

Introduction to Ezekiel¹

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Introductory Matters²

Authorship

Ezekiel is identified as the author two times in the book (1:3; 24:24). The unity of the book seems defensible from various internal indicators. For example, the first person singular is used throughout the book. Also, the style, language, and thematic development are consistent throughout the book. Moreover, the book repeats distinctive phrases. Examples include “they shall know the lord,” “son of man,” “glory of the Lord.” The presupposition of Ezekiel as the author was not challenged until around the 1930’s.

Despite this evidence, many today deny the authenticity of the book, instead arguing that someone in Palestine composed it sometime after the return from the exile. However, the arguments used to buttress this position are answerable. First, it is argued that the book’s focus on imminent

¹ Material for this section was compiled from various sources, including Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 509-16; Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 391-98; John F. Walvoord, “Revelation,” in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1983), 925-27; *Nelson's Complete Book of Charts and Maps*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 482-92; Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Revelation,” online: www.soniclight.com, accessed 8 December 2005, 1-2; Stanley Toussaint, “The Revelation of John,” (unpublished class notes in BE 307B Hebrews, General Epistles, and Revelation, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2000), 1-4.

² Material for this section was assembled from various sources, including Charles H. Dyer, “Ezekiel,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor, 1983), 1225-26; Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. and exp. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 409-19; Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 212-19; Robert B. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 231; Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Ezekiel,” online: www.soniclight.com, accessed 28 September 2005, 1-13; Charles H. Dyer, “Introduction to Ezekiel,” (unpublished class notes in 304C Old Testament Prophets, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2000), 1-4.

judgment and restoration indicates that two different authors composed it. However, the pattern of judgment followed by restoration is the consistent pattern of virtually every other writing prophet. Even those prophetic books whose unity is not suspect follow this identical pattern. Second, it is argued that the book betrays an intimate knowledge of Jerusalem (8; 11:13; 12:3-12; 21:8; 24:2). Thus, it is contended that the writer lived in Jerusalem during its final years before the destruction in 586 B.C. His work produced oral tradition that was later pieced together by an anonymous writer after the exile. However, the text indicates that the writer had knowledge of Jerusalem based upon supernatural visions given to him by God. Thus, only an anti-supernatural bias can allow one to hold that the author's knowledge of Jerusalem was derived as a result of being physically present in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel's name means "God strengthens." His name is consistent with how the Lord repeatedly strengthened him so that he could fulfill his prophetic ministry (3:8, 14; 30:25; 34:16). Like Jeremiah (Jer 1:1) and Zechariah (Zech 1:1, Neh 12:16), Ezekiel was a Judean priest (1:3). Ezekiel's priestly status would explain his understanding of the cherubim. It would also explain his natural interest in the temple, God's glory, the activities of Jerusalem's priests, the future temple, and the sacrifices. Ezekiel's father's name was Buzi (1:3). Ezekiel was married (25:15-24) and lived in a house (3:22-25). There is no record that he had any children. Aside from this scant biographical information, nothing else is known of Ezekiel. His hometown is unknown. He is not mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament.

Date

The three sieges of the southern kingdom of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled from 605 to 562 B.C., are summarized in the following chart.

Nebuchadnezzar's 3 sieges of Judah			
	1	2	3
Year	605	597	586
Scripture	2 Kings 24:1; Dan.1:1	2 Kings 24:10-16; Ezek. 1:1-2	2 Kings 25:1-2, Ezek 33:21
Judah's king	Jehoiakim	Jehoiachin	Zedekiah
Those taken	Daniel & some princes	Ezekiel & majority 10k	Remnant captured, Jerusalem & Temple destroyed

After the death of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin came to the throne in 598-597 B.C. However, he only ruled for three and one half months before surrendering to Nebuchadnezzar. The second deportation occurred shortly thereafter. As indicated in this chart, Ezekiel was taken to Babylon in the second exile in 597 B.C. where he predicted the third and final siege that would come in 586 B.C. According to Ezekiel 1:1-2, Ezekiel's ministry began on the 5th day of the 4th month of the 5th year of Jehoiachin's exile. The fifth year of his exile would be 593 B.C. The fourth month would be Tammuz, which began on 7/27/593. The fifth day would be 7/31/593.³

Although debated, Ezekiel 1:1 seems to indicate that the prophet was 30 years old when he began his ministry (Num 4:3). Thus, Ezekiel was 25 years old when he was taken into captivity. Moreover, Ezekiel was probably born in 622 B.C. and grew up in the era of Josiah's reforms (628–609 B.C.). Ezekiel's last recorded prophecy occurred in the 27th year of the first month of the first day of Jehoiachin's exile (29:17). This occurred on 3/26/571. Thus, Ezekiel's ministry spanned 22 years. He continued functioning in his ministry until the age of 52.

³ Dyer, "Ezekiel," 1225.

Because Ezekiel’s ministry started in 593 and ran until 571, it overlapped the end of Jeremiah’s ministry (627–580 B.C.), who was prophesying in Jerusalem while Ezekiel was prophesying in Babylon. Ezekiel’s ministry also ran concurrently with the ministry of Daniel (605–536 B.C.). Because Daniel was taken as a teenager in the first deportation in 605 B.C., he was probably born in 620 B.C. and was therefore only a few years older than Ezekiel. Both Ezekiel and Daniel ministered in Babylon. While Daniel ministered to the princes of Judah who were taken in the first deportation, Ezekiel ministered to the exiles that were taken in the second deportation. Despite the fact that both were exilic prophets, it is doubtful that the two personally knew one another. However, Ezekiel did demonstrate an awareness of Daniel’s reputation and ministry (Ezek 14:14, 20; 28:3).

In his book, Ezekiel took great care to provide specific chronological information regarding when important visions and events took place. Such data allows scholars to determine when various strategic events took place within the scope of Ezekiel’s ministry.⁴

Date	Event	Scripture
7/31/593	Call to ministry	1:1-2
8/7/593	Appointment as a watchman	3:16
9/17/592	Temple vision	8:1
8/14/591	Review of Israel’s history	20:1-2
1/15/588	Siege of Jerusalem begins	24:1
4/23/587–4/13/586	Message Against Tyre	26:1
1/7/587	Message Against Egypt	29:1
4/26/571	Egypt given as payment for Babylon’s siege	29:17
4/29/587	Message Against Pharaoh	30:20
6/21/587	Message Against Pharaoh	31:1
3/3/585	Lament over Pharaoh	32:1
4/13/586–4/1/585	Announcement of Egypt’s “death”	32:17
1/8/585	News of Jerusalem’s destruction reaches Ezekiel	33:21
4/28/573	Vision of the future temple	40:1

⁴ This chart was taken from Charles H. Dyer, “Introduction to Ezekiel,” 2.

Because Ezekiel probably wrote the book shortly after the final events of his ministry transpired, assigning a date of 565 B.C. for the composition of the book seems appropriate.

Place of Writing

Ezekiel's ministry occurred while he was in captivity in Babylon. He lived among the captives in Tel Abib along the Kebar River (1:1; 3:15, 23). The Kebar River was known as the grand river of Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar's "Grand Canal." The Kebar River began at the Euphrates River just north of Babylon. It bypassed Babylon to the east and proceeded through Nipur. The Kebar rejoined the Euphrates south of Babylon near Uruk. Most of the exiles lived in Nipur and this is the most likely location of Tel Abib. Ezekiel's ministry consisted of ministering exclusively to these Babylonian exiles.

The life that these Jews experienced during the exile does not seem to have been unduly oppressive. Apparently, many of them had the opportunity of living in homes and running businesses while in Babylon (Ezek 3:22-25; Jer 29). Messengers could reach them unencumbered (Ezek 33:21). The relative ease of life during the captivity is evidenced by the fact that many Jews opted to remain in Babylon rather than returning to Canaan when later given the opportunity to return. There is no indication that Ezekiel ever returned to Jerusalem after his deportation to Babylon.

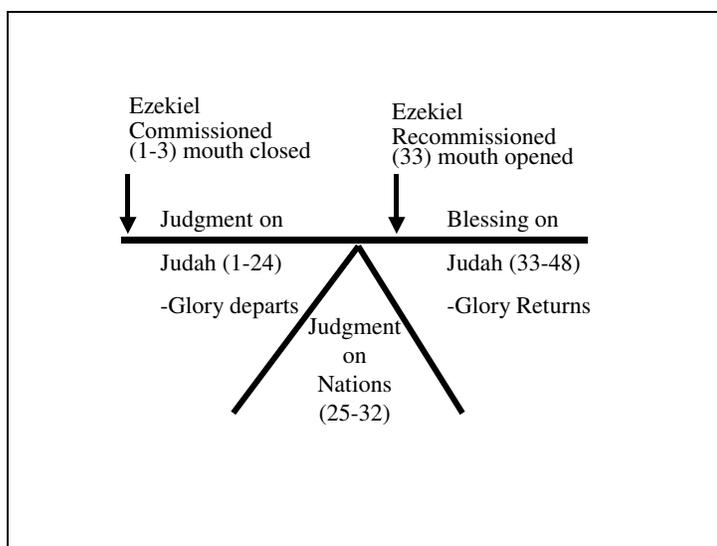
Occasion for Writing, Purpose, and Message

The *occasion* of Ezekiel's ministry involved Nebuchadnezzar's second deportation. In this deportation, Ezekiel was taken away to Babylon where he spent the rest of his career ministering among the Babylonian exiles. Nebuchadnezzar installed Zedekiah as a puppet king over Judah. As long as Zedekiah obeyed Nebuchadnezzar, Judah could be insulated from a third Babylonian invasion. This scenario engendered a false optimism among the exiles. They felt that the third invasion would never come. Consequently, they believed that they would be shortly returning from Babylon to Jerusalem. Thus, the *purpose* of Ezekiel's ministry involved showing the exiles that their optimism was a false hope (1–24). The third and final siege was inevitable. Judgment was sure to come upon Judah because of her repeated violations of the Mosaic Covenant. However, after the third siege became a reality, Ezekiel encouraged the beleaguered exiles by explaining to them that the Abrahamic covenant necessitated Judah's eventual restoration (33–48). The *message* of Ezekiel is that God destroys the false hope of a disobedient people. However, once this false hope is destroyed, He replaces it with a new hope.

