










## Ezekiel – 2nd draft

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### Notes

In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: [The Message of Ezekiel](#) by Christopher J. H. Wright, [City Views](#) 10 Bible studies on Ezekiel by George Athas, [Postcard from Palestine](#) by Andrew Reid, [New Bible Commentary](#) 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, [New Bible Dictionary](#) 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, [The Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Part 2](#), [Lion Handbook to the Bible](#) Second Revised Edition, sermon by John Dickson 15/3/2015 and various websites.

Ed O'Connor, 2017

### Study 1, Introduction to the Old Testament

To refresh our thinking on the Old Testament I thought it would be fun to read some quotes and listen to some sound bites while we make our way through the history of God's people up to the time of Ezekiel. Your job is to say where the quote is from and its context in the Bible. Some of these are easy and some are quite hard. See how you go.



#### 1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Where? Gen 1:1

Context? creation

#### 2. "The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Where? Gen 12:1-3

Context? God promises Abram that he will become a great nation and lead them to the Promised Land.

#### 3. Play Highway61Short.mp3

Translation: God said to Abraham "Kill me a son."  
 Abe said "Man, you must be putting me on."  
 God said "No."  
 Abe said "What?"

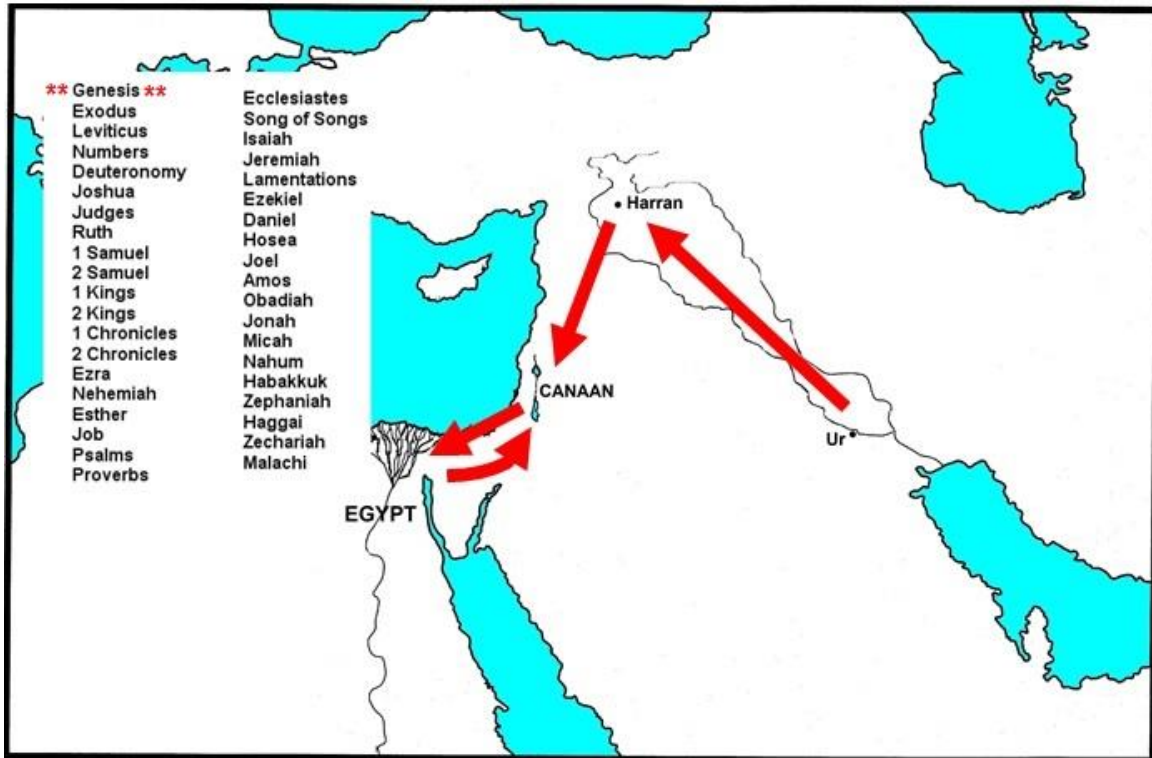
God said "You can do what you want to but, the next time you see me coming you better run."  
 Well Abe said "Where do you want this killing done?"  
 God said "Out on Highway 61."

Bible: Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"  
 "Here I am," he replied.  
 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

Where? Gen 22:1-2

Context? Bible: Abraham & Sarah finally have a son in their old age but God tells Abraham to sacrifice his only son as a test of Abraham's faith.  
 Bob Dylan: You can get away with anything in America, out on Highway 61.

