

HEARING THE WORD



NIGEL BARGE

Ezekiel
Work Book

Hearing the Word Ezekiel Work Book

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Nigel Barge, August 2019

Scripture Quotations taken from

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Resources

The *New Bible Dictionary* 3rd edition, published by Inter Varsity Press
The *New Bible Commentary* 21st century edition. A commentary on every Bible book, IVP

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Reading Prophecy in the Bible

Whatever we read, we adjust to its style. We approach a newspaper, a cookery book, a poem and a scientific report in different ways. We take into account the purpose for which it was written and the way the writer uses words.

Since the Bible has many styles – law, poetry, history, prophecy, *etc.* – we need to allow for the style if we are to discern what God is saying. Ezekiel is **prophecy**, mostly expressed in *prose*. To approach it properly, keep in mind the following principles:

1) In general – it is God's story

The Bible tells the story of God's dealings with humankind. After creation and 'the fall' in Genesis 1-3, the rest describes how he works out his unfolding plan to rescue humankind through Jesus. The Old Testament (OT) prepares for the coming and the death of Jesus. The New Testament (NT) describes the event and looks forwards to his return at the end of time. It is *all* about God. It follows that:

- a) Every part relates to Him (Luke 24:27; John 5:39). So as we read, we ask, 'what does this show about God? What is He doing?'
- b) Everything is relevant. In a movie, every scene plays some part in the overall story. Often the early stages of a film show things that make no sense until later. The Bible is the same. So as we read prophecy, often knowing the outcome already, we ask, 'what relevance has *this* part to the *main* story?'

2) In particular – 'follow the camera angle'

A film director focuses our attention on particular shots to tell 'his story'. In the same way the prophet is selective about what he tells us. He omits much general detail, only giving us items relevant to what he is trying to convey.

As we read we should therefore be asking the question – why is he telling me this, and in this particular way?

3) The nature of prophecy

The Bible uses the word 'prophet' to mean a person authorised by God to speak for him, and inspired by the Holy Spirit so that what *he* says, *God* says (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). God had made a covenant, or special agreement, with his people; he had a special concern to hold his people to it.

4) The scope of prophecy

To read prophecy we need a tri-focal lens! A text may be referring to the immediate time-frame, the coming of Jesus made flesh among us, or His coming as Judge at the end of time. The difficulty in reading prophecy is that these may all be included, but mixed up, apparently at random!

Reading Ezekiel

The Author

Ezekiel, son of Buzi, was a priest and probably the son of a priest. He was deported to Babylonia, almost certainly with Jehoiachin in 597BC (2 Kings 24:14-17) when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem after a brief siege. He was settled in the village of Tel Abib (3:15) by the river Chebar (or Kebar). He was married; his wife died at the time of Jerusalem's fall (24:18), but no children are mentioned.

Date of writing

Ezekiel started prophesying in 593BC when he was aged thirty. He was the first prophet to give an orderly sequence of dates for his oracles. They spanned 22 years. After that we have no further mention of him.

Historical setting

After the death of king Solomon the kingdom of Israel was split in two, with ten tribes in the north keeping the name Israel and two tribes in the south, named after one of them, Judah. Decline followed, first in the northern kingdom, with evil king after evil king choosing other gods. Their wicked habits included corruption, oppression of the poor, child sacrifices and cult prostitution. In vain the prophets Amos, Hosea and Isaiah protested, appealed and warned that God would judge. In 722BC Israel reached a point of no return when their capital Samaria fell to the Assyrians. They were deported, assimilated into the lives and religions of the countries to which they were exiled. To this day, their fate is unknown, their identity as God's people lost.

Initially Judah fared better, walking with God but then they started following the same pattern as Israel. Faith and morals steadily declined, despite the pleas of the prophets Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah and Jeremiah. Five of the last six kings are described as evil. Babylon began to invade; in 605BC Daniel and some others were deported. Further deportations followed in 597BC, taking King Jehoiakim, Ezekiel and his contemporaries. Finally, in 586BC Nebuchadnezzar broke through the walls of Jerusalem and torched the Temple. He took king and people the 1,400 miles to Babylonia, placing them in Jewish Prisoner of War colonies.

The Message of Ezekiel

Ezekiel is the only 'exilic' prophet. He writes *as an exile* about God's reasons for the exile and his promises of rescue. He is very familiar with the Bible from Genesis to Jeremiah. E.g. compare Genesis 2:7 (creation of man) with Ezekiel 37 (dry bones) : God breathes, they live.

In much of Ezekiel ch. 38-48 the exaggeration and sometimes unreality of description, and frequency of the number 7, show we are to understand it as foretelling the future *symbolically* or expressing truths about God's power rather than predicting future events literally. For example:

- In ch. 45 Ezekiel prophesies the sacrificing of animals in the Messianic kingdom. But thanks to Jesus' death, 'there is no longer any sacrifice for sin' (Heb. 10.18). He is prophesying future worship, but expressed in OT thought-forms.
- In ch. 47 the river flowing from God's presence starts as a trickle and becomes ever deeper, apparently without any water being added; it heals the saltiness of the Dead Sea and brings new life. Ezekiel is telling us about God's healing grace, in language like Jesus uses in John 7:38 – 'rivers of living water will flow from the heart of those who believe in me.'

This is almost apocalyptic literature - but not quite. In apocalyptic literature (from a word meaning to unveil, i.e. uncover the spiritual powers behind events), God's intervention overthrows the structures of human society and government altogether, using angelic beings and supernatural cataclysms. Ezekiel's writing is more restrained. It is not always easy to understand. If we take it slowly however, use our imaginations and interpret the signs given as the writer intended, we need not be daunted.