Structure

Two features must be kept in mind regarding the overall structure of Ezekiel. First, the book is symmetrical.⁵

⁵ This chart was taken from Charles H. Dyer, "Introduction to Ezekiel," 3.



In the first section of the book (1–24), information is given regarding Ezekiel’s commissioning, dumbness, prophecies of coming judgment, and the departure of God’s glory. In the book’s final section (33–48), the nearly identical information is found. However, this time it is couched in terms of restoration rather than judgment. Ezekiel is recommissioned, his dumbness is removed, he prophesies restoration, and the glory of the Lord returns. Balancing these two sections are the prophecies of judgment against the surrounding nations found in chapters 25–32.

Second, Ezekiel seems to move into different phases of his ministry depending upon how his prophecies regarding imminent destruction of Judah are being realized. In the book’s first section (1–24), Ezekiel prophesies imminent judgment upon Judah. This section of his ministry begins on 7/31/593 and lasts until 1/15/588. This section of the ministry takes place before Nebuchadnezzar’s siege has begun. However, when Ezekiel receives word that Nebuchadnezzar has begun his final siege against Jerusalem (24:1-2), Ezekiel’s focus shifts away from predictions about Judah and toward predictions of judgment concerning the surrounding nations (25–32). This section of his

ministry begins on 1/15/588 and lasts until 1/8/585.⁶ It takes place during Nebuchadnezzar's final siege. When Ezekiel receives word that Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem has been completed (33:21), the tone of his prophecies again shifts as he details Judah's eventual restoration. This section of his ministry begins on 1/8/585 and lasts until 4/28/573. This section of the ministry takes place after Nebuchadnezzar's final siege of Jerusalem.

In sum, Ezekiel's ministry has three distinct parts. First, there are the prophecies of judgment against Judah (1–24). This section also contains Ezekiel's commissioning from God (1–3). Second, there are the prophecies of judgment against the surrounding nations (25–32). Third, there are the prophecies of national restoration (33–48). This final section also contains Ezekiel's recommissioning (33).

Unique Characteristics

The Book of Ezekiel boasts several unique features. First, the book exhibits an unusual precision. The year, month, and day of several of the book's prophecies and events are recorded. Perhaps this precision is given in order to vindicate Ezekiel's ministry when his short-term prophecies are realized. Second, the book's structure seems to flow chronologically. When dates are given in the book, they are generally chronological. Thus, Ezekiel is the only major prophet who is chronologically structured. The only other prophets that seem to come close to Ezekiel's chronology are Zechariah and Haggai. However, this is not a "hard and fast" rule as some of Ezekiel's prophecies are out of order chronologically (29:1, 17). The prophecies that are out of order

⁶ This scope is only to be taken as a general reference since Ezekiel's last recorded prophesy against Egypt occurred on 4/26/571 (29:17).

generally revolve around his oracles against Egypt, which are grouped topically (29–32). Third, as previously explained, the book is symmetrically structured.

Fourth, the book is autobiographical. Nearly all of Ezekiel’s oracles appear in the first person. However, Ezekiel does not disclose as much personal information as Jeremiah does. Fifth, Ezekiel places great stress upon the Spirit of God. God’s spirit appears more prominently in Ezekiel than in any of the other prophets. Sixth, Ezekiel employs multiple literary devices in an attempt to communicate with his audience. They include proverbs (12:22-23; 16:44; 18:2-3), visions (1–3; 8–11; 37; 40–48) parables (17; 24:1-14), symbolic acts (4–5; 12; 24:15-27), allegories (16), prophecies, rhetorical questions, dreams, drama, funeral dirges, and history. Seventh, the book is characterized by repetitive phraseology. Such repetitive phrases include “the word of the Lord came to me saying,” “thus has the Lord Yahweh said,” “the declaration of the Lord Yahweh,” “set your face toward,” “the hand of the Lord came upon me,” the Spirit of the Yahweh fell upon me,” “I am Yahweh,” “house of Israel,” and “they will know I am Yahweh.”

Eighth, the book emphasizes God’s glory (1:28; 3:12; 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23; 39:11, 21; 43:2-5; 44:4). Ezekiel’s emphasis upon God’s glory is seen through various repeated themes and phrases. Fourteen times Ezekiel says God acted to prevent His name from being profaned. Sixty-three times Ezekiel says that God acted so people would know that he was the Lord. Two hundred and seventy-one times Ezekiel calls God “Lord Yahweh” or “Sovereign God.” God never uses Ezekiel’s personal name but rather refers to him as “son of man” ninety-three times throughout the book. This title shows the humanity of Ezekiel and emphasizes the transcendence between holy God and sinful man. Perhaps Ezekiel emphasizes God’s glory because there is no way his audience could understand the manner in which God was dealing with Judah without a fresh glimpse into God’s glory. Ninth, the book emphasizes the temple. The temple is seen in its perversion, destruction, and

eventual restoration. Tenth, Ezekiel's prophecies of restoration are more detailed than any other prophet. These prophecies are even more detailed than those of his contemporary Jeremiah. Eleventh, sixty times the book emphasizes that God's purpose in blessing and judgment is so that people may come to know Him.

Messianic Prophecy in Ezekiel

Ezekiel contains several veiled messianic references. First, as mentioned previously, the title that God repeatedly uses to address Ezekiel is "son of man." This is the same title that Christ repeatedly applies to Himself in the gospels. However, this argument probably should not be pushed too far since the title may merely imply the transcendence between sinful man and a holy God rather than having anything to do with messianic prophecy. Second, there are two references to a resurrected David (34:23; 37:24). However, as will be explained later, there is a debate concerning whether these references pertain to David's greater son Jesus Christ or to literal David. Third, the messiah seems to be in view in 17:22-24. In this passage, His work of providing permanent security is contrasted with the false security offered by Zedekiah, Egypt, and Nebuchadnezzar. Fourth, when Ezekiel proclaims that there is no one to "stand in the gap" for the Lord, he may be alluding to the work of a coming messiah who will be able to accomplish what no man can do (22:30).

Ezekiel Outline⁷

I. Imminent judgment upon Judah (1-24)

⁷ Some of this outline has been influenced from that presented by Charles H. Dyer, "Outline of Ezekiel," (unpublished class notes in 304C Old Testament Prophets, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2000), 1-39.

- A. Ezekiel's preparation for ministry (1-3)
 - 1. The Lord appears to Ezekiel (1:1-3)
 - a) Time (1:1-2)
 - b) Recipient: Ezekiel (1:3a)
 - c) Place: Kebar (1:3b)
 - 2. God's visions (1:4-2:7)
 - a) Four living creatures (1:4-14)
 - i) Their advent (1:4)
 - ii) Their appearance (1:5-14)
 - (a) Generally (1:5-6)
 - (b) Specifically (1:7-14)
 - (1) Body parts (1:7-11)
 - a. Legs (1:7)
 - b. Hands (1:8a)
 - c. Wings (1:8b-9)
 - d. Faces (1:10)
 - e. Wings (1:11)
 - (2) Movement (1:12-14)
 - b) Four wheels (1:15-21)
 - c) Firmament (1:22-25)
 - d) God's throne (1:26-28)
 - e) Ezekiel's assignment (2:1-7)
 - i) Spirit stands Ezekiel up (2:1-2)
 - ii) Ezekiel to be sent to rebellious Israel (2:3-5)
 - iii) Ezekiel not to fear (2:6)
 - iv) Ezekiel to speak God's Word (2:7)
 - 3. God's Word (2:8-3:11)
 - a) Ezekiel eats God's Word (2:8-3:3)
 - b) Ezekiel to deliver God's Word (3:4-11)
 - 4. God's hand (3:12-27)
 - a) Spirit leads Ezekiel back to exiles (3:12-15)
 - b) Ezekiel appointed as a watchman (3:16-21)
 - i) Responsibility to declare God's Word (3:16-17)
 - ii) Responsibility to warn the wicked (3:18-19)
 - iii) Responsibility to warn the righteous (3:20-21)
 - c) Ezekiel's limitations (3:22-27)
 - i) Incarceration (3:22-25)
 - ii) Limited dumbness (3:26-27)
- B. Prophecies of coming judgment against Judah and Jerusalem (4-24)
 - 1. Imminent judgment (4-11)
 - a) Four signs showing the reality of the coming siege (4-5)
 - i) Brick indicating fact of the siege (4:1-3)
 - ii) Lying on right and left side indicating length of the siege (4:4-8)
 - (a) Left side for Israel (4:4-5)
 - (b) Right side for Judah (4:6-8)
 - iii) Unclean food indicating severity of the siege (4:9-17)

