hard heart does not love the Redeemer, but the renewed heart burns with affection towards Him. Many are the privileges of this renewed heart: it is here the Spirit dwells, it is here that Jesus rests. It is fitted to receive every spiritual blessing, and every blessing comes to it. It is prepared to yield every heavenly fruit to the honor and praise of God, and, therefore, the Lord delights in it. A tender heart is the best defense against sin and the best preparation for heaven. A renewed heart stands on its water tower looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus. Have you this heart of flesh?

Ezekiel 37

Ezekiel 37; Ezekiel 37:1–10

Several well-known African-American spirituals are sung about the book of Ezekiel. “Ezekiel Saw the Wheel,” for example, celebrates his vision in chapter 1. “Dry Bones” responds to his vision in today’s reading by re-imagining those bones coming to life: “The toe bone connected with the foot bone, the foot bone connected with the ankle bone, the ankle bone connected with the leg bone . . . They gonna walk around, dry bones, Rise and hear the word of the Lord!” The hope of resurrection and new life permeates all the various versions of this classic spiritual.

Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones is probably the most famous chapter in the book. The bones symbolized Israel’s hopeless condition (Ezekiel 37:11–14). They weren’t just losing big or hoping for a miracle comeback. They were dead as dead can be!

But God brought life to this desolate scene. Before Ezekiel’s eyes, the bones began to rattle, tendons and flesh and skin appeared to bind everything together, the breath of life was breathed into them, and they stood up on their own two feet (Ezekiel 37:1–10). Israel had lost everything—the promised land, their capital city, and their beloved temple. Yet God would bring the nation back from the dead, so to speak, and restore the people to a covenant relationship with Him.

The second part of the chapter is a second prophecy with the same meaning (Ezekiel 37:15–28). Ezekiel took two sticks representing Israel and Judah and made them into one stick to show that the divided kingdom would be reunited and the exiled people brought home. The restored nation would be ruled by a king from the line of David who would lead them in the ways of genuine worship and holiness. This prophecy of the Messiah anticipated Christ’s first (to us, past) and second (future) advents. He has established an everlasting “covenant of peace”: “My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people” (Ezekiel 37:26–27; cf. 1 Thess. 5:23).

Apply the Word

Unbelievers are in the same hopeless condition as Israel (Eph. 2:1–5). They’re spiritually dead as dead can be! But just as the dry bones came to life through God’s mighty power, so too can dead people become spiritually alive through Christ’s resurrection power. One of the purposes of our redemption is for us to bear witness to this truth! Just as Ezekiel was called to be a prophet and “watchman” to Israel, so also are we called to speak and live the gospel of Christ to the world.

Ezekiel 37:11

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Behold, they say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off. Ezek. 37.11

The whole of this great message of Ezekiel may be said to be the Divine answer to these words, which were the words of Israel. They were the words of despondency, born of the realization of the desolation produced by the Divine Reprobation. It was an accurate description. Considered as a nation, Israel was indeed but a skeleton, and worse—her bones were scattered; there was no hope as within herself: she was clean cut off. To prepare him for his message, Jehovah gave the prophet a vision of a valley filled

with dry bones, and asked him the question: "Can these bones live?" The prophet's answer was characteristic of his loyalty and faith: "O Lord Jehovah, Thou knowest!" Then he saw the secret of hope. By prophecy—the Word of God; and the four winds—the Spirit of God; that valley of dead bones became a valley peopled with living men, the hosts of Jehovah. Then another sign was given him, that of the two sticks, showing that God would yet gather together and bind into one the two nations, which through their own sin existed as two, and establish them as one nation under one Shepherd King. The teaching has wider application than to Israel. It is the story of humanity. Through sin the whole earth has become a valley of dry bones. There is no hope for humanity in man. But these dry bones can live. By the Word, and the Spirit of God, men can be reborn; and at last healed of their separations, and united under one King. The valley is yet the place of dead bones; but the word of Jehovah is being uttered; and the Spirit of God is breathing over the dead; and the processes of Divine recovery and restoration are proceeding. When the King comes, the work will be cut short in righteousness.

Ezekiel 37:13

Faith's Checkbook - C H Spurgeon

Out of Spiritual Death

"And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves."—Ezekiel 37:13

INDEED it must be so: those who receive life from the dead are sure to recognize the hand of the Lord in such a resurrection. This is the greatest and most remarkable of all changes that a man can undergo—to be brought out of the grave of spiritual death, and made to rejoice in the light and liberty of spiritual life. None could work this but the living God, the Lord and giver of life.

Ah me! how well do I remember when I was lying in the valley full of dry bones, as dry as any of them! Blessed was the day when free and sovereign grace sent the man of God to prophesy upon me! Glory be to God for the stirring which that word of faith caused among the dry bones. More blessed still was that heavenly breath from the four winds which made me live! Now know I the quickening Spirit of the ever-living Jehovah. Truly Jehovah is the living God, for He made me live. My new life even in its pinings and sorrows is clear proof to me that the Lord can kill and make alive. He is the only God. He is all that is great, gracious, and glorious; and my quickened soul adores Him as the great I AM. All glory be unto His sacred name! As long as I live I will praise Him.

Sermon Starter Don't Bury Those Bones Ezekiel 37-1-14

I - A HOPELESS situation {vv 1-2}

- Our world today seems hopeless
- Religion looks hopeless

II - A HUMAN solution {vs 3}

- Some problems, such as fixing our nation or our families, are above any human solution

III - A HEARING of the Scriptures {vv 4, 9-10; 2 Tim 4:2}

- Things happen with God's Word
- It is the beginning of the solution to impossible situations

IV - The HOLY SPIRIT {vv 5-6, 9-10}

- Works with God's Word in convicting, fixing, and healing

V - HOPE stirred {vv 11-14}

- The spiritually dead can be made alive by God's Word and His Holy Spirit!
- Pastor David M. Coe

Ezekiel 38

Ezekiel 38–39; Ezekiel 39:21–29

In 1950, the U.S. men's national soccer team earned one of the greatest upsets in sports history. A group of amateurs including a schoolteacher, a mail carrier, and a hearse driver traveled to Brazil for the World Cup. In an early-round game against powerhouse England, they pulled off an unbelievable 1–0 victory. It was so unbelievable that some newspapers thought the telegraph report must be a typo and that England had actually won 10–1. Others suspected a hoax and did not immediately report the score. The team's story, recently told in a book and movie titled *The Game of Their Lives*, is gaining renewed attention because the United States is again scheduled to play England in this summer's World Cup.

While at times it might appear that God's enemies are unbeatable, His triumph at the end of history is assured. In yesterday's and today's readings, Ezekiel's words of comfort for the Jewish exiles slide forward from a homecoming in 70 years to the advent of the Messiah to the end times period known as the Millennium. Not everyone will welcome the kingdom of God—Ezek 38 and Ezek 39 recount a future battle in which the nations attempt to overturn or destroy it. Their leader is "Gog," who may be an individual king or who may represent an allied group of nations deceived by Satan. As happens in Revelation 20:7–10, these nations wield fearsome military power, but against God they stand no chance and are destroyed by fire from heaven. Their evil plans are overwhelmed by His sovereign plan.

The word of comfort here is that from beginning to end God is in control. His enemies think they are fighting a battle, but the fact is that He is leading and driving them as one leads or drives a horse or an ox (Ezek 38:4; 39:2). Their crushing defeat is certain, to the point where the prophet issued a mock invitation for animals to come to a "feast" after the battle (Ezek 39:4, 17–20). The name of the Lord will be honored and His glory will be proclaimed (Ezek 38:23; 39:7, 21–29).