The form of Ezekiel

1] Symbolic actions

eg the building of a model Jerusalem (4:1ff), the shaving of his hair (5:1)

2] Prophetic words

Eg 6:1; 13:1; 16:1 etc

3] Visions

Ezekiel has three visions that describe:

- 1) The reign of God (1:4-28)
- 2) The atrocities in Jerusalem leading to God's departure (8:1ff)
- 3) The return of God to Jerusalem (cf40-48)

The book has three main sections:

Chs 1-24, *before* Jerusalem fell, are prophecies of denunciation

Chs 25-32, *around the time* Jerusalem fell, are oracles against other nations

Chs 33-48, *after* Jerusalem fell, are prophecies of hope. There will be salvation for God's people, victory over the enemies of God and his people, and finally a new temple, a new Torah (instructions about life & worship) and a new Eden

Map

Extent of Babylonian empire in Ezekiel's day
shown by the broken line - - -

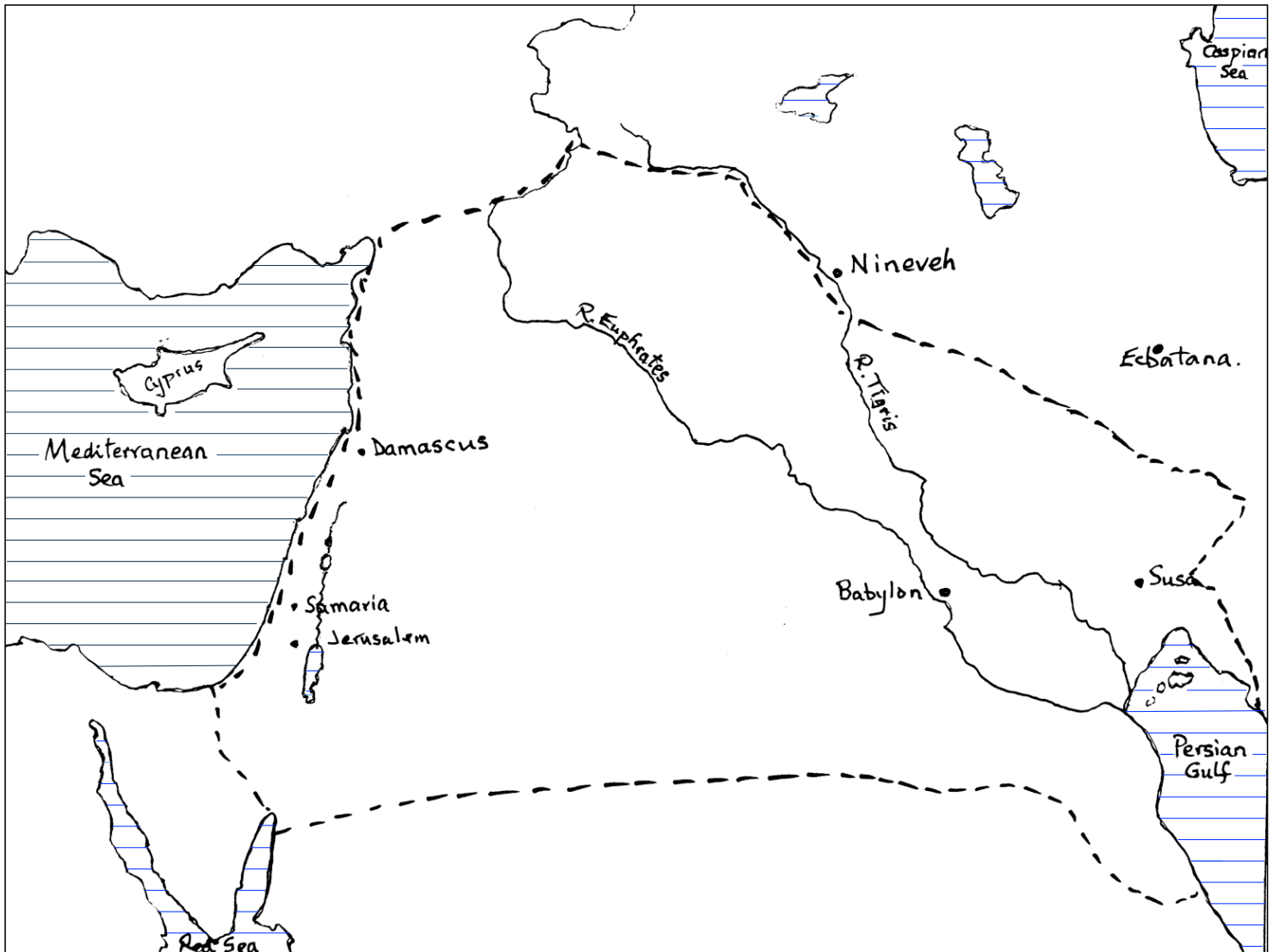


Chart: Dates and Content of the Writing Prophets

| Date BC | Dominant world power | Kings of Israel | |
|---------|---|--|-------|
| 750 | 800-626 ASSYRIA Capital: Nineveh. Fell in 612 (750-732 Damascus was a minor power in area) 744-727 Tiglath-Pileser III | Capital: Samaria | |
| | | 793-753 Jeroboam II | evil |
| | | 753-2 Zechariah; Shallum | evil? |
| 700 | 726-722 Shalmanezar → 704-681 Sennacherib | 752-742 Menahem | evil |
| | | 742-740 Pekahiah | evil |
| | | 740-732 Pekah | evil |
| 600 | 626-538 BABYLONIA Capital: Babylon. Fell in 538 (read how, in Daniel ch. 5) 605-562 Nebuchadnezzar Belshazzar (Daniel 5) | 732-722 Hoshea | evil |
| | | 722 Samaria fell to Assyria People of Israel (ten northern tribes) deported to Assyria | |
| | | Exile & Captivity | |
| 500 | 538-331 MEDO-PERSIA Main capital: Susa 559-530 Cyrus (prob.= 'Darius the Mede' Dan.5:31, 6:28) 522-486 Darius the Great 486-465 Xerxes = Ahasuerus 465-424 Artaxerxes | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| 331 | 331 GREECE: Alexander the Great of Macedon | | |

| Date BC | Kings of Judah | Prophets |
|---------|---|--|
| 750 | Capital: Jerusalem | ??date Jonah : to Nineveh* ??date Obadiah : vs Edom ??date Joel : Jerusalem / Last Days |
| | 792-740 Uzziah(Azariah) good 740-735 Jotham good 735-716 Ahaz evil 716-687 Hezekiah good 687-642 Manasseh evil, repented 642-640 Amon evil 640-609 Josiah good | 775-755 Amos (esp N; from S) 755-725 Hosea (esp N) 740-690 Isaiah (esp S) 740-690 Micah (esp S) *(?730ish Jonah warns Nineveh) |
| | 609 Jehoahaz evil 609-598 Jehoiakim evil 597 Jehoiachin evil 597-586 Zedekiah evil | ?635 Zephaniah (S) 627-585 Jeremiah (S) 620ish Nahum (vs Nineveh) ?610-600 Habakkuk (personal/S) |
| 600 | 586 Jerusalem fell to Babylonia. People of Judah (two southern tribes) deported to Babylonia 586-538. <i>Babylonian captivity/exile</i> | (586ish Lamentations) 605-530 Daniel in Babylon's court then in Persia's (exiled in 605 with King Jehoiakim) 593-570 Ezekiel in Babylon (exiled in 597 with King Jehoiachin) |
| 500 | 538 Cyrus encouraged the exiles to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1.1) | Isaiah had predicted this: 44:28 - 45:6 520 Haggai 520-470 Zechariah ?430s Malachi |
| 331 | | |