- (a) Divine command to cook food over human excrement (4:9-13)
 - (b) Ezekiel's objection to human excrement (4:14)
 - (c) Divine command to cook food over animal excrement (4:15)
 - (d) Explanation: scarcity of food during siege (4:16-17)
- iv) Ezekiel's haircut indicating results of the siege (5)
 - (a) Sign (5:1-4)
 - (1) Hair shaved and divided (5:1)
 - (2) One third burned (5:2a)
 - (3) One third hit by sword (5:2b)
 - (4) One third scattered (5:2c)
 - (5) Some saved (5:3-4)
 - (b) Interpretation (5:5-17)
 - (1) Jerusalem sin (5:5-7)
 - (2) Jerusalem's judgment (5:8-12)
 - (3) Jerusalem's reproach (5:13-17)
- b) Two sermons showing cause of the siege (6-7)
 - i) Idolatry as the cause of judgment (6)
 - (a) Judgment against idolatry (6:1-7)
 - (b) Remnant spared (6:8-10)
 - (c) Judgment against idolatry (6:11-14)
 - ii) The nature of the judgment (7)
 - (a) Sin as cause of judgment (7:1-4)
 - (b) Imminence of the judgment (7:5-13)
 - (c) Israel as the object of judgment (7:14-27)
- c) One vision showing cause of the siege (8-11)
 - i) What Ezekiel saw in the Temple (8)
 - (a) Introduction (8:1-3a)
 - (1) Date (8:1a)
 - (2) Place: Ezekiel's house (8:1b)
 - (3) Ezekiel transported to the Temple (8:2-3a)
 - (b) Sins in the Temple (8:3b-18)
 - (1) Idol of jealousy (8:3b-6)
 - (2) Idolatrous paintings on the walls (8:7-13)
 - (3) Tammuz worship (8:14-15)
 - (4) Sun worship (8:16-18)
 - ii) Marking and slaying those in Jerusalem (9)
 - (a) Calling of the Six and the writer (9:1-2)
 - (b) Directive to mark and slay (9:3-7)
 - (c) Ezekiel's concern (9:8-10)
 - (1) Ezekiel's question (9:8)
 - (2) God's answer (9:9-10)
 - (d) Announcement of the accomplishment of the mission (9:11)
 - iii) Cherubim and God's departing glory (10)
 - (a) Departure of God's glory to the Temple threshold (10:1-8)
 - (b) Wheels and cherubim (10:9-17)
 - (1) Description (10:9-14)

- (2) Movement (10:15-17)
 - (c) Departure of God's glory to the East gate (10:18-19)
 - (d) Cherubim identified (10:20-22)
- iv) The sin of the 25 rulers and God's glory departs (11)
 - (a) The 25 rulers (11:1-13)
 - (1) Sin: violence and teaching judgment would not come (11:1-6)
 - (2) Ezekiel's predictions of judgment (11:7-12)
 - (3) Slaying of Pelatiah (11:13a)
 - (b) Restoration of the nation (11:13b-21)
 - (1) Ezekiel's concern (11:13b)
 - (2) Restoration to the land (11:14-17)
 - (3) Fulfillment of the New Covenant (11:18-21)
 - (c) The departure of God's glory (11:22-23)
 - (d) Ezekiel is returned to the exiles (11:24-25)
- 2. Shattering false securities (12-19)
 - a) First false security: Jerusalem remnant (12:1-20)
 - i) First sign (12:1-16)
 - (a) Baggage and hole in the wall (12:1-7)
 - (b) Interpretation (12:8-16)
 - ii) Second sign (12:17-20)
 - (a) Trembling while eating and drinking (12:17-18)
 - (b) Interpretation (12:19-20)
 - b) Second false security: parables (12:21-28)
 - i) First parable (12:21-25)
 - (a) Prophecies come to nothing (12:21-22)
 - (b) Lord's response (12:23-25)
 - ii) Second parable (12:26-28)
 - (a) Prophecies will not be immediately fulfilled (12:26-27)
 - (b) Lord's response (12:28)
 - c) Third false security: false prophets and prophetesses (13)
 - i) False Prophets (13:1-16)
 - (a) Sin (13:1-7)
 - (b) Judgment (13:8-16)
 - ii) False prophetesses (13:17-23)
 - (a) Sin (13:17-19)
 - (b) Judgment (13:20-23)
 - d) Fourth false security: idols (14:1-11)
 - i) Elders' idolatry (14:1-5)
 - ii) Elders must repent (14:6-11)
 - e) Fifth false security: presence of a righteous remnant (14:12-23)
 - i) Ineffectiveness of a righteous remnant (14:12-20)
 - (a) Noah, Daniel, and Job cannot save land from famine (14:12-14)
 - (b) Noah, Daniel, and Job cannot save land from beasts (14:15-16)
 - (c) Noah, Daniel, and Job cannot save land from sword (14:17-18)
 - (d) Noah, Daniel, and Job cannot save land from plague (14:19-20)
 - ii) God will bring famine, beasts, sword, and plague upon Israel (14:21-23)

- f) Sixth false security: position as God's vine (15)
 - g) Seventh false security: Jerusalem (16)
 - i) Jerusalem was an unwanted baby (16:1-5)
 - ii) God rescued, reared and married the baby (16:6-14)
 - iii) God's wife became an adulteress (16:15-34)
 - iv) God will punish his adulterous wife (16:35-43)
 - v) God's adulterous wife is worse than Samaria and Sodom (16:44-52)
 - vi) God will restore his adulterous wife (16:53-63)
 - h) Eighth false security: Zedekiah (17)
 - i) Parable of the two eagles (17:1-10)
 - ii) Interpretation: Zedekiah's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar and its tragic results (17:11-21)
 - iii) God will provide true security (17:22-24)
 - i) Ninth false security: a proverb (18)
 - i) The proverb stated (18:1-2)
 - ii) Principle of individual responsibility defended (18:3-18)
 - (a) God rebukes the proverb (18:3-4)
 - (b) God refutes the proverb (18:5-18)
 - (1) Righteous man blessed (18:5-9)
 - (2) Sinning son cursed (18:10-13)
 - (3) Righteous grandson blessed (18:14-18)
 - (c) Conclusion (18:19-20)
 - (d) Application (18:21-32)
 - (1) To the wicked and righteous (18:21-29)
 - a. The wicked repenting brings life (18:21-23; 27-29)
 - b. The righteous sinning brings death (18:24-26)
 - (2) To the present generation (18:30-32)
 - j) Conclusion: funeral dirge for Jerusalem's princes (19)
 - i) Jehoahaz (19:1-4)
 - ii) Jehoiachin (19:5-9)
 - iii) Zedekiah and the destruction of the vine (19:10-14)
3. Historical causes and reality of coming judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem (20-24)
- a) History of Israel's rebellion (20:1-44)
 - i) Introduction (20:1-3)
 - (a) Date (20:1a)
 - (b) Elders' inquiry (20:1-2)
 - (c) God's response (20:2-3)
 - ii) Israel's past rebellion (20:4-32)
 - (a) Idolatry in Egypt (20:4-9)
 - (b) Idolatry in the wilderness (20:10-17)
 - (c) Idolatry in Canaan (20:18-32)
 - iii) Future restoration (20:33-44)
 - (a) Purging out of the rebels (20:33-38)
 - (b) Fulfillment of the New Covenant (20:39-44)
 - b) Reality of coming judgment (20:44-24:27)

- i) Parable of the forest fire (20:45-49)
- ii) Four messages of the sword (21)
 - (a) Sword is drawn against sanctuary and Israel (21:1-7)
 - (b) Sword is sharpened against rebellious Israel (21:8-17)
 - (c) Sword is directed toward Jerusalem (21:18-27)
 - (d) Sword is directed toward Ammon (21:28-32)
- iii) Three messages against Jerusalem (22)
 - (a) Cause of judgment: Israel's covenant violations enumerated (22:1-16)
 - (b) Means of judgment: the smelting furnace (22:17-22)
 - (c) Objects of the judgment (22:23-31)
 - (1) Princes (22:23-25)
 - (2) Priests (22:26)
 - (3) Officials (22:27)
 - (4) Prophets (22:28)
 - (5) People (22:29-31)
- iv) Parable of the two sisters (23)
 - (a) Their identification (23:1-4)
 - (b) Their sins (23:5-21)
 - (1) Oholah / Samaria (23:5-10)
 - (2) Oholibah / Jerusalem (23:11-21)
 - (c) Their Judgment (23:22-49)
 - (1) First judgment Oracle (23:22-27)
 - (2) Second judgment Oracle (23:28-31)
 - (3) Third judgment Oracle (23:32-34)
 - (4) Fourth judgment Oracle (23:35-49)
- v) News of the initial siege reaches the Babylonian exiles (24:1-2)
- vi) Parable of the boiling pot (24:3-14)
 - (a) Enacted (24:3-5)
 - (b) Explained (24:6-14)
- vii) Death of Ezekiel's wife (24:15-26)
 - (a) Announced (24:15-17)
 - (b) Explained (24:18-26)
- vii) Ezekiel's dumbness to end (24:27)

II. Imminent judgment upon surrounding nations (25-32)

A. Nations to the east of Judah (25:1-14)

- 1. Ammon (25:1-7)
- 2. Moab (25:8-11)
- 3. Edom (25:12-14)

B. Nation to the west of Judah: Philistia (25:15-17)

C. Nations to the north of Judah (26-28)

- 1. Tyre (26:1-28:19)
 - a) Tyre's downfall (26)
 - b) Funeral dirge over Tyre (27)
 - i) Tyre's former state (27:1-25)
 - (a) Glorious ship (27:1-9)