Apply the Word

Every day, we are engaged in spiritual warfare with an enemy who "prowls around like a roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8). And while Christ has already won the victory (1 Cor. 15:57–58), He has also given us the daily responsibility of putting on "the full armor of God so that [we] can take [our] stand against the devil's schemes" (Eph. 6:10–18). Be encouraged that the Lord will be with you today as you stand firm in His mighty power (2 Cor. 1:21–22)!

Ezekiel 38:2

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Son of man, set thy face toward Gog, of the land of Magog.—Ezek. 38.2

This and the next chapter contain two messages of Ezekiel, but they are concerned with the same matter. That matter is an arresting one. While his theme now was that of the Restoration of Israel, at this time he was borne along to see visions of events beyond that restoration. Let this be clearly noted. The invasion of Gog and his allies was an invasion not of a land desolated, but of the land in which the people of God were seen dwelling in peace and prosperity. Notice also that none of these enemies are the old ones with which we are familiar as hostile to Israel. It is a new confederacy and antagonism. Here the prophet saw the final manifestation of antagonism to Jehovah and His people. He saw it gathering itself in terrific force, the mightiest alliance that had ever acted against Israel. But still the prophet saw God reigning. It was He Who brought forth Gog with his armies; that is, He compelled the incipient antagonism to express itself. For us there can be no doubt that here Ezekiel had a vision of that which even yet is more than a thousand years ahead. John, in the Apocalypse, refers to it, and definitely places it beyond the period of the thousand years (Rev. 20.7-8). Whatever men may think as to the speedy elimination of evil from human affairs, the Bible has no such teaching. The process is, by the measurement of human lives and calendars, a long one; but God is never defeated. He watches its working, and curbs and restrains it within limits, and compels it to the fullest expression, in order to its complete and final defeat.

Ezekiel 39

Ezekiel 39:29

Octavius Winslow

In a more enlarged communication of the Holy Spirit's gracious influence lies the grand source and secret of all true, spiritual, believing, persevering, and prevailing prayer; it is the lack of this that is the cause of the dullness, and formality, and reluctance, that so frequently mark the exercise. The saints of God honor not sufficiently the Spirit in this important part of His work; they too much lose sight of the truth, that of all true prayer He is the Author and the Sustainer, and the consequence is, and ever will be, self-sufficiency and cold formality in the discharge, and ultimate neglect of the duty altogether. But let the promise be pleaded, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication;" let the Holy Spirit be acknowledged as the Author, and constantly sought as the Sustainer, of this holy exercise; let the saint of God feel that he knows not what he should pray for as he ought, that the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered, and that God knows the mind of the Spirit, because He makes intercession for the saints according to His will; and what an impulse will this give to prayer! What new life will it impart! What mighty energy, what unction, and what power with God! Seek, then, with all your blessings, this, the richest, and the pledge of all, the baptism of the Spirit; rest not short of it. You are nothing as a professing man without it; your religion is lifeless, your devotion is formal, your spirit is unctionless; you have no moral power with God, or with man, apart from the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Seek it, wrestle for it, agonize for it, as transcendently more precious than every other mercy. Submerged in His quickening and reviving influences, what a different Christian will you be! How differently will you pray, how differently will you live, and how differently will you die! Is the spirit of prayer languishing? Is its exercise becoming irksome? Is closet-

devotion abandoned? Is the duty in any form becoming a task? Oh, rouse you to the seeking of the baptism of the Spirit! This alone will revive the true spirit of prayer within you, and this will give to its exercise sweetness, pleasantness, and power. God has promised the bestowment of the blessing, and He will never disappoint the soul that seeks it.

Ezekiel 39:8

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Behold, it cometh, and it shall be done, saith the Lord God; this is the day whereof I have spoken.—Ezek. 39.8

In this message the prophet took up and completed the subject of this final antagonism to the people and purpose of God. Its burden is that if there be such antagonism, it is equally true that God is antagonistic to it; and that not passively, but actively. He will compel it to its last and mightiest manifestation in order that it may be completely and for ever destroyed. The words we have stressed emphasize the Divine determination to complete the destruction of evil. Again John in brief sentences makes the same affirmation (Rev. 20.9-10). The most arresting thing in this burden of Ezekiel is its account of how, after the defeat of this mighty alliance by the intervention and fire of God, the people of God give themselves to the complete cleansing of their land from the last dead remains of the pollution. With the greatest diligence they bury the dead hosts, persevering until not a bone is left above the ground to pollute it. And not the dead bodies alone, but all the vast quantities of the implements of war are to be for fuel and burning, the final destruction of the things wherein man trusted in his opposition to the will of God. Again we say that, judged by the measurements of human lives and calendars, the process is a long one, but the end is certain : "Behold, it cometh; and it shall be done." Be it ours within the span of our lives to count it the highest of all honours that we by faith and patience are permitted to have some part with God in the work which brings the glorious end. It is a great thing to be a "partaker—in the tribulation, and kingdom, and patience which are in Jesus."

Ezekiel 39:25 - The Name of Names

Our Daily Bread

If you ask for Kleenex, you won't necessarily get that brand of tissue. The same is true if you request Scotch tape, a Coke, or a Xerox copy. Then there's the Jeep, the Band-Aid, and the Thermos. Specific trademark names often take on broader meaning than the original product.

Those names, though, are important to the companies that own them. That's why a corporation like the Coca Cola Company, which may have the most widely known trademark in the world, maintains a large legal department. It even has field inspectors to protect its "name."

Much more is at stake, however, when the name of God or His Son Jesus Christ is misused. His is the most important name in all the world. That's why He will one day show everyone the difference between how His name is abused and what it actually stands for. He will reveal to all living creatures why God and Jesus Christ should be used with the utmost respect and honor.

That is why we need to ask for the Lord's forgiveness when we are guilty of disgracing His name. There is so much to be gained by using His name reverently, and there is so much to lose by taking it in vain. God is jealous for His holy name!— by Mart De Haan

No word of man can ever tell

How sweet the name I love so well;

O let its praises ever swell,

O praise the name of Jesus! —Martin

God's name—handle with care!

Ezekiel 40

Ezekiel 40–41; Ezekiel 40:1–4

Legos, the interlocking plastic building blocks with which kids (and adults!) can build nearly anything they can imagine, celebrated their 50th anniversary two years ago. Over 400 billion Legos have been sold worldwide. The term Lego originated from the Danish words leg and godt, meaning "play well." Legos are now made in 2,400 different shapes and the product line includes building kits, games, movies, books, amusement parks, and children's shoes. Lego pieces have been used to recreate the Statue of Liberty, Mount Rushmore, and St. Paul's Cathedral in London. There is even a Brick Testament Web site and book series featuring more than 3,600 Lego illustrations of 400 Bible stories.

Ezekiel's vision of a new temple seems to be a future building project—no temple matching the measurements given in chapters 40 and following has yet been built. Commentators are divided over whether it will be built during the end times or if perhaps this temple is symbolic or allegorical (like so many other pictures in Ezekiel).

In any case, the temple was hugely significant for Israel because it represented the covenant and God's presence with His people. It was the center of national worship. It represented His love and faithfulness and reminded them of their responsibilities to obey and walk with Him. It pointed back to a golden age under the kingships of David and Solomon. Even though the people had pursued false idols and defiled the temple, they were still devastated when the Babylonians destroyed it.