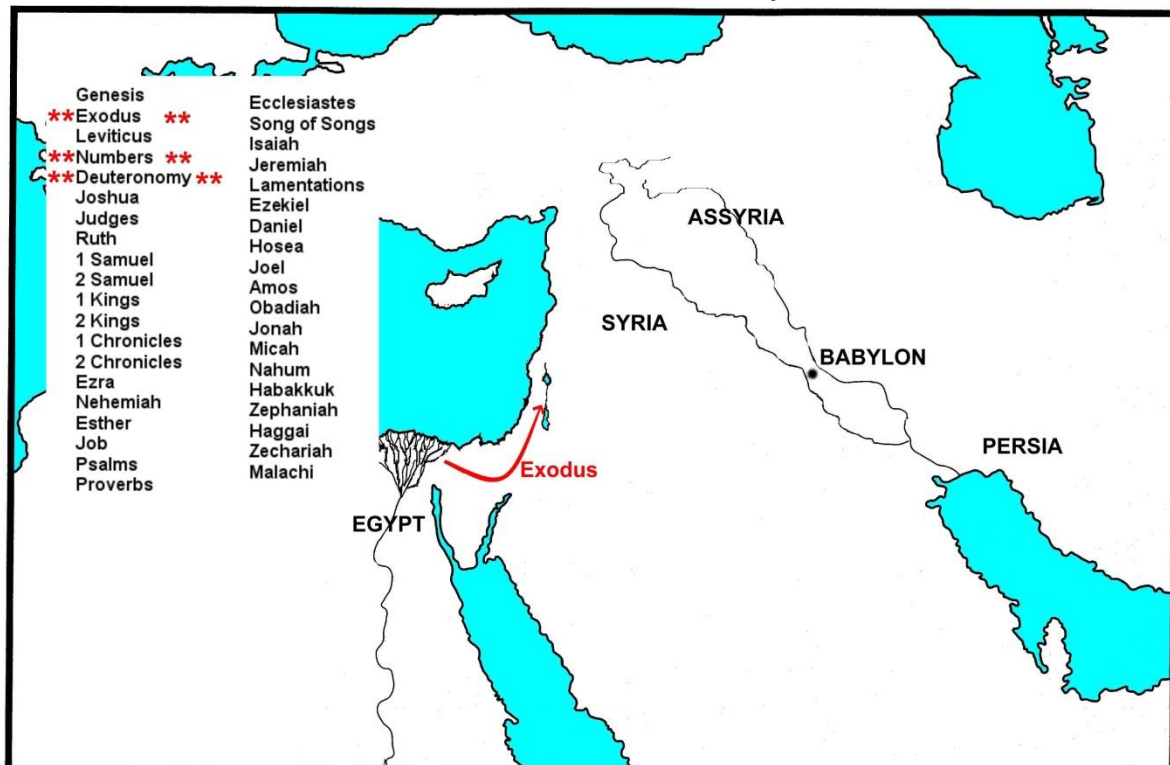
Beginning at roughly 1900 BC, God called Abraham to be a father of a great nation (Gen 12). Genesis relates the story of his travels and eventual settling in the Promised Land, Canaan.



Famine forced God's people to Egypt and they spent more than 400 years in bondage to the Pharaohs. God worked to release them from slavery and, under Moses' leadership, they escaped (the Exodus, roughly 1300 BC) and travelled back to the land God had promised them.

The Egyptians were the major world power from 3000 BC to 1000 BC (these dates are very approximate). The Great Pyramid of Giza was completed in 2600 BC.

The escape from Egypt is described in the book of **Exodus**. The trip of 40 yrs. wandering in the desert before getting to Israel is described in **Numbers**. On the verge of Palestine, Moses lectures his people to prepare them for their new life in a new land as related in the book of **Deuteronomy**.