- (b) Commerce (27:10-25)
 - ii) Tyre's coming destruction: shipwreck (27:26-36)
 - c) Tyre's leaders downfall (28:1-19)
 - i) Prince of Tyre (28:1-10)
 - ii) King of Tyre (28:11-19)
 - 2. Sidon (28:20-26)
 - a) Sidon's downfall (28:20-23)
 - b) Israel's restoration (28:24-26)
 - D. Nation to the south of Judah: Egypt (29-32)
 - 1. Destruction of Egypt (29:1-16)
 - 2. Babylon to plunder Egypt (29:17-21)
 - 3. Egypt and her allies to be destroyed (30:1-19)
 - 4. Egypt to be scattered by Babylon (30:20-26)
 - 5. Egypt to experience the same fate as Assyria (31)
 - a) Assyria's former glory (31:1-9)
 - b) Egypt's imminent destruction (31:10-18)
 - 6. Pharaoh lamented (32:1-16)
 - 7. Egypt's appointment with the grave (32:17-32)
- III. Restoration of Israel (33-48)
- A. Ezekiel's recommissioning (33)
 - 1. Ezekiel's reappointment as a watchman (33:1-9)
 - a) General duty of a watchman (33:1-6)
 - b) Ezekiel's duty as a watchman (33:7-9)
 - 2. Ezekiel's message (33:10-20)
 - a) Turn from sin (33:10-11)
 - b) Individual responsibility (33:12-20)
 - 3. News of Jerusalem's fall (33:21)
 - 4. Ezekiel's dumbness removed (33:22)
 - 5. Ezekiel rebukes two groups (33:23-33)
 - a) Israelites who remained in the land: false hope (33:23-29)
 - b) Ezekiel's hearers in Babylon: false hearers (33:30-33)
 - B. Present false shepherds contrasted with the coming true shepherd (34)
 - 1. Present false shepherds (34:1-10)
 - a) Sins (34:1-8)
 - b) Condemnation (34:9-10)
 - 2. Coming true shepherd (34:11-31)
 - a) His concern for the flock (34:11-16)
 - b) His judgment among the flock (34:17-24)
 - c) His establishment of the New Covenant (34:25-31)
 - C. Destruction of Edom (35)
 - 1. Destruction of Mount Seir (35:1-4)
 - 2. Sins of Edom (35:5-15)
 - a) Everlasting hatred against Israel (35:5-9)
 - b) Covetousness against Israel and Judah's land (35:10-15)
 - D. Restoration of Israel (36)
 - 1. Israel to prosper again (36:1-15)

2. Israel's past sins (36:16-21)
3. Israel to be restored physically and spiritually (36:22-38)
- E. Israel's restoration illustrated (37)
 1. Vision of the dry bones (37:1-14)
 - a) Vision (37:1-10)
 - b) Interpretation (37:11-14)
 2. Sign of the two sticks (37:15-28)
 - a) Sign (37:15-17)
 - b) Interpretation (37:18-28)
- F. Protection from Gog and Magog (38-39)
 1. The invasion planned (38:1-13)
 - a) Intent of God (38:1-9)
 - b) Intent of Gog (38:10-13)
 2. The invasion executed (38:14-16)
 3. Gog defeated (38:17-39:20)
 - a) Armies destroyed (38:17-39:8)
 - b) Weapons burned (39:9-10)
 - c) Soldiers buried (39:11-16)
 - d) Eaten by birds (39:17-20)
 4. Results of Gog's defeat (39:21-29)
 - a) God's glory manifested (39:21-24)
 - b) Israel restored (39:25-29)
- G. Restored Temple (40-48)
 1. Temple (40-43)
 - a) Introduction (40:1-4)
 - i) Date (40:1)
 - ii) Setting (40:2)
 - iii) Angel (40:3)
 - iv) Instructions (40:4)
 - b) Outer court (40:5-27)
 - i) Wall (40:5)
 - ii) East outer gate (40:6-16)
 - iii) Chambers of the outer court (40:17-19)
 - iv) North outer gate (40:20-23)
 - v) South outer gate (40:24-27)
 - c) Inner Court (40:28-47)
 - i) South inner gate (40:28-31)
 - ii) East inner gate (40:32-34)
 - iii) North inner gate (40:35-37)
 - iv) Tables for slaughter animals (40:38-43)
 - v) Chambers for singers (40:44-46)
 - vi) Inner Court (40:47)
 - d) The temple structure itself (40:48-42:20)
 - i) Porch (40:48-49)
 - ii) Holy place (41:1-2)
 - iii) Most holy place (41:3-4)

- iv) Side chambers (41:5-11)
- v) Separate building (41:12-14)
- vi) Temple interior (41:15-26)
- vii) Inner court chambers (42:1-14)
 - (a) Description (42:1-12)
 - (b) Their use by the priests (42:13-14)
- viii) Outer walls of the Temple (42:15-20)
- e) Return of the Lord's glory (43:1-12)
 - i) Return of the Lord's glory (43:1-5)
 - ii) Israel's perpetual holiness (43:6-9)
 - iii) Ezekiel to explain the Temple to the exiles (43:10-12)
- f) Altar of burnt offering (43:13-27)
 - i) Altar (43:13-17)
 - ii) Offerings by priests (43:18-27)
- 2. Worship (44-46)
 - a) East gate closed (44:1-3)
 - b) Foreigners not admitted (44:4-9)
 - c) Temple priests (44:10-45:8)
 - i) Duties (44:10-27)
 - (a) Levites (44:10-14)
 - (b) Priest of Zadok (44:15-27)
 - ii) Privileges (44:28-45:8)
 - (a) Inheritance (44:28-31)
 - (b) Land (45:1-8)
 - d) Offerings (45:9-46:24)
 - i) Priests to be honest (45:9-12)
 - ii) Offerings for and by priests (45:13-17)
 - iii) Offerings on certain days (45:18-25)
 - (a) New Year's (45:18-20)
 - (b) Passover (45:21-24)
 - (c) Tabernacles (45:25)
 - (d) Sabbaths, new moons (46:1-12)
 - (e) Daily sacrifices (46:13-15)
 - iv) Rules for the Prince (46:16-18)
 - v) Places for preparing the offerings (46:19-24)
- 3. Land (47-48)
 - a) Millennial river (47:1-12)
 - b) Boundaries (47:13-20)
 - i) Introduction (47:13-14)
 - ii) Northern border (47:15-17)
 - iii) Eastern border (47:18)
 - iv) Southern border (47:19)
 - v) Western border (47:20)
 - c) Division of the land (47:21-48:29)
 - i) Inheritance of the alien (47:21-23)
 - ii) Among the tribes (48:1-29)

- (a) Seven northern tribes (48:1-7)
- (b) Prince's portion (48:8-22)
- (c) Five southern tribes (48:23-29)
- d) City (48:30-35)
 - i) Gates (48:30-34)
 - ii) Size (48:35 a)
 - iii) Name (48:35b)

Argument⁸

Ezekiel's purpose in the first twenty-four chapters is to explain to the exiles that their expectation of a soon return to Jerusalem is a false hope. The reason this hope was misplaced is because the future third siege by Nebuchadnezzar was imminent and would sweep away Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple. Because of the severity of this message the exiles needed to know if these prophecies were actually from God or from Ezekiel's own imagination. In other words, because Ezekiel's prophecies in this section are so severe, his audience would need to know if his message was divinely authored. Thus, to show that his message was truly from God, Ezekiel spends the first three chapters presenting his divine commissioning. Ezekiel begins with some introductory information furnishing the time and place of the inauguration of his ministry (1:1-3).⁹ According to these verses, in Ezekiel's divine commissioning, he would experience "visions of God" (1:1b), "the

⁸ I was first introduced to the basic structure presented in this argument by Charles H. Dyer, class notes of Andy Woods in BE304C Old Testament Prophets, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2000. This same structure is also developed in Charles H. Dyer and Eugene H. Merrill, *Old Testament Explorer*, Swindoll Leadership Library, ed. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001), 659-98.

⁹ As discussed in the introductory section, Ezekiel's ministry began on 7/31/593 and took place among the exiles along the Kebar River.

word of the Lord” (1:3a), and “the hand of the Lord” (1:3b). God’s visions are amplified in 1:4-2:7. God’s word is amplified in 2:8-3:11. God’s hand is amplified in 3:12-27.¹⁰

Ezekiel relays his visions with great precision to establish that his commissioning was divine in nature (1:4-2:7). He begins by discussing the role that the four living creatures played within his vision. He carefully describes their appearance (1:4-14). Because they had faces on all four sides, they could move in any direction to follow God’s spirit. Also, the four faces resembled that of a lion, bull, eagle, and man. Thus, these faces represented the height of the wild animal kingdom, the height of the domesticated animal kingdom, the height of the bird kingdom, and the height of all creation. Therefore, the four living creatures represented the height of God’s created order. He also observed the four wheels allowing the living creatures to turn any direction to follow God’s spirit (1:15-21). These wheels made it possible for the four living creatures to follow God’s people even into exile. In sum, the four living creatures represented the height of God’s creative works and they existed in order to execute God’s will. Ezekiel’s contact with these beings shows that his message is from God.

After noting the expanse above the living creatures (1:22-25), Ezekiel saw God on his throne (1:26-28). He then heard God’s voice giving him his prophetic assignment (2:1-7). He was to be sent to the rebellious house of Israel. Rather than being afraid of Israel, he was to speak God’s word to them fearlessly. This rehearsal of his commissioning allowed his audience to understand that his harsh prophecies of judgment that would characterize the initial phase of his ministry were indeed from God.

¹⁰ Dyer and Merrill, *Old Testament Explorer*, 659-60.

Next, Ezekiel experienced God's word (2:8-3:11). He is shown a two sided scroll with the words "lament and woes" written on both sides. This description amply characterizes Ezekiel's message in the first twenty-four chapters. He is told to eat the scroll (2:8-3:3). Although this scroll is a prophecy of judgment, it still tastes like honey since it is God's word. Ezekiel will deliver the content of this scroll to the rebellious house of Israel. After strengthening Ezekiel for the task,¹¹ God explains to Ezekiel that he is to be an accurate channel of divine revelation.¹² He is to proclaim God's truth to wayward Israel¹³ regardless of their response. These additional details regarding his commissioning will help the exiles understand that his message in the first twenty-four chapters represents God's direct message through Ezekiel.

Finally, Ezekiel experiences God's hand (3:12-27). The Spirit of the Lord returns him to the exiles (3:12-15). There, he experiences the normal emotion of anger at the rebellious nature of the nation. During his week stay among the exiles, he remains overwhelmed with the awesomeness of the visions he has seen and he prepares for the awesome task of ministry that lies before him. At the end of the seven days,¹⁴ the Lord appoints him as a watchman (3:16-21). The function of a watchman was to declare exactly what God revealed. To the extent that he did, he exonerated himself. To the extent that he did not, God would hold him accountable for the fate of others who

¹¹ God made Ezekiel's head as hard as the hardest stone (3:8-9).

¹² Ezekiel's responsibility to be an accurate conduit of divine truth is found in God's requirement for Ezekiel to listen and to take heart of all that he is commanded to do (3:10).