The Lord reigns everywhere – acknowledge Him

Background

Ezekiel in Hebrew means ‘God will strengthen’. The book is all written in the first person. Unlike the other OT prophets, Ezekiel gives dates for events. Priests normally began their duties in the Temple at age 30. Here we see God calling Ezekiel instead to a prophetic ministry with a vision of reassurance. Ezekiel’s vision of God is divided. ‘Above’ and ‘below’ the great ‘expanse’ (23,25) means Heaven and Earth. When speaking of earthly things, he describes the vision exactly as seen. In Heaven, however, pertaining to God, descriptions are qualified as being ‘like’. It shows God in each: on earth, all-seeing, all-knowing and all powerful; in heaven, utterly majestic and glorious. Throughout his ministry Ezekiel expresses this sense of awe and holy fear.

Word list

| | | |
|----|---------------------------|---|
| 1 | <i>exiles</i> | Jews who had been deported to Babylonia in 597BC |
| | <i>Kebbar</i> | Babylonian river, location unknown (<i>Heb: ‘a long time’</i>) |
| | <i>visions</i> | dreams in which God spoke to the prophet |
| 2 | <i>Jehoiachin</i> | king of Judah deported to Babylonia in 597BC |
| 3 | <i>word of the Lord</i> | most frequent phrase associated with OT prophets |
| 4 | <i>out of the north</i> | direction they had come from when being brought from Jerusalem to Babylon |
| 12 | <i>spirit</i> | Hebrew word <i>ruah</i> can mean (i) Spirit of God; (ii) wind which brought storm cloud from north; (iii) spirit within the living creatures; (iv) vital impulse or energy by which God from his throne acted upon them. |
| 16 | <i>chrysolite</i> | yellow jasper or topaz |
| 24 | <i>Almighty</i> | another Hebrew word <i>Shaddai</i> for the Lord |
| 26 | <i>sapphire</i> | or lapis lazuli, stone highly prized in ancient world |
| | <i>like that of a man</i> | Ezekiel is writing with great care, leading to 28b |

Bible Connections

| | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1 | <i>rivers of Babylon</i> | <i>see also</i> Psalm 137:1 |
| 5 | <i>4 faces and 4 wings</i> | <i>cf</i> Isaiah 6:2; <i>cf</i> 4 creatures, 6 wings: Rev 4:6b-8 |
| 22 | <i>expanse sparkling like ice</i> | Same as ‘sea of glass like crystal’ in Rev 4:6a? |
| 28 | <i>fell face down in awe</i> | <i>cf</i> Peter in Luke 5:8 |

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

What surprises or confuses you?

2) The Context

What other parts of the Bible – surrounding passage, individual book, whole Bible, or Bible story – might help you understand this passage?

LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions the passage raises?

- 2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?
- 3) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

LISTEN

- 1) What is the lesson or the main point?
- 2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? v.

LIVE

- 1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?
 - a) His nature and character?
 - b) His grace?
 - c) Jesus and His salvation?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

- 2) What should I do?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Do not ‘mince’ His Word!

Background

Ezekiel’s vision continues as God calls him and commissions him to be his messenger to the rebellious people, his ‘countrymen in exile.’ (v11)

‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says’ is the distinctive mark of all true spokesmen of the Lord, right from Moses’ time.

Word List

- 2:1** *son of man* Hebrew phrase emphasising Ezekiel’s insignificance or mere humanity. It occurs over 90 times in Ezekiel.
- 2:3** *the Israelites* ie his fellow exiles in Babylon
- 2:4** *obstinate and stubborn* literally, ‘hard of face and firm of heart’
- 2:9** *on both sides of it* unusual feature: scrolls were usually inscribed only on the inside; may indicate the completeness of God’s plans.
- 3:16** *watchman* sentinel, alert to warn of approaching danger
- 3:20** *righteous man* Hebrew *saddiq* was essentially one who showed by his good living his adherence to the ten commandments and the stipulations of the covenant
- stumbling block* Heb *miksot* means ‘occasion for stumbling’, literally or in an ethical sense
- die for his sin* may mean ‘liable to an early or violent death’ ie temporal reference

Bible connections

- 2: 1** *Son of man* see Gen1:27-28. Phrase takes on special significance when referring to Christ see Daniel 7:13-14, Mark 2:28 etc.
- 2: 9** *both sides* compare Revelation 5:1
- 3: 3** *God’s words sweet as honey* see Jeremiah 15:16; cf Psalms 19:10; 119:103
- 3:15** *seven days* cf Ezra 9:4; Job 2:13; Acts 9:9
- 3:16** *watchman* see Habakkuk 2:1; Isaiah 56:10 cf 62:6; Jeremiah 6:17; Hosea 9:8
- 3:20** *accountable for his blood* principle expressed in Genesis 9:5f

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- 2) What should I do?

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Beware! Judgment is coming

Background

Chapters 4-24 contain vivid denunciation, appeal and warning. Ch. 4 is an example of the dramatic ‘visual aids’ employed. Ezekiel is told to make a ‘model’ to symbolise what is going to happen to Jerusalem in 586BC. God would be bringing armies against Jerusalem to bring her to the ground.

Lying on his left side for 390 days and on right for 40 days symbolises the duration of the punishment Israel and Judah will endure for their sins. (390 = the time since Solomon’s dedication of the Temple? 40 yrs = the time in the wilderness after Egypt? 390 + 40 = 430 years – which parallels the time of captivity in Egypt (Exodus 12:40)?

Ezekiel is also put on ‘starvation rations’. Using human excrement as fuel was to indicate the defilement which would come on the exiles through being compelled to live and eat in a heathen environment. When Ezekiel protests that he at least has kept himself ritually clean, God graciously allows him to use cow dung instead. (NB ‘not so’ is the first time Ezekiel has spoken!)