Because Ezekiel had never had the privilege of serving in the original temple, this must have been a thrilling vision for him. While a prophet and in exile, he remained a priest. Even in the vision, he was not allowed into the Most Holy Place (41:3–4). But to receive and share from God a picture of this new temple was surely a deeply fulfilling ministry.

Apply the Word

One of the ways in which God's presence with His people is symbolized today is through the Lord's Supper. Churches celebrate it to obey Christ's command, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:14–20). The Lord's Supper reminds us that the Resurrected One lives in our hearts and calls us to worship and obedience. We are also called to share this good news: "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:23–29).

Ezekiel 40:4

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel. Ezek. 40.4

We now come to the final section of this book of Ezekiel. These visions were given to the prophet some twelve years after the latest of those already considered, except the brief one concerning the over-coming of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek 29.17-20), which was incorporated with the burdens of the nations. These last messages were descriptive, rather than didactic, although their purpose was moral, in that the prophet was commanded to declare them to the house of Israel "that they may be ashamed of their iniquities" (see Ezek 43:10). The prophet, in the visions of God, was brought to the land of Israel, and there he was given a portrayal of the final order, when the people of God are spiritually, morally, and physically restored. In reading these messages, we find ourselves in an entirely new order. Difficulty has been created in the minds of many by the merging of things which are distinctly and definitely material, with those which have all the elements of heavenly conditions and spiritual experiences. Yet this is of the essence of the revelation. The earth separated from heaven, or heaven separated from earth, is not the original order. It resulted from human sin. When that has been dealt with, the interrelation between heaven and earth will be that of natural intercommunication, not as now, merely by faith, but actually, positively, definitely, by sight and by sense. The first phase of the vision of the restored order presented the Temple as at the centre of the life of the people. In this chapter we have the description of the courts round about the Temple proper, and of the porch leading to the house itself.

Ezekiel 41

Ezekiel 41:18

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

It was made with cherubim and palm trees; and a palm tree was between cherub and cherub, and every cherub had two faces. Ezek. 41.18.

In this chapter we have the prophet's description of the Temple itself; first its general structure and then its ornamentation. The dimensions as to the actual sanctuary were those of the Tabernacle. Moreover, its general form was the same, as the distinction was maintained between the Holy Place (verses 2 and 3) and the Holy of Holies (verses 4 and 5). The buildings round about constituted an addition. Within, he saw the ornamentation, the symbols of beauty, and of suggestiveness. These were alternating cherubim and palm trees. The cherubim constitute a part of the visions of God, granted to Ezekiel at the beginning of his ministry. Here he saw two of the faces only, those of the man and the lion. The palm trees were the symbol of national or racial life in its full realization and glory. Thus into each palm tree the eyes of a man and the eyes of a lion were ever looking. God in His fullest expression in man, and in His sovereignty, typified by the lion, is watching with complacency and satisfaction the full realization of His purposes as typified by the palm tree. These symbols were seen upon the wall of the Temple, and upon the folding doors admitting thereto. Thus at the centre of the new order of life was the Temple; and in its very heart these symbols of the condition of life as realized in that order. Life in full fruition, watched over by God in love and in authority.

Ezekiel 42

Ezekiel 42–43; Ezekiel 43:1–9

Last fall, the newly built U.S.S. New York, a Navy assault ship, sailed into New York harbor. What made her visit extra special was a bow built from 7.5 tons of steel recovered from the wreckage of the World Trade Center. Firefighters and relatives of those who died on 9/11 watched the arrival of the ship, which delivered a 21-gun salute to honor those who died on that tragic day. The ship's crest design shows a phoenix rising from between the twin towers with the motto, "Never Forget."

For the Jewish exiles listening to Ezekiel's description of a new temple, the point was also "Never Forget." To remember how the glory of God once dwelt in Jerusalem but departed due to their sin was painful. It had been 19 years since Ezekiel delivered that word from the Lord (Ezekiel 10, see June 7). The fact that the original temple was destroyed was likewise a crushing realization. The prophet's vision, however, encouraged the people that God had not forgotten them and that His glory would return one day.

Chapter 42 describes the rooms for the priests in this new temple, highlighting the purity and holiness of the place, the people, and their activities. We also see here a stark contrast with the evil found in the rooms of the temple earlier in the book (Ezekiel 8, see June 6).

In chapter 43, Ezekiel's vision comes to a climax when the glory of the Lord enters the new temple. As before, the prophet fell facedown in awe and reverence, and was lifted to his feet by the Holy Spirit (43:1–5). Then God spoke and once again promised an eternal covenant relationship with Israel. This included a promise to keep the nation holy for His name's sake—there would be no more cycles of rebellion and idolatry. The people would turn away from all that, and God Himself would keep them righteous (43:7–9). The dedication ceremonies for the new temple symbolize a complete change of heart and a reconsecration to walking in the ways of the Lord (43:10–11).

Apply the Word

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). In light of what we've learned in Ezekiel, it's clear that Paul employed an incredibly powerful metaphor when he compared our bodies with the temple—a place of purity, a place of worship, a place where God's glory dwells. No wonder the apostle admonished us: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:19–20).

Ezekiel 42:20

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

It had a wall round about . . . to make a separation between them which was holy, and that which was common. —Ezek. 42:20

This chapter is devoted to the description of the buildings surrounding the Temple proper, or the Sanctuary, but all within the sacred precincts. These buildings were for the use of the priests while engaged in the sacred service of the Temple. Finally the measurement of the great wall surrounding the whole Temple area is given; and concerning that wall these words were written. Thus in the vision of the final order, a distinction is maintained between that which is holy and that which is common. Perhaps the word "common" employed by our revisers is better than the "profane" of the King James' Version; but that is because of our more modern use of this word "profane" which associates with it the idea of evil. A similar difficulty however is created by the word "common," which we now use as meaning in some sense inferior, or less worthy. Neither of these ideas is present in the distinction between the holy and the profane, in the text. It is rather a distinction between the exercise of man in relation with God, and his exercises—neither evil nor unworthy—in relation with his fellow man. This is a distinction. It is the difference between worship and social intercourse. The first is the highest activity of which man is capable, and can only be rendered to God; and is at last the only relation which man can bear to God. The second is a blessed and glorious activity, the realization of the joy of the family of the One Father, of the happiness of the subjects of the One King. This sense of distinction is to be maintained in the final order; how carefully therefore we should observe it now. This vision of the final earthly Temple has much to say to us today as to the reverence and sanctity of true worship.

Ezekiel 43

Ezekiel 43:10

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Thou, son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities.—Ezek 43:10

Having completed the description of the new temple, the prophet told how he saw Jehovah return to His House. As in the days

when Moses completed the Tabernacle, and Solomon the Temple, the glory of Jehovah came and filled the House. It was that manifestation of the Presence, which had constituted the real value of Tabernacle and Temple; and so it will be in the new Temple. All the beauty of the structure in each case was but a symbol and harmonic setting for this essential wonder. Ezekiel had seen this glory depart (Ezek 10.19 and Ezek 11.22-23), and now he saw it return. In these particular words we find the value of the messages which the prophet was now delivering. The vision of the glory of the House was given in order to produce shame in the hearts of the people for those evil ways which had robbed them of their glory. This is a very suggestive word, and it is impossible not to see its application to the Church of God. So far as the fulfilment of her function of revealing the glory of God to the world in her corporate capacity is concerned, few will deny her comparative failure. The recognition of it is the inspiration of many modern movements toward unity. Perhaps nothing would be more valuable than a renewed vision of God's ideal of the Church, as that is revealed in the New Testament. That vision would be of the spiritual unity which has never been destroyed; nor can be; but which we have largely hidden from the world, and even lost sight of ourselves, through our differences and diversions, in non-essential things.