¹³ The waywardness of Israel is evidenced by the fact that a pagan nation would have repented had they heard Ezekiel's message of imminent judgment (3:4-6).

¹⁴ This event took place on 8/7/593.

died without having received the message of repentance that could have helped them.¹⁵ Because of this heavy responsibility, Ezekiel's audience could be certain that Ezekiel would only speak God's message.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations that God imposed upon Ezekiel (3:22-27). Not only is Ezekiel to remain in his house (3:22-25), but he is also to experience limited dumbness (3:26-27). The only time Ezekiel will be allowed to speak is when he has a word from the Lord. A description of these limitations should make it clear to the exiles that every time something comes out of Ezekiel's mouth, his words are directed by God. In sum, the details of Ezekiel's commissioning communicates that the harsh messages of judgment given in the first twenty-four chapters are from God. Thus, the exiles should not discount Ezekiel's message.

Now that he has established his authority to speak (1-3), Ezekiel gives the prophecies of coming judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem (4-24). He begins with prophecies of imminent judgment (4-11). He gives four signs demonstrating the reality of coming judgment (4-5).¹⁶ The first sign demonstrates the fact of coming judgment (4:1-3). God tells him to draw Jerusalem on a brick and to lay siege to the brick in order to demonstrate the reality of Nebuchadnezzar's coming invasion. The iron pan placed between the brick and Ezekiel demonstrates the inability of the Jerusalemites to call out to God in the midst of the siege.

The second sign demonstrates the length of the siege (4:4-8). God tells Ezekiel to lie on his left side 390 days for Israel and on his right side 40 days for Judah. This total time period would

¹⁵ The death of the righteous person depicted in 3:20-21 is not speaking of a loss of salvation. "Turning from the covenant would result in physical death, even for a righteous person." J. Carl Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible* (Kregel: Grand Rapids, 1997), 138.

¹⁶ In an attempt to attract attention, Ezekiel performs these signs in the courtyard or entrance to his house.

represent the days of Nebuchadnezzar's siege. These days correspond to the past years of the nation's sin.¹⁷ The third sign demonstrates the severity of the siege (4:9-17). God tells Ezekiel to assemble various ingredients in order to cook a loaf of bread. He is to cook the bread over a fire fueled by animal excrement. The ingredients that Ezekiel used to cook the bread will be rare during the siege. This signifies the siege's severity. Moreover, the animal excrement signifies the moral pollution of the people.

The fourth sign demonstrates the results of the siege (5:1-17). God tells Ezekiel to shave his head and beard and to take the shaved hair and place it in a pile on the ground. He is to burn the first third of the hair. This represents a third of the Jerusalemites who will die of famine and plague in the upcoming siege. He is to chop with a sword the second third of the hair. This represents a third of the Jerusalemites who will die by the sword in the upcoming siege. He is to scatter the final third of the hair to the air. This represents a third of the Jerusalemites who will be scattered to the nations in the upcoming siege. Finally, Ezekiel was to save a few strands of hair. This indicates God's preservation of a remnant in the midst of the upcoming siege. In sum, these four signs, with their emphasis upon the reality of the coming siege, are designed to destroy the false confidence of the exiles that thought that the siege would never take place.

Ezekiel now moves away from the fact of the coming siege (4-5) to its cause (6-11). Ezekiel wants his audience to see that not only is this siege a coming reality, but it is deserved. Judah's prolonged wickedness has made the coming invasion inevitable. Thus, the exiles should not entertain any false hope of returning to Jerusalem. Ezekiel begins discussing the cause of the siege

¹⁷ Some see this 430-year number as reminiscent of the duration of the Egyptian bondage (Exod 12:40-41). Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Handbook*, rev ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2005), 299.

by giving two sermons (6–7).¹⁸ The first sermon emphasizes that idolatry is the cause of the coming judgment (6).¹⁹ The second sermon emphasizes the nature of the coming judgment (7). The coming judgment will be imminent, without historical precedent, and based upon the sinful conduct of the Jerusalemites.²⁰

Ezekiel continues the theme of the cause of the coming judgment by recording the temple vision (8–11).²¹ In this vision, God shows Ezekiel sins that are taking place inside the Jerusalem temple (8:1-3a). Four initial sins are mentioned (8:3b-18).²² First, Ezekiel sees the “idol of jealousy”²³ erected within the temple (8:3b-6). Second, Ezekiel sees idolatrous paintings on the temple walls (8:7-13). Third, Ezekiel sees people worshipping Tammuz (8:14-15).²⁴ Fourth, Ezekiel sees 25 priests worshipping the sun with their backs toward God (8:16-18). If the nation’s religious leadership has transgressed so far in sin, judgment cannot be averted.

The reality of the judgment is portrayed in the next chapter (9). After God supernaturally marks the righteous, the unmarked are slain thus exemplifying the reality of the coming judgment.

¹⁸ Each sermon begins with the phrase “the word of the Lord came to me” (6:1; 7:1).

¹⁹ The threefold repetition of the phrase “they will know that I am the Lord” (6:7, 10, 14) serves as a convenient way of dividing the chapter.

²⁰ “According to their conduct” is mentioned five times within the chapter (7:3-4, 8-9, 27).

²¹ This vision took place on 9/17/592. The vision contains four parts. Each part is recorded in a separate chapter.

²² The threefold repetition of the phrase “You will see things that are even more detestable” (8:6, 13, 15) serves as a convenient way of dividing the chapter.

²³ This idol may have been a statue of Asherah who was the Canaanite goddess of fertility (2 Kings 21:7; 23:6). Dyer, “Outline of Ezekiel,” 10.

²⁴ “Tammuz is Hebrew name for the Sumerian god Dumzi.” Dyer, “Outline of Ezekiel,” 11. Worship of Dumzi involved cultic prostitution. Dyer and Merrill, *Old Testament Explorer*, 666.

The sinfulness of the people as the cause of judgment is reiterated in the final two chapters in the vision. Ezekiel sees the departure of God's glory to the temple threshold and then to the eastern gate (10). Ezekiel also sees the 25 temple priests preaching that judgment will not come²⁵ and practicing violence.²⁶ Ezekiel prophesies that the plans and prophecies of these priests will not come to fruition.²⁷ As a result of all of this wickedness within the temple, Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord completely departing from the temple and retreating to the Mount of Olives.²⁸ Thus, the two sermons (6–7) and temple vision (8–11) furnish ample evidence to the exiles that Judah's wickedness has made judgment inevitable.

In the next section (12–19), Ezekiel moves away from discussing the causes, nature, and reality of the coming judgment (4–11). Instead he focuses upon the false securities in which the exiles had placed their confidence. In spite of Ezekiel's previous messages, the exiles still did not believe that judgment would come because they had placed their hope in nine false securities. Thus, in this section, Ezekiel explains that these nine items represent false optimism because they would not avert judgment.²⁹

The first false security that the exiles placed their hope in was the existing remnant in Jerusalem (12:1-20). The exiles probably reasoned that judgment would never come because the remnant continued to live in prosperity in Jerusalem. However, in order to pantomime to the exiles

²⁵ Building houses (11:3) was a sign of peace.

²⁶ Among the culprits are Jaazaniah son of Azzur and Pelatiah son of Benaiah.

²⁷ The slaying of Pelatiah (11:13a) seems to be functioning as a short-term confirmation of Ezekiel's long-term prophecies in this chapter.

²⁸ "The mountain which is east of it" (11:23) is a reference to the Mount of Olives.

²⁹ The nine items are discernible through the repetition of the phrase "the word of the Lord came to me." Chapter 19 does not follow this pattern. This is probably because chapter 19 represents a summation of the entire unit.

the reality that the Jerusalemites would go into captivity, God tells Ezekiel to bore a hole in his wall and to drag his packed belongings out through the hole (12:1-16). Furthermore, God tells Ezekiel to tremble while eating and to shudder while drinking in order to demonstrate the terror that the Jerusalemites will experience when Nebuchadnezzar's third siege begins (12:18-20). Thus, any hope based upon the mere existence of the Jerusalem remnant is misplaced.

The second false security that the exiles placed their confidence in was two false parables (12:21-28). The first false parable said, "days go by and prophecies come to nothing." However, God through Ezekiel explained that He would prove the parable wrong. God would prevent people from quoting this parable any longer (12:21-25). The second false parable said that the prophecies of judgment were for the distant future. However, God through Ezekiel explained that the judgment would no longer be delayed (12:26-28).

The third false security that the exiles placed their confidence in was the messages of the false prophets and prophetesses who were proclaiming peace. Through Ezekiel God explains that these false prophets were "whitewashing" problems by hiding covenant violations that needed to be exposed. Furthermore, their messages originated from their own imaginations rather than from God. Thus, any misplaced confidence in the messages of the false prophets was futile (13:1-23). The fourth false security that the exiles placed their hope in was idolatry (14:1-11). When the elders came to inquire of Ezekiel, God showed him the idolatrous content of the elders' hearts (14:1-5). Thus, God through Ezekiel told Israel to repent of this misplaced hope (14:6-11).

The fifth false security that the exiles placed their confidence in was the presence of the righteous. Just as God promised to spare Sodom if he found ten righteous men within the city, the exiles probably reasoned that nothing bad could ever happen to Jerusalem since there would always

be a righteous remnant within that city. However, Ezekiel shatters this false confidence. He explains that even the righteous presence of Noah, Daniel, and Job could not avert the coming judgment of famine, beasts, sword, and plague against Jerusalem (14:12-23).³⁰ The sixth false security that the exiles placed their confidence in was their status as God's vine (15:1-8). However, Ezekiel explains that the wood from a vine has less utility than any branch of a tree. The vine wood becomes even more useless when it is burned. Similarly, Judah's sin has made her useless to God. She will be made even more useless after the coming judgment.