Word List

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------|--|
| 1 | <i>clay tablet</i> | or ‘brick’, presumably fairly large |
| 2 | <i>siege works</i> | ‘fort’ in AV, ‘siege wall’ in RSV; Hebrew <i>dayeq</i> is a collective noun always in the singular <i>see</i> 2 Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 52:4 where it seems to mean a chain of towers around the besieged city. |
| 3 | <i>iron pan</i> | probably large, saucer-shaped piece of metal used as griddle for baking bread |
| 4 | <i>yourself</i> | or ‘your side’ |
| 10 | <i>20 shekels</i> | about 8ozs (200g) |
| 11 | <i>one sixth of a hin</i> | about 1 pint (0.6litre) |
| 12 | <i>barley cake</i> | baked without yeast, fare of the poor |
| 15 | <i>cow manure</i> | a normal form of fuel in the East, even today |

Bible connections

- | | | |
|-----|--|--|
| 1-3 | <i>symbolic actions</i> | <i>see eg</i> 1 Kings 11:30; 2 Kings 13:17; Isaiah 20:2-4; Jeremiah 13:1-11; Acts 21:10-11 |
| 4,6 | <i>day for each year</i> | <i>see also</i> Numbers 14:34; Daniel 9:24 |
| 14 | <i>found dead / killed by wild animal, ie with blood still in it</i> | (Lev 17:10-13) unclean meat <i>see</i> Lev 22:8; Deuteronomy 14:21 <i>see also</i> 1 Corinthians 8:1f; Acts 10:14f |

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 - c) Jesus and His salvation?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

- 2) What should I do?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Study 4

Ezekiel 10:18 – 11:25

‘Exiles’ – persist in hope in the Lord!

Background

The first vision (1:2-3:14) - shows God's presence in Heaven and on Earth and comes to Ezekiel while he is in Babylon

For this second vision (8:1-11:24) - the Holy Spirit 'takes' Ezekiel to Jerusalem, to show him the idolatry that has been going on at the Temple.

In ch. 10 he is shown God's glory departing from the Temple, but then pausing at the east gate (10:18-20).

In **ch 11** vv1-13 - Ezekiel stands at the east gate; God tells him He will punish the evil plotters in the city.

vv14-21 - The Lord promises that the exiles already in Babylon will, after their time of discipline, be brought back, by a gracious gift of God.

v23 - Ezekiel tells us the glory of the Lord left the city, and the Spirit brings Ezekiel back to Babylonia in his vision.

Word list

10:19-22 *Cherubim* Hebrew plural of cherub. Normally used for the two carved figures in the most holy part of the Temple, 'guarding' the covenant box. Ezekiel is now using this term for the winged figures of ch 1:5-9 etc.

11:1 *gate, that faces east* ie outside the sacred area, a place for public assembly
house of the Lord the Temple in Jerusalem

2 *Jaazaniah, Pelatiah* two leaders in the political pressure group

3 *Will it not soon be time to build houses? or* This is not the time to build houses
...city is a cooking pot... A popular proverb.

7-12 *you* the repeated 'you' is emphatic

13 *Pelatiah* meaning - 'the Lord has delivered' - (a remnant?)

15 *blood relatives* or, 'are in exile with you'

16 *sanctuary* used of Temple ie Where God was present (8:6; 9:6)

23 *mountain east of it* ie Mount of Olives

Bible Connections

10:19 *cherubim* Gen 3:24; Ex 25:18-22, cf Heb 9:5; 1 Kings 6:26

11:10 *die at the borders of Israel at Riblah* see 2 Kings 25:18-21

14-25 *hope for the exiles* cf Jeremiah 24:7; 31:33; 32:39f

24b *vision went up from him* cf Genesis 17:22; 35:13

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For God's sake, believe in Jesus

Background

“The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge,” was a common proverb in Israel (*see* Jeremiah 31:29). The people were saying God was unjust to send *them* to exile because of their *parents’* sins. (v25,29) The second commandment (Exodus 20:5) refers to the on-going effect of ancestral sins.

The chapter is important for vindicating God’s justice. Ezekiel says their complaint is pernicious because they were justifying themselves and accusing God of being unjust. It led to a spirit of fatalism and irresponsibility: you could shrug off any sense of personal sin.

Ezekiel’s concern here is to point out that in God’s eyes, people are individuals and treated as such; everyone will be responsible to God for his or her own conduct. He then gives three cases to illustrate the principle, at vv5,10,14.

Word list

- | | | |
|-----------|------------------------|--|
| 4 | <i>soul</i> | Hebrew <i>nepes</i> represents the totality of a person or the life force in him |
| 7 | <i>return...pledge</i> | duty to return any article taken in pledge which was necessary for existence or well-being eg cloak at night |
| 12,13, 24 | <i>detestable acts</i> | ‘abominations’ |
| 24 | <i>commits sin</i> | <i>ie</i> persistent choice of evil |

Bible Connections

- | | | |
|-------|---|---|
| 7 | <i>returning a pledge</i> | <i>cf</i> Exodus 22:26; Deuteronomy 24:6; Amos 2:8 |
| 8 | <i>Usury forbidden on loans when someone is in distress</i> | <i>see</i> Deuteronomy 23:19f; Psalm 15:1,5a |
| 23,32 | <i>Repent and live</i> | <i>cf</i> 2 Peter 3:9 <i>see also</i> Ezekiel 36:26 |

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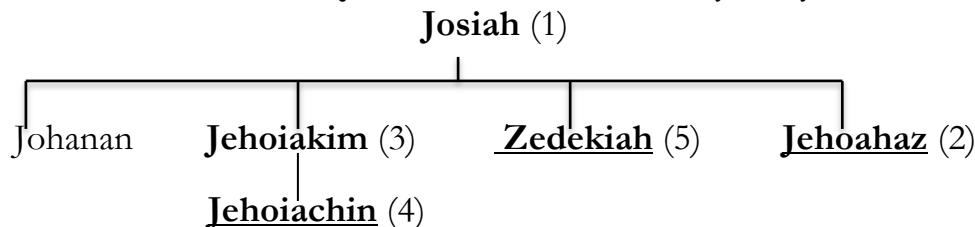
Acknowledge your sin

Background

This poem is Ezekiel's first use of a *qina*, a 'dirge', 'elegy' or 'lamentation'. It has a distinctive mournful rhythm, in which the two members of the couplet are of unequal length. It is very hard to echo it in an English translation.

The subjects of his lament are the three, related kings of Judah in the 23 years before the Babylonians captured Jerusalem:

- v 4 Jehoahaz, last son of Josiah, who was taken captive to **Egypt** in 609BC by Pharaoh Necho (2 Kings 23:33) and eventually died there as Jeremiah foretold. (Jer. 22:10-12; Shallum was another name for him.)
- v 9 Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, (therefore grandson of Josiah) who was exiled to **Babylon** in 597BC (2 Kings 24:8-15; 25:27-30)
- v14 Zedekiah, also a son of Josiah who was the last of the Davidic line of rulers and exiled to **Babylon**. This ended the dynasty.