Ezekiel 43:2 - Seeing God's Glory

Our Daily Bread

I've had the privilege of viewing some glorious sights in my life.

I've seen an awe-inspiring nighttime launch of the space shuttle, the majesty of Mount Fuji in Japan, the sparkling beauty of ocean sealife off the coast of the Philippine Islands, the architectural wonders of New York City, and the gleaming midsummer spectacle of a night baseball game in a major league stadium.

But nothing I've ever seen comes close to what some Old Testament people saw. Moses, the people he led, Ezekiel, and others witnessed the most breathtaking sight of all time. They had a glimpse of the glory of God—a visible manifestation of the Lord's invisible being and character.

Moses experienced it on Mount Sinai, and his face shone (Exodus 34:29). The Israelites saw it in the cloud, before God provided them with quail (16:10). Ezekiel saw God's glory return to the temple, and he fell to the ground (Ezekiel 43:1-5).

Someday we who have been redeemed by Jesus will experience that inspiring sight. God's glory will shine in the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10-11). And we will see our risen and glorified Savior, the Lord Jesus (1 John 3:2).

This hope encourages us as Christians to keep going. For nothing in this world compares to seeing God's glory! — — by Dave Branon

The glory of God

In the face of His Son

To us who behold Him

Is heaven begun. —Hess

The world's greatest glory is but a spark compared to the radiance of God's glory.

Ezekiel 44

Ezekiel 44; Ezekiel 44:24–30

One day in 1938 a boy in Queensland, Australia, brought home a dull-colored stone he had found lying on a hillside. The family decided to use it for a doorstep, where it stayed for ten years. Then a jeweler recognized it for what it was, bought it, and polished it until it was revealed as the largest star sapphire in the world. Known as the Black Star of Queensland and now mounted on white gold with 35 diamonds around the star's rim, this 733-carat sapphire is considered to be one of the most beautiful gems in the world.

As breathtaking as such treasures are, they can't compare to the splendid glory of God! Ezekiel witnessed the glory of the Lord fill the new temple and he again fell facedown in worship. Because God's glory had passed through the eastern gate, that gate would be shut permanently—it was holy, not for common use. Disobedience that dishonored the covenant would no longer be tolerated, for example, bringing "foreigners uncircumcised in heart and flesh" into the sanctuary (vv. 7–9). Circumcision was a physical and spiritual symbol of membership in the community of faith.

The instructions for Levites and priests in this new order of worship likewise emphasize the necessity of pure hearts when coming into God's presence. Collectively, these passages fulfill an ancient promise: "The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live" (Deut. 30:6).

These instructions also stress the religious leaders' responsibility to teach the people "the difference between the holy and the common . . . the unclean and the clean" (v. 23). They should provide good examples and models of holy living. They should in all things act with scrupulous integrity and a commitment to righteousness. They would not be assigned a portion of land, because God Himself would be their inheritance (v. 28; cf. Deut. 18:1–2).

Apply the Word

Just as the "temple" is no longer a building, but all believers (see yesterday's Today Along the Way), so also are "priests" no longer a select few, but all believers. All who have trusted Christ for salvation are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that [we] may declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). Each of us has a responsibility to cultivate righteousness and purity in every dimension of our lives.

Ezekiel 44:3

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

As for the Prince, He shall sit therein as Prince to eat bread before the Lord. Ezek 44.3

In this chapter and the two following, the Temple is still in view, and all its ordinances are declared. It is noticeable, however, that the Temple is considered as at the centre of the city, and so of the national life. Within its boundary, the Prince of the people is found, surrounded by the priests. This place of the Prince is arresting. Ezekiel had seen the glory of Jehovah entering by the east gate. That gate was now closed, and none was permitted to enter thereby. But within the courts, right in that gateway, the Prince is to find His place; there He is to eat bread before Jehovah. Notice, He is not called the King. In this restored order, there is only One King for this people, the One Whom they had rejected from being King. Through the discipline of reprobation, He restores them to Himself; they constitute a Theocracy. Their visible ruler is a Prince, and He sits in the gate through which Jehovah enters, and there eats bread before Him, in fellowship with Him, and in His rule representing Him. In so far as all this is a vision of the ultimate earthly order, we know who the Prince will be; and in this suggestive portrayal of His place in the Temple, we have one phase of application of that consummation which Paul saw, when he wrote of the time when the Son shall deliver up the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all. In so far as the picture represents any stage short of the ultimate order, it reveals the place of the Prince or Ruler, at all times, as that of complete submission to the one authority of Jehovah.

Ezekiel 45

Ezekiel 45–46; Ezekiel 46:1–8

Basement kitchens are found in many churches across America. On the counter sits a pair of well-used coffee urns. A few washed casserole dishes from last month's potluck dinner lie unclaimed a few feet away. A handmade sign on the cupboard asks visitors not to eat the Cheerios and Goldfish crackers needed for Sunday school and nursery snacks. The trash can is filled with soda bottles and pizza boxes from a youth group meeting.

Church basement kitchens are cousins to the temple kitchen areas in today's reading (Ezek 46:19–24). Following the account of the new temple, Ezekiel narrated a new division of the promised land. The list of what does and does not belong to the ruler is a warning not to repeat the exploitation and injustice that led to God's judgment. Leaders are instructed to protect the property rights of all citizens and reminded that in truth the land belongs to the Lord, as seen in the Year of Jubilee (Ezek 46:16–18).

The bulk of this passage deals with offerings and holy days (Ezek 45:13–46:24). The reasons behind the sacrifices are much the same as in the Mosaic Law—worship, purification, atonement, and gratitude—but the specifics vary in so many details that an entirely different time period seems to be in view. In addition, some sacrifices and holy days are not mentioned. It's possible that these instructions are actually symbols and allegories. As with understanding the new temple, commentators differ as to whether the prophecy will be literally fulfilled during the end times or whether it speaks primarily to spiritual principles and meanings.

Might it be both? Take the kitchens, for example. They may very well actually be built one day as part of a new temple complex during the end times. Even now, though, at a spiritual level they speak to the reality that fellowship is an important part of worship. They remind us that within the community of faith, social and spiritual interactions merge with one another. A shared meal can bring glory to God!

Apply the Word

It is often a good idea to seek out additional Scripture passages to help illuminate or give background to a biblical text under consideration. For instance, studying the sacrifices in Ezekiel 45 and Ezek 46 would correlate very well with a review of the sacrifices in the Mosaic Law (Lev. 1–7). For another example, the centrality of the temple within the book of Ezekiel might send an eager inquirer to such passages as Solomon's dedication of the original temple (1 Kings 8).