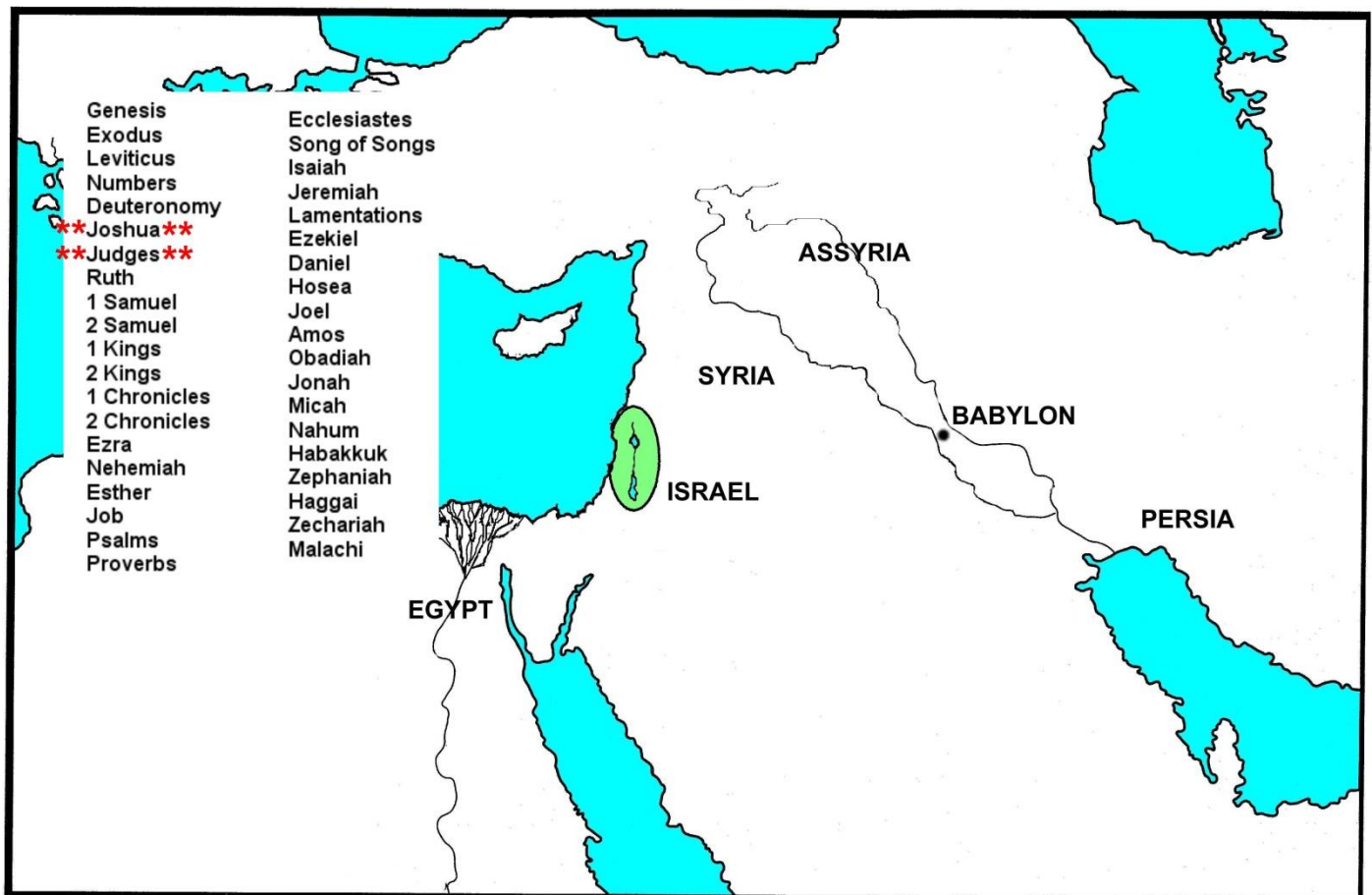


4. "Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour. You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour."

Where? Ex 20:12-17

Context? 10 Commandments made at Mt Sinai while God's people were on their way to the Promised Land.

In Israel, God fights for his people to conquer the indigenous peoples. These battles are described in **Joshua** and **Judges**.



Samuel led God's people after the Judges. After Samuel came the kings with Saul as Israel's first king and David as Israel's second and greatest king until Jesus. David began his reign at about 1000 BC. The history of Samuel and Saul is written in **1 Samuel**.

David was a warrior king and expanded Israel's borders (represented by the green area below). David's story begins at 1 Samuel 16 and continues through **1 and 2 Samuel** and **1 Chronicles**, ending with his death in 1 Kings 2. The focus in Chronicles is on David as king and what is happening in the kingdom, whereas Samuel is interested in David as a person and what is happening in his life. David was also a singer and musician and he wrote many **psalms** describing his feelings, experiences and prayers.

**5. As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.**

Where? 1 Sam 17:48-49

Context? David kills Goliath, the Philistine champion. Israel has a king, Saul, but David will be the next and greatest king besides Jesus.

**6. “The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.”**

Where? Ps 23:1

Context? Psalm of David. Even in the most difficult of circumstances David trusts God to rescue him and bring him goodness and mercy.