Bold = Kings. 1-5 = the order in which they became King

Underline = Kings exiled (ie those mentioned in ch 19)

For all their prowess and renown, these men fell victims to the judgment of God on their lives. (2 Kings 23:32; 24:9, 19)

Lions were common in Palestine until shortly after the Crusades. Hebrew had five different words to describe them, three of which are used in v2.

Word list

- 1 *princes* Hebrew *nasi*, a general term for rulers.
- 2 *lioness* *ie* the nation who mothered these kings.
- 9 *cage* Hebrew *sugar* = an animal's cage, or a neck-band with which lines of prisoners were roped together.
- 10 *mother like a vine* *ie* the nation of Israel, previously pictured as a lioness.

Bible Connections

- 1 *Lion* 1:10; cf Gen 49:9//Rev 5:5; Mic 5:8; 1 Kings 10:19f
- 10 *Vine and vineyard* see 15:1-6; Isaiah 5:1-7; cf Matt 21:33-41; John 15:1-8

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Now underline the application of the Main Point.

- 2) What should I do?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Devastation? – but know God is in control!

Background

Jeremiah had spoken God's Word to Israel to 'serve the King of Babylon and live' (Jeremiah 27:7). Ignoring God, Zedekiah made alliances with Egypt and surrounding kings instead.

That provoked Nebuchadnezzar to return to Jerusalem. The date in v1 is normally given as 15 January 588 BC; the same date is given in 2 Kings 25:1, Jeremiah 52:4, when he began his final siege of Jerusalem. Zechariah says (8:19) it became a fast day for the exiles, commemorating the fall of the holy city.

v3-5, 'the song of the cooking pot' could well have been a household cooking song, rather like "Polly put the kettle on". Turning it into a message was a typically prophetic way of speaking.

v6-8 and v9-14 are two oracles dependent on each other & on the poem v3-5. Typical Jewish mourning rites included noisy sighs like groaning, removing headwear and covering the head in dust and ashes, sandals taken off in times of distress, covering lips (compulsory for lepers) and eating funeral meals.

v27 indicates a turning point in Ezekiel's task. His prophecies of doom will no longer be needed. He can now become a shepherd and watchman for his people, working to build up a new community, a new Israel.

The 4 pillars of Israel's traditional faith are about to be destroyed – the Land. The Temple, the Davidic Kingship and the Covenant.

Word list

| | | |
|----|---------------------------------|--|
| 3 | <i>parable</i> | or allegory |
| 6 | <i>deposit</i> | probably a rusty scum |
| | <i>piece by piece</i> | <i>ie</i> indiscriminately |
| 7 | <i>on the bare rock</i> | <i>ie</i> not covered by earth in burial, still visible |
| 16 | <i>the delight of your eyes</i> | your wife, and my sanctuary (21,25) |
| 17 | <i>turban</i> | normal headdress of a priest like Ezekiel |
| 21 | <i>my sanctuary</i> | <i>ie</i> the Temple in Jerusalem ('the delight of your eyes') |
| 26 | <i>a fugitive</i> | Hebrew is really <i>the fugitive</i> see 33:21 |

Bible Connections

- 3-5 *song of the cooking pot* cf Jeremiah's vision of a boiling pot Jer. 1:13f.
- 6-8 *blood crying out for vengeance* cf Genesis 4:10; Job 16:18; Isaiah 26:21.
- 15-17 *Mourning rites* cf Mark 5:38; Joshua 7:6; 2 Samuel 15:30; Jer. 16:5-13.

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Discern Satan's work and fate

Background

Chs 4-24 God warns Jerusalem that its fall is imminent (24:25-27)

Chs 25-32 God gives oracles against the surrounding nations with an interesting structure: 97 verses either side of 28:24-26.

Chs 26 – 28 God deals with the cities of Tyre and Sidon and promises a land for His people.

Around 590 BC when Ezekiel was prophesying, Tyre was a strong seafaring, trading nation. The city has two parts, one on the mainland and the other on a seemingly impregnable rock about 1 mile off the coast, from which it gets its name.

Tyre thought it could profit from the fall of Jerusalem (26:2) but God tells Ezekiel He'll use Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, for them too: just after Jerusalem fell, Neb. captured Tyre's land-base after a 13 years' siege. (585-572 BC). The island base was destroyed 270 years later, 322 BC, when Alexander built a causeway out to it.

Outline

Ch 26 Ezekiel made prophecies about Tyre that were fulfilled: Nebuchadnezzar would destroy the mainland (8), Nations would come against Tyre (3), She will be made a bare rock (4), Fishermen will spread nets over her (5), Debris thrown into water (12); Never rebuilt (14); Never found again (21).

Ch 27 Tyre is pictured as a wealthy trading-vessel which will be ship-wrecked.

Ch 28 Pronounces judgement on the King of Tyre and laments his fall, (and also Sidon), and then gives hope for the Lord's repatriation of His people.

Interpretation

During his ministry Jesus referred little to his place in the OT (eg John 3:13-15; Matthew 12:39ff; Luke 4:18). However, on the day of the resurrection, Jesus explained 'all that was said concerning himself in Scriptures' (Luke 24:27).

Similarly, though the NT often refers to Satan and his demon legions, the OT has few explicit references to him. One of these is Ezekiel 28 and the 'king of Tyre'.

Word List

- 1 *Tyre* Heb 'rock'. On the coast, about 35 miles NW of the Sea of Galilee.
- 3 *Daniel* (see also 14:14,20) Hebrew 'God is my judge'.
- 12 *lament* Hebrew *qinah* means funeral dirge. (cf Isaiah 14:4-23)

Bible connections

- 2 *as wise as a God* cf Genesis 3:5; Psalm 9:20; 82:6-7.
- 11ff *cf Isaiah's prophecy against Babylon* Isaiah 14:12-15.
(Satan in OT only refs – Gen 3:1ff; 1 Chron 21:1; Job 1:6ff, Zech 3:1)
demise of Satan 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 20:10.
- 13 *precious stones* reminiscent of high-priest's breastplate see Ex 28:17-20.
- 24 *Cherub guarding Eden.* Genesis 3:24.

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- 2) What should I do?

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Series B

Study 9

Ezekiel 33:21-33

The Lord is in charge – take Him seriously

Background

Following the Assyrian invasion of the Northern Tribes of Israel (721 BC), the population was deported and replaced by immigrants (2 Kings 17:24).

When Babylon overran Judah (587 BC), they deported the nation but left behind some of the poorest people to work the land (2 Kings 15:11,12).

[A residue was finally snuffed out by Nebuchadnezzar in 582 BC – Jer. 52:30]

In Chs 1-24 Ezekiel's main concern was with Jerusalem as it *was* and *had been*.