Ezekiel 45:16-17

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

All the people of the land shall give unto this oblation for the Prince in Israel. And it shall be the Prince's part to give the burnt offerings.—Ezek 45.16-17

Here in the setting out of the new order of the land, provision is made first for the area for priests and Levites in close association with the Temple. The territory of the Prince is also appointed. To Him the people are to pay their dues, of their flocks and of the soil; and out of these He is to provide all that is necessary for those ceremonial offerings, which perpetually set forth the truth concerning the relationship of the people to Jehovah as it is based upon redemption. Thus a change is seen from the old order. In that, every person was responsible for bringing offerings to the priests. Now all these are brought to the Prince, and He provides what is necessary. Thus, in some senses the Prince is more than Ruler; He is exercising the supreme function of the Priest in receiving from the people and providing the offerings of atonement. Peter charged the men of Israel with having "killed the Prince of life," and declared that the heaven had received Him "until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God sake by the mouths of His holy prophets" (Acts 3.15, 21); and on another occasion said: Him did God exalt with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins" (Acts 5.31). To His people Israel, He will indeed be a Prince and a Saviour, ruling over them in fellowship with God, and that on the basis of that perfect redemption which He has provided, through which their restoration must come.

Ezekiel 46

Ezekiel 46:2

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And the Prince...shall worship at the threshold of the gate.—Ezek 46.2

Still the description of the new order continues, and is now concerned with the arrangements for the observance of the Sabbath, and the offerings of the Sabbath and the new moon. The whole outlook is earthly; that is to say, that the order described is that of life in this world. Men are still employed in their earthly vocations, and so the Sabbath is observed. In this day of restoration, the ceremonial offerings are observed, with this difference, that until Christ came they were prophetic and anticipatory, whereas now they are memorial. That the sacrifices are symbolic rather than actual I think there can be no doubt. That which is most arresting throughout, is the presence of the Prince. Whereas He has His place in the gateway of the Divine return to His people, and eats His bread before Jehovah, He is identified with the people in their worship. In this worship He is first alone, at the threshold of the gate; then He is with the people; whether it be the company of those who pass from the north to the south, or that which passes from south to north. He goes in the midst of them. When we think of all this as finding fulfilment in Christ, we need to remember that it is in representative capacity only, as completely one with His people, that He can be thought of as a worshipper; and that is the ultimate of grace. John in the Apocalypse never refers to Him as worshipping, save only as He, in unity with His people, is identified with the worship of the four living creatures. But these are worshippers of God and the Lamb. Thus, the highest symbolism fails to interpret finally the mysteries of grace. The one truth which is clear is that of the complete identification of the Prince and Saviour with those over whom He rules as Redeemer.

Ezekiel 47

Ezekiel 47–48; Ezekiel 47:1–12

Bill Foege, a pioneer in global health, has saved millions of lives. He started working in Nigeria to vaccinate people against smallpox and contributed much to the eradication of the disease. He later headed up a task force working to improve immunization rates for the world's children, raising the rate from only five percent in 1978 to 80 percent by 1990. Later, he persuaded a major pharmaceutical company to donate drugs to help end river blindness in Africa. Inspired by the life of Albert Schweitzer and a missionary uncle who served in Papua New Guinea, Foege works today with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, continuing to formulate strategies to improve health conditions worldwide.

God is the ultimate giver and saver of life, as seen in Ezekiel's vision of the river of life flowing from His throne (47:1–12). This recurring image in prophecy can also be found in Revelation 22:1–2. In those verses, the "river of the water of life" flows from God's throne and is lined by trees, the leaves of which bring healing to the nations, exactly as seen in Ezekiel. The water's main properties are that it heals and gives life, suggesting a renewal of the physical creation as well as spiritual vitality. Christ Himself is the Living Water: "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:7–14).

Following a description of the new boundaries of the promised land and new divisions of it among the twelve tribes of Israel, the book of Ezekiel draws to a close (48:30–35; cf. Rev. 21:1–7). The new Jerusalem will be renamed, “THE LORD IS THERE.” His presence and worship of Him will define this place and time in unprecedented ways. All through the book we have heard the refrain that God does what He does in order that “they will know that I am the LORD.” Here at last is the place where our thirst for God will be quenched (Psalm 84)!

Apply the Word

Today’s reading brings us full circle of our study this month. The transcendent and sovereign God we encountered in Ezekiel 1 is the same God who keeps promises made long ago to Abraham and Moses. The wrathful God who wielded the sword of justice is the same God who dwells with His people as friend and King. The holy God whose glory departed from the city is the same God who names the city to affirm His eternal presence with His people

Ezekiel 47:9

Faith's Checkbook - C H Spurgeon

The Life-giving Stream

“And it shall come to pass, that everything that liveth which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live.”—Ezekiel 47:9

THE living waters, in the prophet’s vision, flowed into the Dead Sea, and carried life with them even into that stagnant lake. Where grace goes, spiritual life is the immediate and the everlasting consequence. Grace proceeds sovereignly according to the will of God, even as a river in all its windings follows its own sweet will; and wherever it comes it does not wait for life to come to it, but it creates life by its own quickening flow. Oh, that it would pour along our streets and flood our slums! Oh, that it would now come into my house and rise till every chamber were made to swim with it! Lord, let the living water flow to my family and my friends, and let it not pass me by. I hope I have drunk of it already; but I desire to bathe in it, yea, to swim in it. O my Saviour, I need life more abundantly. Come to me, I pray thee, till every part of my nature is vividly energetic and intensely active. Living God, I pray thee, fill me with thine own life.

I am a poor, dry stick; come and make me so to live that, like Aaron’s rod, I may bud and blossom and bring forth fruit unto thy glory. Quicken me, for the sake of my Lord Jesus. Amen.

Ezekiel 47:9

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Everything shall live whithersoever the river cometh.—Ezek. 47.9

The glory and beauty of this great message has been fully recognized by the people of God, and constant and most justifiable use has been made of it in interpretations of the fulness and fertility of life in the Pentecostal baptism and in-dwelling. It is a message constantly referred to in consideration of the words of Jesus on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles when He said: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7. 37, '8). Considering it in its relation to Ezekiel's visions, we observe its place. The new order is established; the Temple is built, and its services are arranged; the city is established around it; the land is apportioned in relation to it; Jehovah has returned to dwell among His people; His will is administered by a Prince upon the basis of redemption. All is completed. Now the river of life flows forth from that House, and so from that Divine Presence; it comes by the way of the altar; it proceeds to the Arabah, the wilderness; it flows into the Dead Sea; and in its progress there is life—"Everything shall live whithersoever the river cometh." That is the life of restoration. For that which is desolate because reprobate, there is no other way of recovery, of restoration. But there is this way, because of the character and nature of God. The end is not yet. The wilderness is still barren; the sea is dead; but the river is flowing out from the Sanctuary by the way of the altar; and the "seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord" are assured, because He will "send the Christ—even Jesus"—for the "restoration of all things."

Ezekiel 48

Ezekiel 48:35 Jehovah Shammah - The LORD is There

Ezekiel 48:35

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

The Lord is there.—Ezek. 48.35

That is the final word of this great prophet of hope, Jehovah-Shammah. It is one of the great Jehovah titles and interpretations, and here Ezekiel employs it as giving the name of the city of God. There, in exile from Jerusalem, that city dear to his heart, in the possession of aliens, its walls broken down, the Temple destroyed, its glory dead, this man had received visions of God. These visions had interpreted for him the corruption of his people, and the infinite depth of the grace of God. He had seen Jehovah leave His people, and their consequent reprobation and desolation. He had argued for the righteousness of that reprobation. But he had seen more. He had been brought to understand that through reprobation, God was working for restoration. He had seen the processes of that restoration, and the glory of it, in the re-established and ennobled order. In his last message he had described the new division of the land among the tribes of Jehovah, each territory running from east to west; and the whole, including all the land promised to the fathers. At the centre of everything was the Sanctuary, surrounded by the territory of Prince, Priests, Levites, and The City. The City with its twelve gates is the final vision. The prophet beheld it, and its complete glory being seen, he named it "Jehovah is there." The name tells of complete satisfaction; that of God, and that of man. God is seen at rest among His people, His original purpose realized. Man is seen at rest in God, his true destiny reached. To John in Patmos, also came the vision of the city of God, and the final glory of it was the same: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His peoples; and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God."