**7. When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.**

Where? 2 Sam 7:12-16

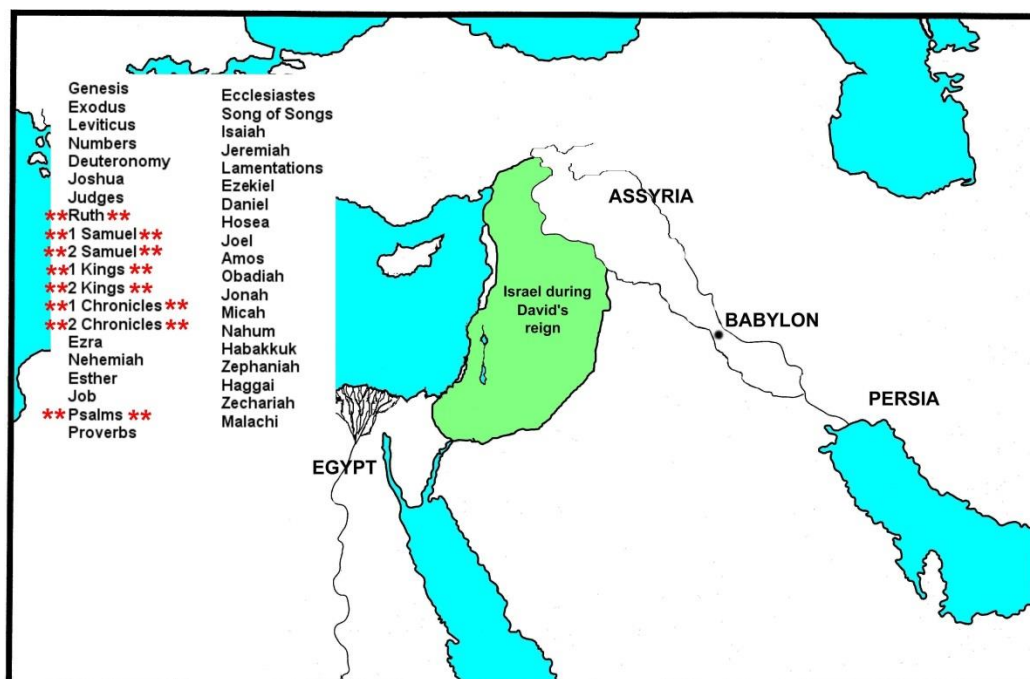
Context? God’s line of kings, through David, will be established forever.

Solomon, David and Bathsheba’s second son (2 Sam 12), became king in 961 BC. After Solomon Israel was split in two in 922 BC with the northern kingdom called Israel and the southern kingdom called Judah. This division into two kingdoms weakened them both and it wasn’t long before other nations threatened them.

**1 and 2 Kings** account for four centuries of Israel’s history with a succession of kings from both the northern and southern kingdoms, ending in exile. 1 and 2 Kings were written as one book from the viewpoint of an Israelite living in exile in Babylon.

**1 and 2 Chronicles** follow the kings from the line of David, ignoring the northern kings. The Chronicler wrote from the viewpoint of an Israelite who had returned from exile with Ezra and Nehemiah.

In contrast, **Ruth** is a quiet tale of ordinary life where a mother, Naomi, and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, move from Moab to Bethlehem and are treated kindly by Boaz. Boaz and Ruth get married and their great grandson is King David.





Assyria became the major world power from about 900 BC to 612 BC. **Jonah** preached God's message of repentance to Nineveh, Assyria's capital, at about 800 BC. They did repent and avoided God's judgement for a time only to re-commit their sins bringing on God's warning through **Nahum**. Israel also needed to repent and a number of prophets warned that God's instrument of judgement would be Assyria. **Isaiah**, **Joel** and **Obadiah** warned Judah (the southern kingdom), **Hosea** and **Amos** warned Israel (the northern kingdom) and **Micah** addressed both kingdoms. Tiglath-Pileser III became king of Assyria in 745 BC. In 721 BC he defeated Israel and took the people into exile. Judah was miraculously saved from the Assyrians.

Babylon was the next major world power from 612 BC to 539 BC. They attacked and defeated nearly everybody. **Jeremiah** and **Zephaniah** warned Judah and **Habakkuk** said that, even worse than Assyria, Babylon would be God's instrument of judgement.