Ch 24 ff Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, has been besieging Jerusalem

Ch 33 onwards, Ezekiel is concerned with what Jerusalem *will* be.

Chs 33-37 start a new section referring to *after* the fall of Jerusalem.

33:1-20 repeats two statements dealing with human responsibility:

v1-9 *Ezekiel's* responsibility to be a watchman for the people, warning them of approaching danger. *Compare with* 3:16-21 (Study 2, p 13).

v10-20 *Each hearer's* responsibility to repent individually so that they may live and not die. *Compare with* 18:21-29 (Study 5 p 27).

33:21-29 is an oracle to the people whom the Babylonians left in Jerusalem ('poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields' *Jeremiah* 52:16) who thought they could claim all the land for *themselves*!

33:30-33 concerns the exiles in Babylon and the shallowness of their sincerity as they listen to the prophet whose words had come true.

Word list

21 12th year. . . 586BC ie 3 years after ch 24.

23 *Abraham* the 'Father' of Israel see Genesis 17:5-10

Bible Connections

21-22 *city has fallen, Ezekiel's mouth opened* see 3:26-27; 24:25-27

24 *misunderstanding 'Abraham's descendants'* cf John 8:33-40; Luke 3:8

31 *actions showing self-seeking* cf Acts 8:18

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Study 10

Ezekiel 36:16-38

GRACE!!!

Background

By chapters 33-37, Jerusalem has fallen, the people are now in exile in Babylon, under discipline. God speaks to them in a quite different spirit.

A new order is promised, the core of which is the change of heart that must happen if God's new society is to come about. (36:26-27)

vv 1-7 prophesy that the contempt which heathen nations heaped on Judah would return on their own heads.

vv 8-15 tell of the fruitfulness of Israel which the exiles will enjoy when they return home.

In vv 16-38 God tells Ezekiel about the new kind of covenant he will establish for his people, for the sake of his holy name. He will do it through the house of Israel (v23).

Word List

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|--|
| 26 | <i>heart</i> | In Hebrew thinking, the heart includes the will and mind; it is the seat of the personality, a person's inmost nature. |
| | <i>spirit</i> | Here it refers to what drives and regulates desires, thoughts and conduct <i>see also</i> Study 1 ch. 1 v12 (p.8) |
| | <i>heart of stone</i> | ie contrary to nature, hard-hearted. |
| | <i>heart of flesh</i> | ie a tender, responsive heart as God designed it to be. |
| 27 | <i>Spirit</i> | Here refers to God the Holy Spirit. |

Bible connections

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 24-28 <i>new heart and spirit</i> | <i>see also</i> Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:10-12 |
| <i>the change it produces</i> | <i>see</i> Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9b-11; Romans 6:6-11. |
| <i>cleansing in Levitical law</i> | <i>see</i> Exodus 30:17-21; Leviticus 16:14-16; Numbers 19:17-19. |

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Praise God for your resurrection

Background

In their exile in the P.O.W. camps of Babylon, the Jews felt demoralised and hopeless (v11).

vv1-10. In a vivid vision, God tells Ezekiel he will put his Spirit into his people.

vv11-14 uses the language of resurrection to illustrate the promise of Israel's return to a new life in their own land from the deathlike existence in exile. One fulfilment of this was when the next emperor, Cyrus, allowed them to return to Judea and rebuild the temple (so they could pray for him).

vv15-23 uses a simple visual aid to show how God will reconcile his people so that they become one. NB at this point (721BC) 'Ephraim etc' (ie Israel) is scattered among nations (2 Kings 17:6; 18:11), 'Judah etc' is exiled in Babylon

vv24-28 talk about the reign of the coming Messiah, developing what was said in ch 34 describing God as the Shepherd of his people.

In this chapter, the Hebrew word *ruah* is translated 3 different ways: In vv1,14 as Spirit; v5,6,8,9,10 as breath; v9 as wind or winds. (In the NT, the Gk word *pneuma* can have the *same three meanings*; two of them are used in John 3:3-8).

Word List

- 1,2 *valley* same Hebrew word as the *plain* in 3:22, probably the same location intended.
- 4 *Lord you know* i.e. 'You know the answer to that – of course they can't!'
- Prophecy* *command in the Lord's name (cf 9,12).*
- 5 *breath* Hebrew *ruah* can mean breath, wind or spirit
- 6 '*will know that I am the Lord*' – used 70x in Ezekiel; only 20x in rest of Bible.
- 7 *rattling sound* or an earthquake. Both meanings of word occur in Ezekiel (3:12f; 12:18; 38:19).
- 9 *four winds* ie the four corners of the earth cf 7:2
- 16 *Judah, Joseph (Ephraim his son)* ie representing the 2 kingdoms of earlier days
- 24 *my servant* a clear Messianic title.
- 25 *king and prince for ever* again, Messianic titles.

Bible connections

- 11,14 *demoralised people revitalised* see John 20:19,22; Acts 2; Eph. 2:1-10.
- 16 *writing on sticks* cf Numbers 17:2ff; Zechariah 11:7ff.
- 22,24 *one flock, one shepherd* see John 10:14-16; Ephesians 2:11-22.

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Believe in God's victory over all evil

Background

The sheer number of sevens in chs 38,39 indicates we are dealing with something symbolic; there will be many fulfilments of this prophecy through history, culminating in a final and total one. (To the Hebrews, seven was the complete, perfect, divine number (*cf* Genesis 2:2))

38:1-6 The hordes from the 'far north' (6) represent the direction from which the worst of Israel's foes came.

39:1-16 retells the story of the overthrow of Gog in different language and fuller detail. This is typical of Hebrew poetry and the semi-poetical writing used in these oracles. The repeated use of the number 'seven' indicates we are dealing with apocalyptic symbolism (revealing the final/end times)

39:17-24 picks up on 39:4 and gives us a graphic, though gruesome picture of a great sacrificial feast.

39:25-29 tells how every captivity of God's people will end.

Ch 39 concludes this section of the prophecy – (33:21-39:29) on 12th year of exile. The next section begins on the 25th year of the exile (40:1-48:35).