Ezekiel 48:35

Jehovah-Shammah

As birds their infant brood protect,
And spread their wings to shelter them,
Thus saith the Lord to His elect,
"So will I guard Jerusalem."
And what then is Jerusalem,
This darling object of His care?
Where is its worth in God's esteem?
Who built it? who inhabits there?
Jehovah founded it in blood,
The blood of His incarnate Son;
There dwell the saints, once foes to God,
The sinners whom He calls His own.
There, though besieged on every side
Yet much beloved, and guarded well,
From age to age they have defied
The utmost force of earth and hell.
Let earth repent, and hell despair,
This city has a sure defence;
Her name is call'd, "The Lord is there,"
And who has power to drive Him thence?

Olney Hymns, by William Cowper, from Cowper's Poems, Sheldon & Company, New York

Falling Down, Standing Up, Going On

Ezekiel 1:28-2:3

Robert Morgan

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one

speaking. He said to me, "Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." As He spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. He said, "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites...." (Ezekiel 1:28b – 2:3a).

One of the crises facing today's church is the lack of young people willing to give their lives to full-time Gospel service. Now, of course, all committed Christians are full-time Christians and full-time servants. But from the earliest days of the church, there have been some who have been set apart from secular vocations in order to be full-time pastors, evangelists, Christian educators, missionaries, and so forth. But I read a news item the other day that said, "The number of clergy ages 35 and younger has dropped dramatically" in recent years, especially among the mainline churches. For example, in 1975, twenty-four percent of Presbyterian clergy (USA) were 35 years old and younger. Today, only seven percent are 35 and younger. Another article I read had this headline: "At Easter, church pews may be full, but it's getting harder to fill pulpits." The article was all about a growing shortage of clergy in America.

We could also say that within our churches themselves, there is a shortage of workers. For example, there's nothing in the world more important than grounding our children in Christ, yet we never have enough workers in our children's ministries. The proportion of people in America who are genuinely committed to Christ and His Kingdom seems to be growing smaller.

Well, the prophet Ezekiel has something to tell us about all this. Look at the way he opens his book: In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River....

There he tells us two things—his age and his location. He was thirty years old, plus four months and five days. He was, by lineage, a priest, and, according to Numbers 4, priests were supposed to begin their priestly service at age thirty. But here he was, four months and five days past his 30th year, and he had done nothing for the Lord. He felt extraordinarily useless. Why? Because he wasn't among the worshippers at the temple in Jerusalem. He was among the exiles by the Kebar River in Babylon. He had been caught in one of the early invasions of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and he had been seized and dragged away from his homeland. He had been taken about 900 miles away and interred in a refugee camp just south of the great city of Babylon where Nebuchadnezzar had his palace and his hanging gardens.

Now, Ezekiel had been looking forward all his life to that moment when he would enter priestly service. He had been training for the day when he would officially be installed into the priesthood. And just when that moment was about to come, he was caught in a war zone, seized by Gentile troops, torn from his homeland, and exiled in a refugee camp. What did priests do? They offered sacrifices and served in the temple. Here there were no altars, no sacrifices, no temple. There was nothing for him to do, and Ezekiel must have been emotionally and spiritually desolate. His morale was gone. His life's training seemed wasted. His life's purpose was gone.

And then three things happened to him, in rapid succession—wham, wham, wham. And from that moment, Ezekiel became one of the most effective and powerful men that God ever planted on this world. This is the story of how God called him from being a useless priest to a greatly-used prophet. The Lord did three things to him, and I suspect He wants to do the very same three things to us.

1. God Knocks Us on Our Faces

Look at our text again: This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking. This was Ezekiel's reaction to the unexpected vision that he experienced in the opening chapter of his book. Let's go back to verse one: In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

Now, notice that. Visions of what? Of God! The reason I want to emphasize that is because as you go on and read chapter 1, it is so easy to get distracted by all the strange descriptions Ezekiel gives of the trappings around the throne of God. He gives us a fascinating description of the whirlwind which opened the vision, and of the four living creatures, the cherubim, who guard the throne. But the main point of it all is the majesty and awesome grandeur of the throne of Almighty God. Let's look at just a few verses:

I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures.... And he goes on to give us a mind-boggling description of these four living creatures which he later tells us (in chapter 10) are an order of angels known as cherubim. Now skip down to verse 25: Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day so was the appearance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown....

Here Ezekiel was. One moment, a defeated, useless priest, 30-years-old, and with no future. No temple. No sacrifice. No home. No homeland. Exiled and defeated. The next moment, He encounters the living God who reigns over heaven and earth, and who is in total control of all His creation. One moment Ezekiel's face is downcast, and the next moment, he falls facedown in worship and in utter terror of the fear of the Lord.

One the reasons so few people today are going into the ministry of the Lord's work is because we have lost the sense of the majesty and the grandeur which belongs to God the Father and to His Son, Jesus Christ, who reign from the Throne of Heaven. If we don't have a vision of who God is, it is very difficult to acquire much of a vision of what He wants us to do. If we would serve God as we should, we must see Him as He is.

Now, I'm not suggesting we need a vision like Ezekiel had, or even an electrifying experience like some of the heroes of Christian history. But we do need to open our Bible and open our hearts and ask God to give us an understanding of His greatness, of His glory, and of His sovereignty.

I'd like to tell you about Robert Grant. His father was a British statesman in the eighteenth century, and Robert himself entered politics, becoming a member of Parliament, then a director of the East India Company. At age 50, he was named Governor of Bombay. He was a Christian and deeply devoted to missions, lending his support and encouragement to missionaries in India. One day as he studied Psalm 104, he compared the greatness of the King of kings with the comparatively pallid splendor he had so often witnessed of British royalty. Verse 1 says of God: "O Lord my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty." Verses 2-3 add that God covers Himself "with light as with a garment" and "makes the clouds His chariot." Verse 5 reminds us that God "laid the foundations of the earth." All of creation reflects God's greatness, verse 24 proclaiming, "O Lord, how manifold are Your works!" Verse 31 says, "May the glory of the Lord endure forever." Sir Robert Grant filled his heart with these verses, and from his pen came one of the most magnificent hymns in Christendom:

O worship the King, all glorious above,

And gratefully sing His power and His love;

Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,

Pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise.

O tell of His might and sing of His grace,

Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;

His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,

And dark is His path on the wings of a storm.

Has it recently dawned on you how majestic and mighty our Lord is? Or have we lost the wonder of it. Before God can do much with us, He knocks us on our face with a glimpse of His glory.

2. God Stands Us On Our Feet

But Ezekiel didn't stay on his face for very long. Let's go on to Ezekiel 2:1: He said to me, "Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." As He spoke the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard Him speaking to me.

The person God uses is the person who is enabled by the indwelling Holy Spirit to consistently hear and obey the Word of God. Now, at the end of chapter 2, we have this portrayed to us in a rather graphic way. Look at verse 8: But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." Then I looked, and I saw the hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then He said to me, Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth."