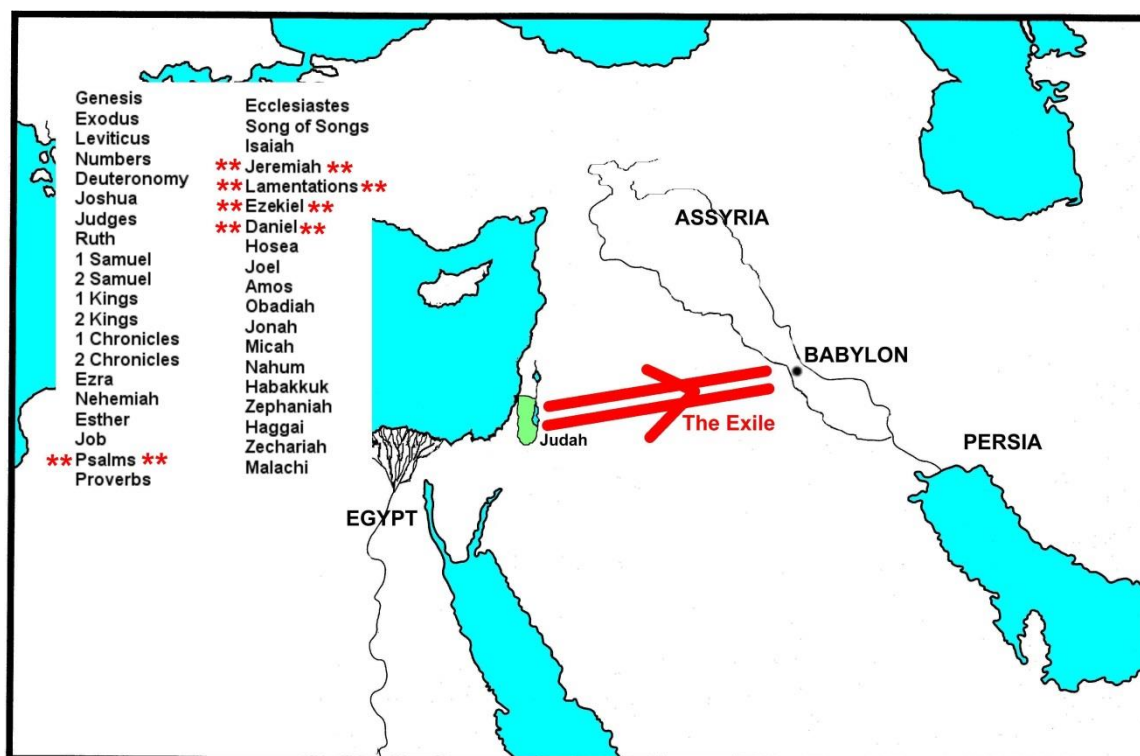
In 597 BC Babylon took Jerusalem and deported the royal family and a number of significant people including Ezekiel. In 587 BC Babylon destroyed the Temple, the palace, much of the city including the walls and drove most of the people to Babylon leaving only the poorest behind. This was known as the Exile.

Some **psalms** were written during the exile.

**Jeremiah** was offered a comfortable life in Babylon but chose to remain in Judah.

**Lamentations** was written, probably by Jeremiah, about the suffering of the people in exile.

**Ezekiel** and **Daniel** were taken into exile.



## 9. Play RiversOfBabylonBoneyMShort.mp3

Translation: By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down. Yeah we wept when we remembered Zion. (twice)  
 When the wicked carried us away in captivity, required from us a song. }  
 Now how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land. } (twice)

Bible: By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.  
 There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs,  
 our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"  
 How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?

Where? Ps 137:1-4

Context? God's people are in exile in Babylon and living in misery.

13. 'The time is coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD.

'This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, "Know the LORD," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the LORD. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'