The seventh false security that the exiles placed their confidence in was the status of the city of Jerusalem (16:1-63). They probably reasoned that nothing could ever happen to Jerusalem since it was God's special city. However, Ezekiel explains that at one time Jerusalem was an unwanted baby (16:1-5) who God rescued and reared. Eventually the baby grew into a beautiful woman who God married (16:6-14). Then Jerusalem became an adulterous wife (16:35-43). Her sins were even worse than Samaria and Sodom (16:44-52). If God did not spare Sodom and Samaria and Jerusalem's sins were even worse than these two cities, how could God spare Jerusalem? Because the adulterous wife must be punished (16:15-34), the exiles should not entertain any false hope that the status of Jerusalem as God's special city will exempt her from future judgment.

The eighth false security that the exiles placed confidence in was Zedekiah (17:1-24). Zedekiah was the reigning king in Judah at the time of Ezekiel's prophecies. He was a puppet king who was installed by Nebuchadnezzar. Apparently, Zedekiah entered into a suzerain vassal covenant with Nebuchadnezzar. As long as Zedekiah obeyed Nebuchadnezzar, he could be assured that Nebuchadnezzar would not launch a third attack upon Jerusalem. The exiles believed that Zedekiah

³⁰ The fourfold repetition of the phrase "or if I" serves as a convenient way of dividing the chapter (14:13, 15, 17, 19).

would live in perpetual obedience to Nebuchadnezzar thus insulating Jerusalem from any future harm. However, Ezekiel shatters this false confidence by explaining that Egypt would entice Zedekiah to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar thus incurring his wrath and causing him to invade Jerusalem. Thus, any hope the exiles placed in Zedekiah was misplaced.³¹

The ninth false security that the exiles placed their confidence in was a false proverb that said, “the fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge?”³² The exiles believed that if God did punish Jerusalem, he would do so unfairly because the present generation would be punished for their father’s sins. However, Ezekiel explains that God does not punish people for the sins of others but rather for their own sins.³³ Because the current generation was sinful, they deserved the punishment that was going to come upon them. Thus, the exiles should place no confidence in the content of the proverb (18).

Ezekiel concludes this section with a funeral dirge for Jerusalem’s rulers (19). Such a dirge was typically sung at funerals in order to mention positive attributes of the deceased. The fact that this song was sung before the final invasion of Jerusalem took place evidences its inevitability. In the dirge, three of Jerusalem’s princes are alluded to. They include Jehoahaz (19:1-4), Jehoiachin (19:5-9), and Zedekiah (19:10-14). This song furnishes a fitting conclusion to Ezekiel’s attack on the nine false securities that the exiles were placing their confidence in (12–19). Nebuchadnezzar’s third siege could not be averted. Thus, the exiles should not place their hope in any fast return to Jerusalem.

³¹ In this parable, Nebuchadnezzar represents the first eagle. Jerusalem is described as Lebanon. Egypt is the second eagle.

³² This parable is also repeated in Jeremiah 31:29-30.

³³ The threefold repetition of “suppose” (18:5, 10, 14) serves as a convenient way of dividing this chapter.

Even after educating the exiles regarding the fact and cause of the coming judgment (4–11) as well as shattering their various sources of false optimism (12–19), some of them still may have doubted that the coming judgment was justified. Thus, in the next section, Ezekiel focuses upon the historical forces leading up to the coming judgment (20–24). Ezekiel’s point is that this judgment is long overdue. Ezekiel begins by explaining the history of Israel’s rebellion (20:1-44). Some elders came to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord.³⁴ God tells Ezekiel that these elders are in no position to ask God for anything given the nation’s history of idolatry (20:1-3). Ezekiel then outlines Israel’s history in three phases. These phases include the Egyptian sojourn (20:4-9), wilderness experience (20:10-17), and life in Canaan (20:18-32). In each phase, no matter how many times God blessed the nation, they continued to revert back to idolatry. Thus, the coming judgment upon the nation was warranted and long overdue.

Ezekiel presents the inevitability of the coming judgment in various ways (20:45-24:27). Through the parable of the forest fire, Ezekiel depicts judgment coming upon Israel’s southern border (20:45-49).³⁵ Ezekiel gives further information about the coming judgment through his four messages of the sword (21:1-32).³⁶ In the first message, Ezekiel explains that the sword is drawn against the sanctuary and Israel (21:1-7). In the second message, Ezekiel explains that the sword is sharpened against rebellious Israel (21:8-17). This second message represents a poetic song of judgment. In the third message, Ezekiel explains that the sword is directed toward Jerusalem (21:18-27). In fact, when Nebuchadnezzar comes to the fork in the road where he has the option of

³⁴ According to 20:1a, this inquiry took place on 8/14/591.

³⁵ The exile’s continued rejection of Ezekiel’s message is seen in the way they thought he was only telling parables that had no chance for fulfillment (20:49).

³⁶ These four messages can be delineated through the repetition of the phrase, “the word of the Lord came to me” (21:1, 8, 18, 28). Although 21:28 does not use the same phraseology, it seems to represent a similar concept.

taking the Transjordan highway toward Rabbah (Ammon) or the international highway toward Jerusalem, he will select the latter. Although he typically cast lots, consulted idols, or examined liver when making such decisions, God has already predetermined the result of the lot. His decision has already been made. In the fourth message, Ezekiel also explains that the sword is directed toward Ammon (21:28-32). Perhaps Ammon thought that because God had already predetermined that Nebuchadnezzar would take the international highway toward Judah, she would be spared from judgment. However, in this final message, Ezekiel explains that Ammon would not be spared.³⁷

Ezekiel further describes the coming judgment through his three messages against Jerusalem (22:1-31).³⁸ In the first message, Ezekiel describes the *cause* of the coming judgment (22:1-16). The cause of the judgment is the city's repeated covenant violations. In the second message, Ezekiel describes the *means* of the coming judgment (22:17-22). The means of the judgment would be the smelting furnace. Such furnaces were used to remove impurities from metallic substances. The coming judgment will have a similar effect on the Jerusalemites. Like the impurities destroyed in the fire, the worthless Jerusalemites would be destroyed in the coming siege. In the third message, Ezekiel describes the *objects* of the coming judgment (22:23-31). These objects include Jerusalem's princes (22:23-25), priests (22:26), officials (22:27), prophets (22:28), and people (22:29-31). All were guilty of repeated violations of God's covenant.³⁹

³⁷ There seem to be four messages of judgment against Ammon scattered throughout the Book of Ezekiel (20:45-49; 21:28-32; 25:1-7; 35).

³⁸ These three messages are discernible through the repetition of the phrase "the word of the Lord came to me" (22:1, 17, 23).

³⁹ The princes were involved in dishonest gain. The priests were not teaching nor enforcing the Law. The prophets were ignoring sins and giving false messages. The officials were involved in unjust gain. The people

As Ezekiel explained previously (20:1-44), various historical forces made Jerusalem's destruction inevitable. Ezekiel gives a similar historical analysis through the parable of the two sisters (23).⁴⁰ The first sister, Oholah, represented Samaria, which was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. The second sister, Oholibah, represented Jerusalem, which was the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah (23:1-4). Oholah became involved with the Assyrians. Thus, she was swept away in 722 B.C. (23:5-10). The younger sister Oholibah should have learned from the example of her older sister. Instead, Oholibah became even more promiscuous than her sister. She became involved with the Assyrians and the Babylonians (23:11-21). If God allowed Oholah to be swept away because of her lesser sin, how can judgment be averted against Oholibah's greater sin (23:22-49)?⁴¹ Ezekiel also analogizes Jerusalem's sinfulness to a meal being cooked in a pot so that its impurities rise to the surface. The contents of the pot must be removed. The empty pot must be placed upon the burning coals to remove its impurities. The coming siege will have a similar purifying effect upon Judah (24:3-15).

These historical factors have made judgment inevitable. To illustrate inevitability of Nebuchadnezzar's siege, God kills Ezekiel's wife. God explains that he is taking the delight of his eyes away from him and that he is to show no public expression of grief. This tragic event signifies the fact that the delight of the exiles' eyes will be swept away when Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed. When these events occur, any public expression of grief will seem inappropriate in

oppressed the poor and blindly followed their leaders. Thus, there was no one left to "stand in the gap" on the Lord's behalf.

⁴⁰ Many have noticed a similarity between chapters 16 and 23. However, chapter 16 seems more focused upon idolatry while this chapter seems more focused upon entangling foreign alliances.

⁴¹ The four oracles against Oholibah are discernible through the repetition of the phrase "this is what the sovereign Lord says" (23:22, 28, 32, 35).

comparison to the gravity of the circumstances. In sum, if the overly optimistic exiles remained unconvinced by Ezekiel's prophecies demonstrating the fact and cause of the coming judgment (4–11) and remained unaffected by his attack on their various sources of false security (12–19), they may have finally become convinced by Ezekiel's discussion of the various historical factors indicating that the coming judgment was long overdue (20–24).

In chapter 24, Ezekiel receives word that Nebuchadnezzar's siege against Jerusalem has begun (24:1-2).⁴² What Ezekiel has been predicting is now beginning to come to pass. Receiving this word changes the direction of Ezekiel's ministry. No longer will he be predicting imminent judgment upon Judah. Now he will begin to condemn the surrounding Gentile nations (25–32) as well as predict Israel's national restoration (33–48). This transition is hinted at through the prediction that Ezekiel's dumbness will soon be removed when Nebuchadnezzar's siege is complete (24:27).

As Nebuchadnezzar's siege against Jerusalem is taking place, Ezekiel predicts imminent judgment upon the surrounding Gentile nations (25–32). In this section, Ezekiel carefully shows that these nations will be judged on the basis of their anti-Semitic attitudes and mistreatment of Judah. This section of Ezekiel's ministry continues until Nebuchadnezzar's siege is complete. These prophecies move in a circular direction as the prophet predicts judgment against those nations to the east (25:1-14), west (25:15-17), north (26–28), and south (29–32) of Judah.⁴³

⁴² Ezekiel received word of the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's siege against Jerusalem on 1/15/588.