Word List

- | | | |
|----|------------------|---|
| 1 | <i>Gog</i> | probably symbolising personified head of the forces of evil which are intent on destroying the people of God. |
| 6 | <i>Magog</i> | the land of Gog <i>see</i> 38:1 |
| 11 | <i>Hamon Gog</i> | means 'hordes' of Gog |
| 16 | <i>Hammonah</i> | means horde |
| 18 | <i>Bashan</i> | the very fertile area east of River Jordan and north of Gilead |

Bible connections

- 17-24 *the Lord's sacrifice* *see* Isaiah 63:1-6; Jeremiah 46:10; Revelation 19:17-21
- 25-29 *captivity of God's people will end* *see* John 8:31-36
- 25 *bring Jacob back from captivity* *see* 29:14; Ps 14:7, 126:1-3; Amos 9:14

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Study 13

Ezekiel 43:1-27

Believe you are accepted through Jesus

Background

Chs 40-48 take place later than the other visions / oracles in ch. 39: we jump from the 12th year of Ezekiel's exile in ch. 1-39 (except for 29:17-21), to the 25th. The vision of God's glory leaving the Temple (10:18ff) is now reversed 19 years later when He returns (43:5).

In this section

- a) Ezekiel is taken to a 'very high mountain' - probably Mt Zion (40:2).
- b) An 'angel' shows the Temple area starting at the East gate (40:6-42:20).
- c) The Glory of the Lord then re-enters the temple (43:1-12).
- d) The altar sacrifices are described (43:13-27).
- e) Regulations for ordering the Temple (re priests etc (ch 44 & 45).
- f) More ritual regulations (45:18-46:24).
- g) The river flows from the Temple (47:1-12).
- h) The land is described for 12 tribes. City gates specified (47:13-48:35).

The name of the city is "**THE LORD IS THERE**" (48:35).

Understanding chapters 40-48

- 1] Literal? - Thin in detail. Impossible to follow. Not reflected in 2nd Temple.
- 2] Fulfilled in Church? - Ezekiel and Revelation have much in common but in the latter, John's city has no Temple and no sacrifices, for the Lord God and the Lamb are its Temple (Rev 21:1-22:5)
- 3] Symbolic ('Apocalyptic Typology') - A mixture - The Temple is present? Sacrifices are offered? God is there!? Cf the present age – An in-between stage? The Kingdom of God has started (Mt 3:2; 12:28) but is yet to come in its fullness. (1 Corinthians 15:24; Revelation 12:10)

Word list

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------------|--|
| 1 | <i>gate facing east</i> | The gate from which God's glory had departed to join the exiles in Babylon (10:18,19; 11:22) Gate through which Jews expect Messiah to come (44:1ff). Blocked up by Muslim leader Saladin in 12 th C |
| 7,9 | <i>prostitution</i> | <i>ie</i> their spiritual adultery, worshipping other 'gods'. |
| 7 | <i>idols</i> | or corpses, <i>ie</i> kings buried there |
| 12 | <i>law of the temple</i> | Hebrew <i>torah</i> , its 'pattern' of holiness |

Bible Connections

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|---|
| 2 | <i>roar of rushing waters</i> | <i>cf</i> 1:24 |
| | <i>land radiant with his glory</i> | <i>cf</i> Deut. 33:2; Isaiah 60:1-3 Habakkuk 3:3f |
| 5 | <i>glory filled the temple</i> | <i>cf</i> Solomon's temple 1 Kings 8:10f; <i>cf</i> Is 6:1-3 |
| 7 | <i>throne-room</i> | <i>see</i> 1 Kings 8:12,13,27; <i>cf</i> Jeremiah 3:17; 17:12 |

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Look to Jesus for all you need before God

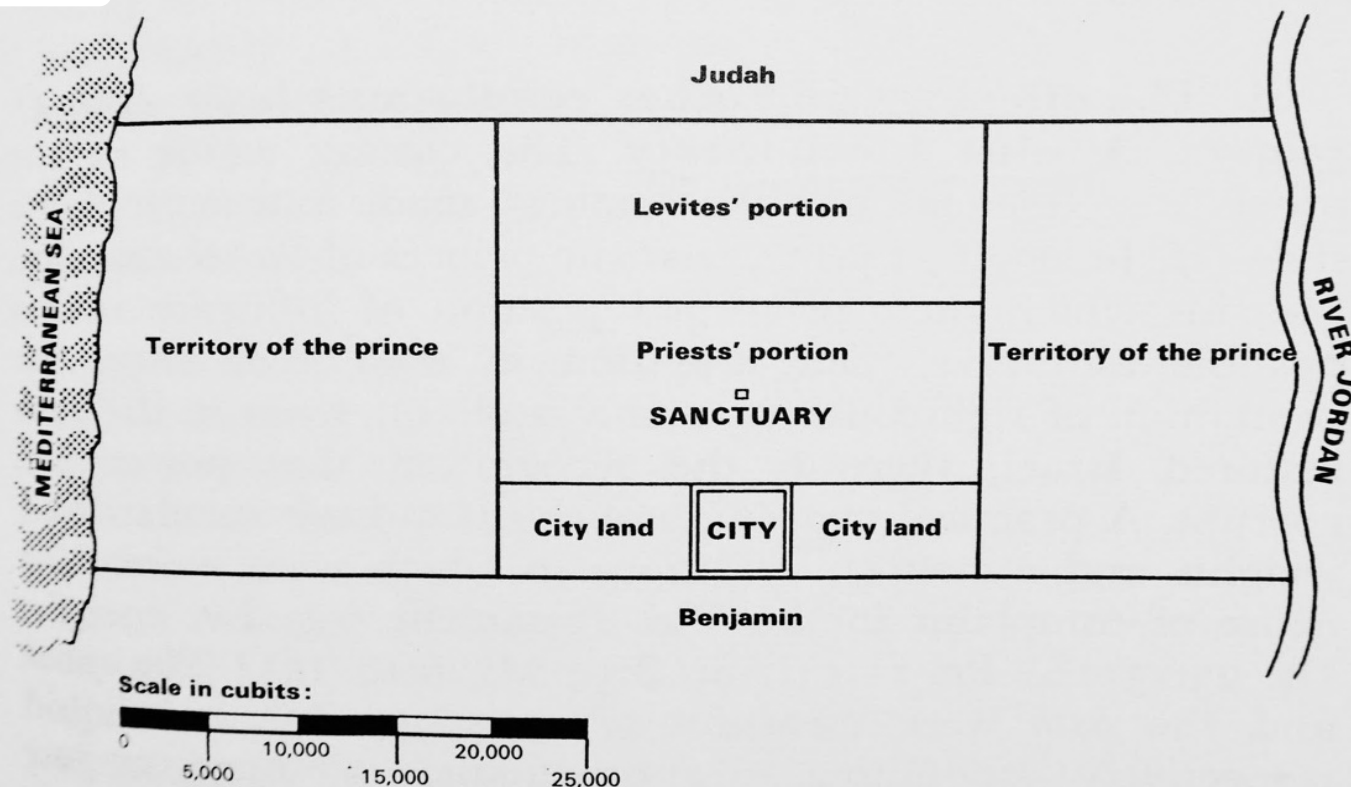
Background

Chapters 40-48 tell of salvation for God's people, victory over the enemies of God and his people, and finally a new temple, a new Torah (instructions about life and worship) and a new Eden *see p3*.