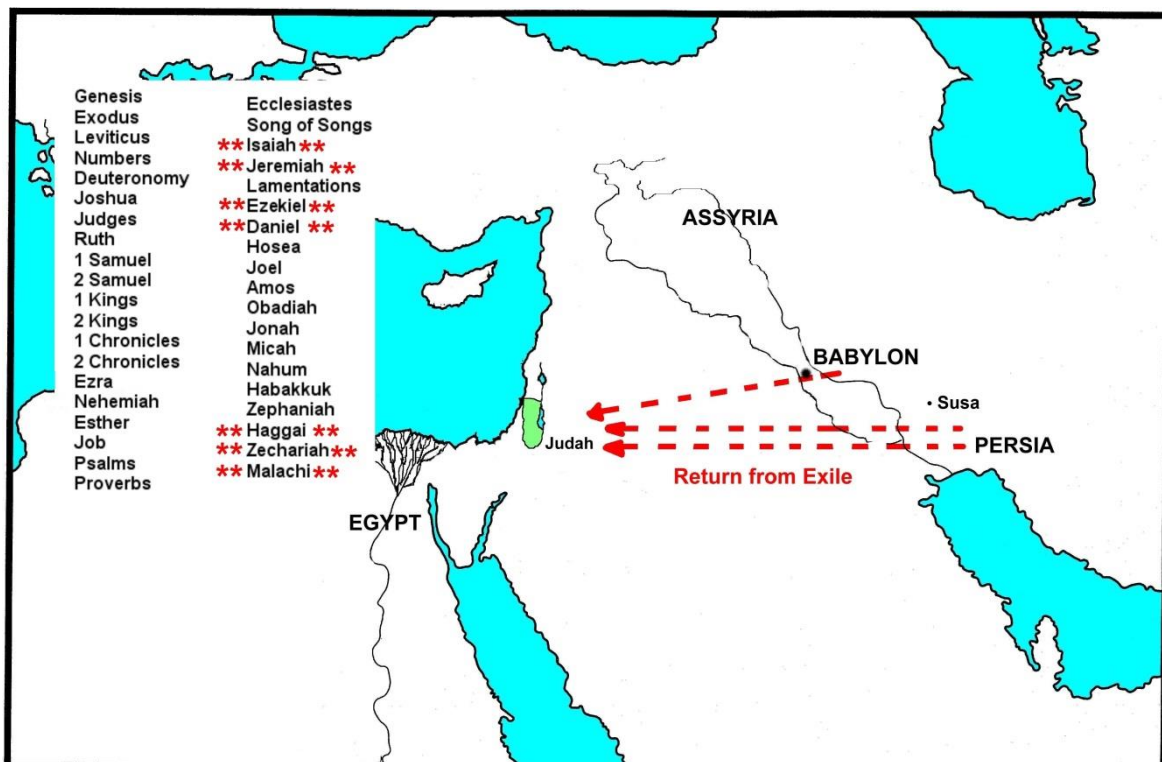
Where? Jer 31:31-34.

Context? God's people are in exile in Babylon but Jeremiah looks ahead when there will be a new exodus and a new covenant.

**Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel** prophesied the defeat of the Babylonians and the return of the exiles.

These prophecies came true when Cyrus the Great defeated the Babylonians in 539 BC and Persia became the major world power.

**Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi** all looked ahead to a time beyond the exile, to a time of restoration and a time when God's king, Jesus, would come.



# 11. Play EricLiddellReadsIsaiahShort.mp3

As read from KJV: Behold, the nations are as a drop in the bucket and are counted as the small dust in the balance. All nations before him are as nothing. They are counted to him as less than nothing and vanity.

He bringeth the princes to nothing. He maketh the judges of the earth as a vanity.  
 Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the  
 Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?  
 He giveth power to the faint and to them that have no strength he increaseth might.  
 But they that waiteth on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with  
 wings as eagles.  
 They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.

Bible: v 15 Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales;  
 V 17 Before him all the nations are as nothing, they are regarded by him as worthless  
 and less than nothing.  
 V 23 He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.  
 V 28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God,  
 the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary,  
 V 29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.  
 V 31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.  
 They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary,  
 they will walk and not be faint.

Where? Isaiah 40:15-31

Context? Bible: God is bringing his people out of exile in Babylon and back to the Promised Land.  
 Chariots of Fire: Eric Liddell reads from Isaiah in church before he competes in the 1924  
 Olympics in Paris.

### To finish

8. (a) Do you have a favourite Old Testament book? What is it?  
 (b) Why is it your favourite?
9. Do you have any difficulties reading the Old Testament? What are they?



## Study 2, Ezekiel chs 1-3, Vision and job description

### Getting started

1. What is a “vision”? Is it different from an idea or a plan? If so, in what way is it different?
  
2. Have you ever had a vision? What was it?



### Bible

In 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem [see p 6]. The 18-year-old King Jehoiachin of Judah had been on the throne for only 3 months before he surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar. As punishment, Nebuchadnezzar took him prisoner to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also deported a whole class of nobles and elite citizens. He also raided the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem, taking back to Babylon some of the vessels used for priestly duties, sacrifices, festivals, and the upkeep of the temple.

Considering the confidence which the people of Judah expressed in the temple and in the royal line of David, the events of 597 BC would have been a crushing blow. Who would have thought that the invincible temple of the LORD—God’s chosen site—could be overrun by pagans? Who would have thought that the line of David—God’s chosen kings—could be tampered with by a foreign power?

Despite these events, the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem was still standing and operating, and a Davidic king sat on the throne—Zedekiah, son of Josiah (the uncle of the imprisoned King Jehoiachin, see chart p 26).

While King Jehoiachin was imprisoned in Babylon, many of the Judean exiles were deported to the districts around the city of Babylon. These districts were built around an intricate network of canals which irrigated the desert lands around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. One such canal was the Chebar canal, about 60km south of Babylon, near the city of Nippur. And beside the canal was a small village known as Tel-Abib (see map p 10).