This is a picture or similitude that we see quite often in the Bible. David compared Bible study to the eating of food in Psalm 19. Jeremiah said, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name" (Jeremiah 15:16). We have a similar passage in Revelation 10.

Now, there are two ways of eating a meal. The first is the American way, and the second is the European way. In many countries in Europe, supper is still a slow and wonderful affair. It may stretch from 8 o'clock in the evening to 9:30 or 10:00, and there are usually several courses. It is designed to be lingered over and enjoyed. In America, we don't even stop the car. We drive by the fast-food

restaurants and they throw the food at us through the window, and we eat on the run.

Something akin to that happens in Bible study. For those who even have their daily devotions, which is a minority of us, we're in such a rush that we gulp down a quick passage or we open a little devotional guide, and swallow the page whole. There's no time for any real depth. No lingering over the passage. No time to chew on it, swallow it, digest it, and let it be assimilated into our minds and hearts.

I'd like to suggest that if God is going to call you into His service in one capacity or another, we have got to be serious partakers of God's Word. We may not have one or two or three hours a day to devote to it, but we must have daily time with God in which we're not always rushed. We need to linger over the Word of God, reading it, chewing on it, swallowing it, digesting it, and letting it be assimilated into our minds.

It's better to spend five minutes thinking through and praying over one verse of Scripture than to rush through five chapters and get very little out of them. All you need is a Bible, a pencil or pen for underlining, and the discipline to set aside some time every day for a private appointment with the King of Kings.

3. God Sends Us On Our Way

So the Lord knocks us on our face in worship, stands us on our feet to listen, then what? Then He sends us on our way in ministry. Look again at Ezekiel 2:1 – He said to me, "Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. He said, "Son of man, I am sending you...."

"I am sending you." Does that sound familiar? Recently I read through the Gospel of John, and I was amazed at how many times we find there the words "Sent" and "Send." Those words occur in every single chapter of John, except chapters 2, 19 and 21.

Jesus said,

- My food is to do the will of Him who sent me.
- Whoever hears My word and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life.
- I have come down from heaven, not to do my will, but the will of Him who sent me.

And then in John 20:21, He looked at His disciples and said, "As the Father has sent Me, so send I you."

But Lord, I have other plans. But you are sent. Lord, I don't want to go there! You're sent. Lord, I'm afraid to be your witness. They might reject my appeal.

Yes, the Lord said to Ezekiel. Verse 4: The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says," And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious house—they will know that a prophet has been among them. And you, son of man, do not be afraid....

All of us know about the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, in 1945. But you might not know what else once happened in the Japanese city of Nagasaki, many years before. When missionary Francis Xavier entered Japan in the sixteenth century, he was surprised to find some people there who had already heard of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were descendants of Christians who long before had immigrated from China and Korea and from the Middle East. As Xavier preached, these people came back to the Lord with all their hearts, and a great Christian movement spread across Japan. Within a year, nearly 100,000 had experienced a revival, and in time about three million Japanese came to the Lord. The 16th century became known as the "Christian Century" in Japanese history.

But then an evil dictator arose and initiated a program of persecution which lasted 250 years and led to many people dying for their faith. Estimates range from 100,000 to one million. It decimated the church in Japan. It all began on February 5, 1597 on a hilltop in Nagasaki. Twenty-six individuals were led to this hill where 26 crosses had been crudely built. The oldest was 64 years of age. The youngest was a 12-year-old named Ibaragi Kun from Kyoto. Shortly after they arrived at the hilltop, a government official came and begged 12-year-old Ibaragi to recant his faith. The boy looked his persecutor squarely in the eye and said, "Sir, it would be better if you yourself became a Christian and could go to heaven where I am going." Then he said these words which will live in Japanese church history until Christ returns. "Sir," he asked, "Which is my cross?"

The stunned official pointed to the smallest cross on the hill, and the boy ran and knelt in front of it. There on those crosses, he and the others died, launching one of the most terrible periods of persecution in the history of Christianity.

Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, so send I you," and the question we must ask is, "Where is our cross? What does God want me to do? Where does He want me to go? How does He want to use me?"

We're knocked on our faces in worship. That's God's majesty.

We're set on our feet to listen. That's God's message.

We're sent on our way to evangelize. That's God's mission

And then, whether they listen or whether they don't—yet will they know that there are prophets among them.

My eyes look up to Thee;

May I more clearly see

Thy glorious Throne.

Falling before Thy grace,

Humbled upon my face,

May I Thy call embrace,

Thy Word make known.

Don't Hang Up

Ezekiel 1-3

Robert Morgan

A survey, recently published in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, found that regular religious worship can relieve the severity of mental health problems and shorten the hospital stays of psychiatric patients. The headline said, "Worshipping God Can Keep You Sane," and the article said, in essence, that those who worship and reverence God have better mental and psychological health than those who don't.

I could suggest many reasons for this, but among them is this one—people who love and serve God have a higher purpose in life. We know we aren't here by accident. We know life isn't meaningless. We have a calling to fulfill, a God to glorify.

God calls every Christian into an area of personal ministry. Everyone in this room, everyone in our church has something wonderful to do in the work of God's Kingdom.

But in addition, He calls a handful of others into "full-time" vocational ministry, and He issues His call in many different ways. Early in our marriage, Katrina and I entertained the pioneer Free Will Baptist missionary, Laura Belle Barnard, the first missionary in our modern denomination. She said that as a child in school, she remembered a day when the teacher had a few extra minutes, so she asked the pupils what they wanted to be when they grew up. When Laura Belle's time came, she replied, "I'm going to be missionary." Everyone was very surprised, but no one was more surprised than Laura Belle herself. She had never had that thought before, but from that moment she knew that was what she wanted to do.

Alexander MacKay was a Scottish missionary pioneer to Uganda, the story of whose ministry is almost unbelievable. How did God call him to be a missionary? Perhaps you recall the story of David Livingstone's disappearance from view into the heart of deepest Africa. At length, a British newspaper sent reporter Henry Stanley to locate him, and upon finding him, Stanley uttered those famous words, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" Well, Stanley was so moved by his time with Livingstone that he himself later became a missionary, and he went to the heart of Africa, to Uganda. There, on April 12, 1875, Henry Stanley wrote a letter appealing for workers to come and evangelize the region.

He gave the letter to a Frenchman, Colonel Linant de Ballefonds, who then left by caravan for the coast. But de Ballefonds was suddenly attacked by a savage tribe. He was killed and his body was left unburied on the sand where it was discovered by some English soldiers who happened to be passing that way. The soldiers buried the French Colonel, but before doing so they pulled off his boots. In one of them was Stanley's letter, stained with the dead man's blood. They sent the letter to the English General in Egypt who sent it to a newspaper in London. In December of that year, 1875, as Alexander MacKay read Stanley's letter in the newspaper, God spoke to him and called him to be a missionary to Uganda.

So God calls His servants in many different ways, and I believe He is going to call some of our children, our teenagers, and our college-age adults to be preachers and evangelists and missionaries. Oh, that there would go forth from this church a new generation of Christian leaders!