⁴³ A helpful map showing the geographic distribution of the nations that Ezekiel condemns in these chapters is found in Wilkinson and Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible*, 299.

This section contributes to Ezekiel's argument in two ways. First, it reinforces the judgment predicted in the first twenty-four chapters. Because God will also judge the nations, He intends to judge sin wherever it may be found even when such sin occurs among His people. Second, it looks forward to the restoration that will be discussed in chapters 36–48. If God is going to enforce the Abrahamic Covenant's protection against anti-Semitism (Gen 12:3), even while Judah is in disobedience, this shows His intention of fulfilling all of the Abrahamic Covenant's provisions. In other words, God's zeal in enforcing His covenant assures the exiles that they will also be avenged and restored to the land. Thus, this section forms a natural bridge between the past judgment spoken of in chapters 1–24 and the future restoration spoken of in 33–48.

Ezekiel begins by dealing with the three nations to the east of Judah (25:1-14).⁴⁴ Although Ammon⁴⁵ originally united with Judah and Tyre against Babylon, she did not come to Judah's defense when Nebuchadnezzar attacked. Instead she was jubilant over Judah's demise because she thought that it would expand her own border. Thus, Ezekiel prophesied imminent judgment upon Ammon (25:1-7). Moab⁴⁶ similarly exhibited animosity toward Judah when she fell. Moab said, "Look the house of Judah has become like the other nations." Thus, Ezekiel also prophesied judgment on Moab (25:8-11). Edom⁴⁷ also exhibited hostility toward Judah when she "took revenge on the house of Judah." Thus, Ezekiel also prophesied judgment on Edom (25:12-14). Ezekiel also

⁴⁴ A "because they...therefore I will...will know that I am the Lord" pattern seems to characterize the prophesied judgment on the nations mentioned in chapters 25 and 26.

⁴⁵ Ammon's animosity against Israel goes back to Judges 10:6-11:33.

⁴⁶ Moab's animosity against Israel goes back to Numbers 22–24.

⁴⁷ Edom's animosity against Israel goes back to Numbers 20:14-21.

deals with Philistia,⁴⁸ which was located to the west of Judah. Because Philistia tried to destroy Judah, Ezekiel predicted that God would destroy Philistia (25:15-17).⁴⁹

Ezekiel next deals with those nations to the north of Judah, which are Tyre and Sidon (26–28). This section contains five separate oracles.⁵⁰ Tyre rejoiced over Judah’s demise. Without Jerusalem around to secure overland trade routes, more goods had to be shipped overseas. This scenario financially benefited Tyre since she had a prosperous seaport. Thus, Ezekiel predicted Tyre’s downfall (26). Ezekiel then gave a funeral dirge (27) over Tyre where he compared her former state as a glorious ship (27:1-9) and commercial center (27:10-25)⁵¹ to the shipwreck she would become after God’s judgment visited her (27:26-36).⁵² Ezekiel then predicted judgment upon Tyre’s prince because he thought he was a god (28:1-10). Ezekiel similarly predicted judgment upon Tyre’s king (28:11-19). Ezekiel spends three chapters on Tyre as opposed to a brief paragraph on the preceding nations because he senses a Satanic influence behind the King of Tyre.⁵³ Finally, Ezekiel

⁴⁸ Philistia’s animosity against Israel goes back to Judges 3:14.

⁴⁹ Philistia disappeared during the intertestamental period.

⁵⁰ The five oracles of this section are discernible though the repetition of the phrase “the word of the Lord came to me saying” (26:1; 27:1; 28:1, 11, 20).

⁵¹ For a helpful enumeration of Tyre’s trading partners, see Dyer, “Ezekiel,” 1281.

⁵² This prophecy was given somewhere in between 4/28/587–4/13/586. Ezekiel 27:1-9 is written in poetry. 27:10-25 is written in prose and poetry. 27:26-36 is written in poetry. These prophecies were fulfilled in Nebuchadnezzar’s siege of Tyre in 585–572 B.C.

⁵³ The references to “perfection,” “Eden,” “cherub,” “on the mountain of God,” and “blameless” have led commentators to conclude that there is more going on in this chapter than a mere description of the King of Tyre. Some view it as a mythological version of the paradise story found in Genesis 2–3. However, Ezekiel makes no mention of the serpent, woman, or the Tree of Knowledge. Others view it as a self-contained mythological tradition. Yet no analogous myth has ever been discovered. Others view it as a satirical attack on the proud Tyrian ruler Ithobaal II. Yet this is not how Ezekiel uses the word cherub elsewhere in his book. It seems best to argue that Satan is the force motivating the King of Tyre’s anti-Semitic attitude. Just as Jesus saw Satan motivating Peter (Matt 16:22-23),

predicts imminent judgment upon Sidon (28:20-26). Ezekiel includes Sidon in his oracles against Tyre because both empires were in a close alliance with one another.

Next Ezekiel deals with the nation to the south of Judah, which is Egypt (29–32). Egypt’s anti-Semitism is well attested since it is the empire that took Israel into captivity as recorded in the Book of Exodus. However, Ezekiel may have spent four chapters dealing with Egypt since Judah seems to have been relying on Egypt for protection from Babylon (17:15; 29:16). Ezekiel’s point in his prolonged discussion of Egypt’s downfall seems to have been that Judah’s trust was misplaced. Thus, Ezekiel launches seven oracles against Egypt.⁵⁴

First, Ezekiel explains that God will drag pharaoh from his place of security behind the Nile and allow him to die in the desert. Consequently, Egypt would be allowed to continue but without regaining her place of influence (29:1-16).⁵⁵ Second, Babylon was to plunder Egypt. Because no resources were left in Tyre after Nebuchadnezzar plundered it, he would be forced to “fill his coffers” by invading Egypt (29:17-21).⁵⁶ Third, Ezekiel predicted that Egypt and her allies would be destroyed (30:1-19). Fourth, Ezekiel predicted that Egypt would be scattered by Babylon (30:20-26).⁵⁷ Fifth, Ezekiel explained that if glorious Assyria could fall (31:1-9) then so could Egypt

Ezekiel saw a Satanic force behind the King of Tyre. The notion of fallen angelic beings influencing Gentile governments is well testified to in Ezekiel’s contemporary Daniel (Dan 10:13, 20). Satan is the ultimate source of anti-Semitism (Rev 12). His pride leading to a fall is well attested to in the New Testament (1 Tim 3:6). Many church fathers, such as Jerome, held this view. For the enumeration of these options, I am indebted to Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 139-40.

⁵⁴ These oracles are discernible through the repetition of the phrase “the word of the Lord came to me” (29:1, 17; 30:1, 20; 31:1; 32:1, 17).

⁵⁵ This message was given on 1/7/587.

⁵⁶ This message was given on 4/26/571.

⁵⁷ This message was given on 4/29/587.

(31:10-18).⁵⁸ Sixth, Ezekiel lamented Pharaoh (32:1-16).⁵⁹ Seventh, Ezekiel explained that if once powerful nations were already in the grave, then nothing would prevent Egypt from also going to the same grave (32:17-32).⁶⁰

When Ezekiel receives word that Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem is complete (33:21),⁶¹ the direction of his ministry changes once again. No longer is he prophesying imminent judgment upon Judah and the nations as he had done in the first two sections of the book (1–32). Now his focus is upon the nation's restoration (33–48). The completion of Jerusalem's destruction had eradicated the exiles' false hope of returning to the land. Now Ezekiel sought to replace the beleaguered exiles' dashed hopes with promises of restoration. Although Ezekiel had briefly mentioned Judah's national restoration in the earlier section of his book (11:13b-22; 16:53-63; 17:22-24; 20:33-34; 28:24-26), the remainder of the book focuses almost exclusively upon restoration.⁶²

The exiles had a difficult time believing Ezekiel's prophecies of judgment in the first twenty-four chapters actually came from God. Thus, that section was inaugurated with evidence of Ezekiel's divine commissioning. Similarly, because the exiles' hopes had been eradicated, they would have difficulty believing Ezekiel's prophecies of restoration were of divine origin. Thus, Ezekiel also inaugurates this final section with evidence of his recommissioning as a watchman

⁵⁸ This message was given on 6/21/587.

⁵⁹ This message was given on 3/3/585.

⁶⁰ This message was given on 4/13/586–4/1/585.

⁶¹ Ezekiel received this message on 1/8/585.

⁶² Some view this restoration section through the lens of a "new Exodus" motif. Dyer and Merrill, *Old Testament Explorer*, 691.

(33:1-20, 23-33). Although as a watchman he would have the same duty (33:1-9) and focus upon individual responsibility (33:10-20) that he had in the earlier section of his book, his prophecies would now focus upon restoration rather than judgment. Ezekiel's reinstatement as a watchman immediately goes into effect as he rebukes two groups. First, he rebukes those Israelites still holding to a false hope by remaining in the land of Israel (33:23-29). Second, he rebukes false hearers in Babylon (33:30-33). The removal of Ezekiel's dumbness also signals a transition in his ministry (33:22). His dumbness was associated with his messages of judgment given in the previous section of the book (1-32). However, the removal of his dumbness anticipates a different message, one of restoration rather than judgment.

Ezekiel begins his prophecies of restoration by predicting that a selfless shepherd would replace Israel's selfish shepherds.⁶³ Unlike the nation's current shepherds (34:1-10), the coming shepherd would place the needs of the flock above his own needs (34:11-16). He will righteously judge among the flock (34:17-24) and rule the nation in the millennial kingdom (34:25-31). This coming shepherd is David.⁶⁴

⁶³ "Shepherds" refer to rulers (Ps 78:70-72; Isa 44:28; Zech 11:4-14).