From City Views 10 Bible studies on Ezekiel by George Athas p 18.

3. Read Ezekiel 1.1–3.  
(a) Who is Ezekiel?

Ezekiel, the son of Buzi, was deported to Babylonia, almost certainly with Jehoiachin in 597 BC (2 Ki 24:14-17). He was settled in a village of Tel-Abib by the river Chebar. Five years later he received his call as prophet (Eze 1:2), possibly at the age of 30 (1:1). . . . He lived for at least another 22 years (Eze 29:17).

From New Bible Dictionary 3<sup>rd</sup> edition p 353.

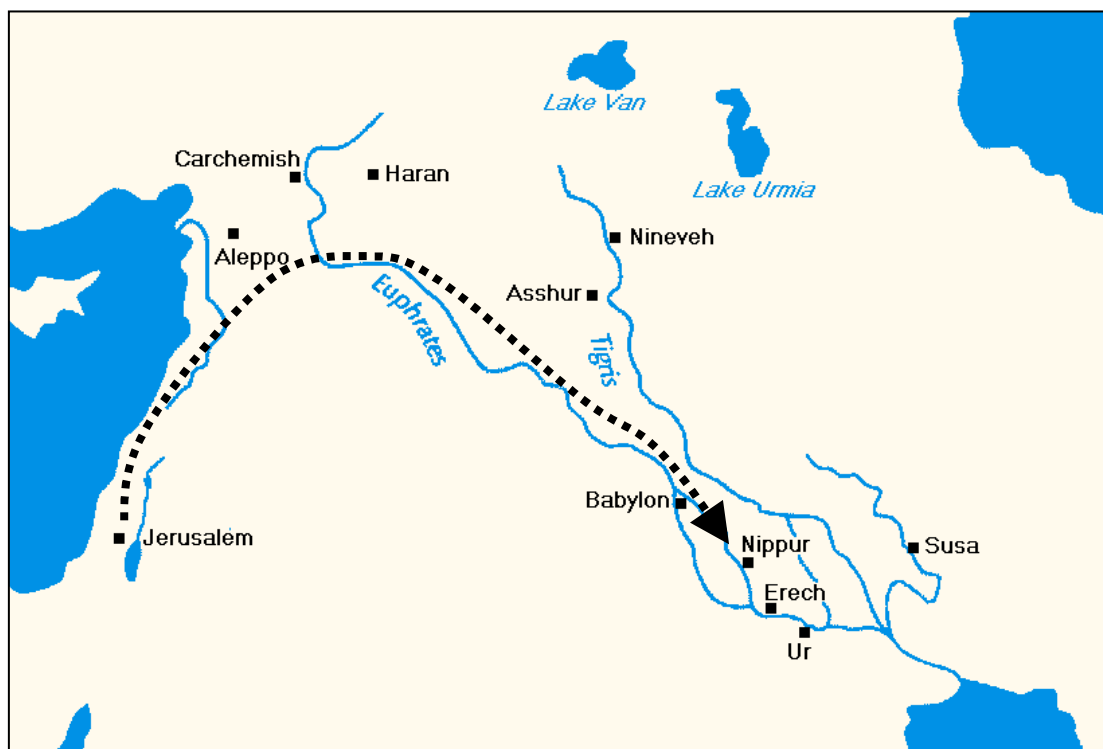
- (b) What does his job description mean?

Ezekiel was the son of a **priest**, most probably from Jerusalem itself. The whole of his education throughout childhood and youth and into his young adult years would have been thorough training for the day when he would enter on all the varied professional duties of Israel's priesthood. These included not only all the tasks involved in the sacrificial rituals (which meant skill in animal anatomy and butchery as well as familiarity with all the levitical regulations and categories), but also the responsibility to teach and administer the law - Israel's Torah.

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright p 21.

(c) Who is Ezekiel with?

(d) How have they all come to be in Babylonia ('the land of the Chaldeans')?



4. (a) How do you think Ezekiel and the exiles would have felt five years after their deportation to Babylon?

(b) How do you think they would have viewed

(i) their past?

(ii) their present?

(iii) their future?

(iv) their countrymen back in Judah?

5. How do you think the exiles felt about Ezekiel the priest?

The reference to **‘the thirtieth year’** in Ezekiel 1.1 has puzzled people for centuries. If we count back from 593 BC (the ‘thirtieth year’) we come to the year 623 BC. This was the year when God’s Law was rediscovered in the temple. It had evidently fallen into disuse. That same year, the righteous King Josiah reformed the nation of Judah in accordance with the Law. It was a momentous year of godly change which was unfortunately undone by Josiah’s successors.