Ch 45 deals with:

- a) vv 1-8a The centre of the new holy land is God Himself! The protected area around the Temple, separating holy and secular areas, was like a green belt. The Prince's land was to east and west. (i.e. the former habit of kings annexing land belonging to the people was to stop!) Allocation to the separate tribes of Israel comes later, in ch. 47-48.
- b) vv 8b-17 The special gift offered through the prince
The 'prince' is a messianic figure, though in Ezekiel he has sons (46:16) and presents an offering for himself (45:22)?!
- c) vv 18-25 Offerings in the sanctuary
It marks the Passover to the promised land, cleansing of the sanctuary (18-20), revised regulations for Passover (21-24); feast of tabernacles (25).

APPORTIONMENT OF THE LAND



Word List

- 1ff *cubits* 1 cubit = 1 ins 10,000 cubits = 4.57 km. i.e. under 3 miles.
- 7 *prince* Hebrew *nasi*, prince over the tribes under God's kingship, one who *serves* rather than *dominates* (cf 17, 22).
- 9 *accurate/honest* related to the term right/righteousness (9).
- 10 *ephah* = 22 litres (used only of cereals) = 1 *bath* (dry measure only)
- 12 *shekel* = 10 gm. 50 shekels = 1 Mina (500 g). 60 Mina = 1 *Talent* (30Kg).
- 13 *homer* = 10 ephahs i.e. 220 litres, or 'a donkey load' = 1 *Cor*, used of fine flour, wheat, barley and as a liquid measure of oil.
(See New Bible Dictionary under 'Weights and Measures, OT')
- 25 *Feast...* ie the Feast of Tabernacles/Shelters, at harvest time.

Bible connections

- 8 *Fair allocation of land* cf Isaiah 5:8; 1 Kings 21; Galatians 3:26-29
- 9 *Do what is just and right* see Jeremiah 22:3, 13-17; Zechariah 7:9-10; Titus 2:11-3:2
- 23 *No mention of the Passover lamb in the Passover!* (cf Ex 12:3-7)
- 25 *7th month 15th day* = Feast of Tabernacles (but *omits* Feast of Weeks, Day of Trumpets, 8th day of Tabernacles, Day of Atonement!)

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Do you see God's purpose, revealed by Jesus?

Background

Ezekiel has a vision of an extraordinary river that grows miraculously as it flows from the temple, turning the Dead Sea into the Sea of Life. It was a startling vision which made him think. (Modern translations omit three 'beholds' in v1-7, as well as 'Do you see this?' in v 6.)

The fulfilment of the message (1-12) may be

- 1) The river means God's grace as the exiles returned and rebuilt the 2nd Temple and listened to God's Word (Ezra 6:14-16; Nehemiah 8:8-10)
- 2) Or it may refer to the springs of living water that Jesus foretold the Holy Spirit would bring (John 4:14; 7:37).
- 3) Or the river of the water of life that John foretold, Revelation 22:1-5.

The land will be divided equally amongst all, Jew and foreigner alike (22).

Word List

| | | |
|----|------------------|---|
| 8 | <i>Arabah</i> | the Jordan valley |
| | <i>Sea</i> | the Dead Sea |
| | <i>Fresh</i> | lit 'healed' |
| 10 | <i>En Gedi</i> | midway along W side of Dead Sea, still same name today. |
| | <i>En Eglaim</i> | probably N of En Gedi. Possibly the currently named 'Ain Feshka', a spring near Qumran (famous as the place where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found). |
| | | En Gedi to En Eglaim = right round coast of Dead Sea? |
| | <i>Great Sea</i> | the Mediterranean |

Bible connections

| | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | <i>river</i> | see Psalm 46:4-7; Joel 3:18; Zechariah 14:4-9; Genesis 2:10; John 7:37ff; Revelation ch 22 |
| 9 | <i>living creatures/ swarm/ teem</i> | cf Genesis 1:20-24 |
| 12 | <i>leaves for healing</i> | cf Genesis 2:15-17; Revelation 22:2,3 |
| 23 | <i>room for aliens/ Gentiles</i> | see Isaiah 56:3-8; Acts 10:34-35, 44-48 Romans 10:11-12; Matthew 28:18-20 |

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

What surprises or confuses you?

2) The Context

What other parts of the Bible – surrounding passage, individual book, whole Bible, or Bible story – might help you understand this passage?

LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions the passage raises?

- 2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?
- 3) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

LISTEN

- 1) What is the lesson or the main point?
- 2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? v.

LIVE

- 1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?
 - a) His nature and character?
 - b) His grace?
 - c) Jesus and His salvation?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

- 2) What should I do?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Note

The Bible Project provides a very helpful Overview of many books of the Bible in short movies which can be viewed free on-line. Each builds into an A4 page, which can be downloaded and printed , also free.

See

www.thebibleproject.com

Old Testament Ezekiel Read Scripture Overview

(For Ezekiel, the movie is in two parts. Since they are on YouTube, you need to click Stop at the end of the second movie, or it will run on to material chosen by YouTube

Sharing the Word

Use

Hearing the Word can be used alone, with one other person, or in a group

Preparing for a group

Time put in alone beforehand will greatly benefit time spent together.

Work through the stages - LOOK, LEARN, LISTEN, LIVE.

Write down your own questions and answers. *

Format

- a. LOOK - Any questions? (If answer is known or not!)
Relevant cross references in rest of the Bible?
- b. LEARN - Answers to questions?
- c. LISTEN - Key verse and Main Point?
- d. LIVE - What does it show about God /His grace/ Jesus?
What should I do

n.b. Leave plenty of time for the LIVE section!

By also eating together and a time of prayer, you will have shared something of the life of the early church! (Acts 2:42-47)

Remember!

As we gather round God's Word -

- a) Listen to the views of others.
- b) Make room for the novice. (They can join in too when you start by listing 'Any questions'.)
- c) Don't let the 'knowledgeable' dominate. Encourage everyone to think for themselves.
- d) Try to include others, especially 'seekers', in your time together.

* The **process** is explained and practiced in a four-hour course, suitable for all, called '**An Introduction to 'Hearing the Word'**

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