This is what I'd like to talk about in our message today, and I'd like to take you to three different portions of Scripture. We can learn a great deal about God's call on our lives by looking at how he called His prophets in the Old Testament. For the last couple of weeks,

we've been looking at the call of Ezekiel in Ezekiel 1-3, and today I'd like for us to go back one more time to that passage, and to compare it with the call of the other two great Old Testament major prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Ezekiel – A Majestic Call

We can learn from the call of Ezekiel in chapters 1-3 of his book that God calls us out of His majesty. Look at these passages with me again:

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there. Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures... The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures was like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads... And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. So when I saw it, I fell on my face....

This sets the tone for the entire book of Ezekiel. Throughout the book, the emphasis is on the glory and majesty of God. Recently I read an old book on prayer called *The Kneeling Christian*, and one of the author's points was this—we too often rush into God's presence seeking His grace before we have seen His glory. Prayer, said the author, is first seeing God's glory, then seeking God's grace. He suggested that it would be good to begin each day by singing to the Lord a doxology that would bring to our minds His majesty: My God, how wonderful Thou art! Thy majesty how bright. How beautiful Thy mercy-seat in depths of burning light. If we're going to serve God as we should, we need to see Him as He is. We need an enlarged glimpse of His majesty, His greatness, and His power.

Isaiah – A Holy Call

Now, let's contrast that with the way that God called the prophet Isaiah, who recorded his calling into the ministry in chapter 6 of His book. Isaiah 6 says:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

This is a very intriguing comparison. When Ezekiel saw the throne of God, it was surrounded by a classification of angels called cherubim. (While we don't find that word in Ezekiel 1, we do find it in Ezekiel 10). The cherubim seem to be guardians of God's majesty. In Isaiah's vision, on the other hand, he saw the Lord's throne surrounded by the seraphs, another classification of God's angels. The seraphs seem to be guardians of God's holiness. The idea behind the word "holiness" is on that of awesome purity, or utter and absolute sinlessness. The seraphs were crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty."

Why such different visions? Ezekiel had been beaten down by life. At the very moment when he had expected to enter active temple service in Jerusalem, terrible things had happened to him, and he had found himself exiled in the hopelessness of an Iraqi refugee camp. He needed to see God's overarching, sovereign majesty and to understand that God was still on His throne and still had a plan for his life.

But Isaiah, who lived 150 years earlier, was an aristocratic figure in Jerusalem, a man of royal blood, an extended member of the royal family. He was well educated and articulate. He was perhaps prone to be too smug, to think too highly of himself and to speak with too much arrogant self-confidence. Before the Lord could use him, Isaiah needed to compare himself with the holiness of God and be humbled by his own sinfulness. He needed to seek and receive divine cleansing and forgiveness.

So the Lord gave him a vision of the holiness and purity that is God's alone, and Isaiah cried, saying, "Woe is me! I am ruined! I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King." Then one of the seraphs took a

burning coal and touched his lips, symbolic of the forgiveness and atonement that God bestowed on this one who was to be called of God for service.

We cannot serve God effectively if we compromise with the world and harbor secret sins within our own hearts or lifestyles. There might be someone here, and the Lord really wants to call you, really wants to use you, really wants to empower you to do something for Him. But there's this little problem of your sleeping with your girlfriend, or this little problem of cocaine use, or this little problem of alcohol, or this little problem of pornography, or this little problem of pride or bitterness or anger.

And in God's sight, those are not little problems at all. What sin is hindering the work God wants to do in your life? What sin is hindering the work God wants to do through you to change this world?

Jeremiah – A Tender Call

Now, finally, we come to the last of the three great major prophets of the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah. God used a different method of calling Jeremiah. He took a different approach:

The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations." Then said I: "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth." But the Lord said to me: "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' For you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you," says the Lord. Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant."

This is so beautiful and wonderful to me. Jeremiah was a meek and melancholy man. If he had been given a vision like that of Ezekiel, or even like that of Isaiah, he would have gone into cardiac arrest. He needed a tender, reassuring word. Jeremiah's call to the ministry was not with spine-tingling, nerve-shattering, heart-pounding visions. Instead, it was a quiet conversation in which Jeremiah expressed his own fears and inadequacies, and God tenderly answered his questions and reassured him. Jeremiah was a sensitive man, often deeply troubled and cast down. God created him with his particular personality because God wanted someone who would reflect His own broken heart. I don't have time to exegete this passage today, but just notice its tender, reassuring tone.

"But, Lord," Jeremiah said, "I feel like a child. I can't even speak very well." The Lord replied, "Don't say that, Jeremiah. You let me worry about that. I'm going to help you. I'm going to put my words in your mouth. Before you were born, I had a plan for your life."

I think the Lord says that to every one of us. Before we ever existed, God knew all about us, and He had a plan for our lives. Through the years, I've had people say, "Oh, Pastor Morgan, I can't really do much in the church. I'm can't do much for the Lord. I'm too old. I'm too sick. I'm too tired. I'm not gifted." But the Lord's call on our lives is a tender, reassuring word, as though the Lord were telling us, "Don't say, 'I'm too old; I'm too sick; I'm too young; I'm not gifted.' I had a plan for you before you were born, and I'm going to use your life in a significant way."

God's call to Ezekiel was majestic, because, trapped in that refugee camp with no future, Ezekiel needed to see God's sovereign majesty. His call to Isaiah was enflamed with holiness, because Isaiah, a gifted, self-confident man, needed to sense the holiness of God. His call to Jeremiah was tender and reassuring because that is what the melancholy Jeremiah needed.

Now, let's go a step further. What does this tell us about Kingdom work itself? It tells us that God's work is a majestic, holy, and tender work, and He expects us to go about it in a like manner. We are to be majestic, holy, and tender people, sensitive to the call of God on our lives.

In her book, *It's My Turn*, Ruth Bell Graham tells of growing up as a missionary-kid in China. She said, "One would have to be very dedicated to go to China in those days," for the work was dangerous and difficult. For example, an oil company, about to open a new operation in China, had a committee meet in an all-night session. The object was to find a man to manage the new division. This manager had to meet four qualifications: He had to be under 30 years of age, a university graduate, a proven leader, and have a fluent working knowledge of Chinese. Each man considered was found lacking.

Then someone said he knew a man meeting all the requirements who already was living in China, in the very city where the company was planning to establish headquarters. He was 28 years old, had a brilliant college record, had three years' study and practice in the Chinese language, plus the full confidence of the Chinese people among whom he was well known.

When someone asked how much salary this young man was getting, the committee was startled to learn that it was only \$600 a

year. "There must be something wrong!" exclaimed the chairman. "There is," replied the man. "But it's not with my friend; it's with the system that employs him. He works for a mission board."

After further questioning, the chairman appointed his friend to go to China with the instructions, "Hire that man. Offer him \$10,000 a year. If that fails, offer him \$12,000 a year or even \$15,000." The agent made the long trip, found his friend, and made him the offer, which was declined. As instructed, the agent raised the offer, but was again refused. Finally the agent said, "What will you take?"

"It's not a question of salary," the young missionary assured him. "The salary is tremendous. The trouble is with the job. The job is too little. I feel that God has called me to preach the Gospel of Christ. I should be a fool to quit preaching in order to sell oil."

Have you given yourself fully to the Lord Jesus Christ? Is He calling you to be a Christian? Is He calling you to be a worker in some aspect of Kingdom work? Is He perhaps calling someone here into vocational ministry?

The Savior is pleading for workers today;

Who will respond to His call?

He's looking for those who will labor and pray;

Why won't you give Him your all?

Time is so short and the task is so large,

He's urgently seeking today

For some to respond to His glorious charge.

"Yes, Lord, I'll quickly obey!"