⁶⁴ It is common for interpreters to understand the reference to the resurrected millennial David (Jer 30:9; Hos 3:5; Ezek 34:23; 37:24) as referring to David's greater son Jesus Christ (Luke 1:32, 69; Acts 2:29-30; 13:22-23, 34). However, such an interpretation cannot be supported from Ezekiel 34:23 and constitutes an impermissible reading of the New Testament back into the Old. If Ezekiel wanted David to be taken in a symbolic sense, he would have said so. Fruchtenbaum explains, "...nothing in the text indicates that *David* is to be taken symbolically. If the prophets wanted to refer to the messiah in connection with David, they used terms such as "Root of Jesse," "Branch of David," "Son of David," or "Seed of David." None of these expressions are used here. The text simply states, *David*. In keeping with literal interpretation, it is best to take the text as it reads, meaning the literal David, who, in his resurrected form, will function as the king over Israel and as a prince in subjection to the King of the world." Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, rev ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 403. Thus, David will be resurrected at the same time as all of the other Old Testament saints (Dan 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Rev 20:4) and rule in submission to Christ during the millennium in a co regency form of government. Regarding the predictions of the millennial David, Walvoord similarly observes, "Though some have attempted to take this prophecy in less than its literal meaning, the clear statement is that David, who is now dead and whose body is in his tomb in Jerusalem (Acts 2:29), will be resurrected." John F. Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1999), 187.

Ezekiel continues his prophecies of restoration by predicting destruction upon Edom (35).⁶⁵ Although at first glance this prophecy seems misplaced since the destruction of the surrounding nations was already dealt with in a previous section (29–32), it actually fits with the theme of Israel’s restoration to the land. Restoration to the land is a theme that Ezekiel will unfold in the subsequent chapters (36–37). Edom has always coveted Israel’s land (35:10-15). Because the land belongs to Israel, God must destroy those forces that seek to illegitimately usurp the land from God’s people. Thus, the destruction of Edom is a necessary prelude to God giving the land back to His people.

Israel’s physical restoration to the land as well as her spiritual restoration is the theme of chapter 36. This chapter represents the fulfillment of the New Covenant (Jer 31), which promised land (Jer 31:27-29), forgiveness (Jer 31:34), and the Holy Spirit (Jer 31:33). All three elements are developed in this chapter (36:24-27). So his audience would better appreciate their need for future cleansing offered by the New Covenant, Ezekiel reminds them of their past sinfulness (36:16-21). In chapter 37, Ezekiel has two visions that illustrate the restoration spoken of in the previous chapter. In the first vision (37:1-14), Ezekiel sees bones reassembling so that they form a human body. He then sees breath reentering the body (37:1-10). This vision speaks of the physical and spiritual restoration of the nation (37:11-14). In the second vision (37:15-28), Ezekiel sees two sticks coming together (37:15-17). These merging sticks represent the end of the divided kingdom during the millennium (37:18-28).

⁶⁵ The threefold repetition of the phrase “then you/they will know that I am the Lord” (35: 4, 9, 15) serves as a convenient way of dividing this chapter. Mount Seir is the name of the mountain range south of the Dead Sea where the Edomites dwelt.

In the invasion of Gog and Magog⁶⁶ (38–39), Israel’s enemies sense her vulnerability and launch an attack against her.⁶⁷ This invasion represents the most severe attack ever to come against Israel. Yet in the midst of Israel’s darkest hour, God will supernaturally intervene to protect His people and judge her opponents. Because these chapters show God’s intention to supernaturally protect Israel even in the midst of the severest form of opposition, Ezekiel includes them in the restoration section of his book. Because God will manifest His glory at the conclusion of the battle (39:21-24), these chapters form a natural transition into Ezekiel’s vision of the glory of the Lord in the millennial temple (40–48).

Ezekiel’s temple vision (40–48)⁶⁸ is included in the restoration section of his book because it shows God’s intention of completely restoring His people. Such restoration will touch the religious life of the nation (40–46) as well as its geographical and political life (47–48). Ezekiel begins by describing the temple (40–43).⁶⁹ After providing some introductory information regarding

⁶⁶ For a discussion of the identity of these entities and their allies, see Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 106-09; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Findley, OH: Dunham Publishing Company, 1958), 342-45; Dyer, “Outline of Ezekiel,” 31-32.

⁶⁷ Because this attack will take place while Israel is living in peace and prosperity within unwalled villages (38:11), it probably will take place sometime during the tribulation period when Israel is enjoying the protection of the antichrist’s treaty (Dan 9:27). For a discussion of the different views concerning the timing of the invasion, see Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 117-25; Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology*, 346-55; Dyer, “Outline of Ezekiel,” 32-33.

⁶⁸ This vision occurred on 4/28/573.

⁶⁹ Commentators remain divided concerning when this vision will find its fulfillment. Some believe that it represents a memorial of Solomon’s temple. However, such a memorial seems unnecessary since that temple was already memorialized in Kings and Chronicles. In addition, the temple described here is different than Solomon’s temple. Others believe it is predicting Zerubbabel’s postexilic temple. However, that temple is also described differently and the glory of God did not return to it. Moreover, Ezekiel’s temple requires certain topographical changes before it could be rebuilt that did not occur in Zerubbabel’s day. Others contend that the temple vision is fulfilled in the church age. Yet this view represents wild allegorization. It also misleads the original audience because

the setting of the vision (40:1-3), Ezekiel records the temple's outer court (40:5-27), inner court (40:28-47), and structure (40:48-42:20).⁷⁰ Ezekiel also discusses the religious life within the temple. He mentions animal sacrifices (43:13-20)⁷¹ and the return of the Lord's glory (43:1-12). The return

they would have understood the temple in the framework of Israel's national restoration. Still others believe that this vision will be fulfilled in the eternal state. However, this is problematic since Revelation 21:22 indicates that there will be no temple in the eternal state. Moreover, according to Ezekiel 45:22, sin will still be a reality in the Ezekiel temple. Yet sin will be an impossibility in the eternal state (Rev 21:27). The best option is to see the earthly reign of Christ as the time for the fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision. Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 142-43.

⁷⁰ For helpful pictures of the restored temple, see Dyer, "Ezekiel," 1303-08; Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 488-91. Many contend that this temple is not to be understood literally. However, several factors argue for a literal interpretation. First, Ezekiel was told to record exactly what he was shown in the vision and then communicate this to the house of Israel (40:4). If the temple is not literal, then these instructions become nonsensical. Second, why communicate such enormous detail in this vision if these details were not to be understood literally? Third, Ezekiel's other short-term prophecies of judgment (1-32) were fulfilled quite literally. Why should Ezekiel's temple vision be fulfilled differently? Fourth, most take the temple described in chapters 8-11 literally. There the glory of God left the temple. Given the symmetrical structure of the book, why should the temple vision where the glory of God returns to the temple be treated any differently? Fifth, when Ezekiel wants his visions to be understood symbolically, he offers an interpretation of the vision (37:11-14, 18-28). However, no similar interpretation is given in Ezekiel's temple vision. Sixth, the other prophets seem to argue for a literal understanding of the temple as well (Isa 2:3; 60:13; Jer 33:18; Joel 3:18; Mic 4:2; Hag 2:7-9; Zech 6:12-15; 14:16, 20-21). Seventh, a literal understanding of the temple does not constitute a revival of the defunct Mosaic system. Numerous differences exist between Ezekiel's vision and the Mosaic system. Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 462-64.

⁷¹ Many believe that a revival of animal sacrifices constitutes a violation of the Book of Hebrews, which indicates that Christ's death rendered animal sacrifices obsolete. Thus, they maintain that animal sacrifices cannot be understood literally in Ezekiel's vision. However, several factors argue for a literal understanding of Ezekiel's sacrifices. First, because of the aforementioned differences between Ezekiel's vision and the Mosaic system, a revival of animal sacrifices does not contradict Hebrews. Second, because Paul issued an animal sacrifice after Christ's death in Acts 21:26, the mere existence of post crucifixion animal sacrifices does not necessarily violate Hebrews. Third, other prophets also argue for a straightforward understanding of millennial animal sacrifices (Isa 56:7; 66:20-23; Jer 33:15-18; Zech 14:16:21; Mal 3:3-4). Fourth, it is possible that these sacrifices are memorial in nature by looking back at what Christ's death accomplished. Just as communion looks back to what Christ accomplished, Ezekiel's animal sacrifices could have the same function. Fifth, it is possible that these sacrifices are necessary for ceremonial cleansing (Heb 9:13). Because the glory of God will be present in the temple along with fallible priests (Ezek 45:22),

of God's glory to the temple is the climax of the vision. By showing that the same glory of God that departed from the temple earlier in the book (8–11) will also return to the temple, Ezekiel shows God's desire to completely reverse Judah's judgment (1–24) through His program of national restoration. Ezekiel goes on to depict regulations for worship in the millennial temple (44–46). These regulations govern the east gate (44:1-3), the admission of foreigners (44:4-9), the temple priests (44:10-45:8), and the offerings (45:9-46:24).

The final two chapters in the temple vision (47–48) convey the geographical and political restoration of the nation. These chapters speak of a new river (47:1-12) that will miraculously bring the Dead Sea back to life. Thus, the restoration described by Ezekiel will be so complete that it will introduce this profound topographical and geographical change. The chapters also speak of new boundaries (47:13-23), and a new tribal distribution of land (47:21-48:29).⁷² Ezekiel closes his book with a brief mention of the restored city of Jerusalem (48:30-35). Although Ezekiel's prophecies of Jerusalem's destruction had come to pass, the beleaguered exiles could take hope in God's intention to restore this ancient city.

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such ceremonial cleansing would be necessary in order for the priests to fulfill their function. Jerry M. Hullinger, "The Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40-48," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (1995): 279-89.

⁷² For a pictorial representation of these items, see Dyer, "Ezekiel," 1314. Apparently, the tribal distribution described in Ezekiel 48:1-29 is different than the tribal distribution depicted in Joshua 13–19. Also, Gilead and the Transjordan will not be part of the millennial land since they were not part of the original land promises.

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