The thirtieth year may also refer to Ezekiel’s age. If this is correct, then it is quite significant, for a priest was able to begin serving at the temple when he turned thirty (see Numbers 4:46–48). It also means that Ezekiel received his first prophetic vision at the age when he would have begun his priestly duties.

However, Ezekiel was nowhere near the temple. So, he was unable to perform his God-given ancestral right at the altar of the LORD. Instead, Ezekiel was living in an unclean land with unclean people who did not worship the LORD. And since he and the community of exiles had no access to the LORD’s temple in Jerusalem, they had no means by which to gather together in the LORD’s presence, or to make the regulation sacrifices for sins and ritual purity. As a result, Ezekiel and the exiles were living in a perpetual state of sin and impurity.

From City Views by George Athas p 20.

**The theological ‘north’** refers to those who are opposed to the LORD, his temple in Jerusalem, and his chosen line of David. We might say that the theological ‘north’ was made up of the LORD’s radical enemies. On the other hand, the theological ‘south’ refers to those who are closely allied to the LORD and his temple in Jerusalem—the LORD’s faithful devotees.

This theological compass probably came about because all the enemies of the LORD seemed either to be north of Judah, or to have approached Judah from a northerly direction. Perhaps the biggest culprit in creating this ‘evil north’ was the northern kingdom of Israel, which had broken away from the royal line of David and the temple in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the Assyrians and the Babylonians always approached Judah from the north.

From City Views by George Athas p 20.

6. Read about Solomon’s dedication of the LORD’s temple in 1 Kings 8:6–14 then read Ezekiel 1:4–2:2.

(a) What are your first impressions of Ezekiel’s vision?

(b) What is at the centre of the vision?

(c) List the items in this vision.

(d) From which direction does this vision come (1:4)?

(e) (i) Considering the ‘theological compass’, what is unusual about this direction?

(ii) What does it tell us about God’s relationship to his temple in Jerusalem?

(f) What is the climax of this vision?

(g) What is God like in this vision?

(h) Although Ezekiel is frightened by this vision, is there any reason for him to draw comfort from it?

(i) At this stage, what problems might this vision raise?

This vision presented the LORD as supremely free and mobile. The wheels of his heavenly chariot did not even need to move in order to change direction, for the Spirit moved them effortlessly wherever the LORD wanted to go.

While a vision of the LORD's glorious presence may have been of some comfort to Ezekiel in Babylon, it must also have presented a massive crisis: What has happened to the LORD's commitment to his own temple? Since the day that Solomon dedicated the temple in Jerusalem, the LORD's presence resided there in the innermost chamber—the Holy of Holies. Now, the LORD's presence appears on the move, riding a chariot of four living creatures. Is this the beginning of something new, or is it just the end? Is the LORD going to move on from Judah? What does this mean for the House of Judah/Israel?

This vision must have shaken Ezekiel to the core, not just because of its astonishing images, but because of the shockwaves to his faith. He must have been all too aware that before the awesome 'appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD' he was just a 'son of man'—a mere mortal. And what answers could a mere 'son of man' have for these faith-rattling problems?

Ironically, the most 'solid' thing in the vision cannot be seen: the voice of the LORD. It now comes to the fore. From City Views by George Athas p 22.

[W]e are dealing here with an account that bears all the marks of an excited eye-witness. Fourteen months later Ezekiel was able to write some cleared explanations of the things he saw (in ch 10), but this account is full of hasty, disjointed and ungrammatical language, tumbling along as the words struggle to cope with an overwhelmingly awesome confrontation with the majesty of God.

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright p 46.

7. Read Ezekiel 2:3-3:15.

(a) How does the LORD describe the House of Israel?

[The] expression '**house of Israel**' clearly means the whole covenant people, without reference to the historical division into two political states. In fact, since Ezekiel was explicitly told to go and speak to the 'house of Israel' the expression obviously means, in those contexts, his fellow exiles from the kingdom of Judah, not the exiles of the northern kingdom who had been scattered by Assyria more than a century earlier (see p 6).

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright p 78.

(b) What instructions does the LORD give to Ezekiel?

(c) What kind of reception is Ezekiel to expect from his fellow countrymen in exile?

Note on Eze 3:7

“Israel is hardened and obstinate”(NIV) is literally, ‘they are strong of **forehead** and hard of heart’. The forehead was the place where the law of Yahweh should have been tied as a symbol of obedience [see Deut 6:8, 11:18]. Instead Israel’s collective forehead had become as hard as bronze [Is 48:4] and unblushingly brazen [Jer 3:3].

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright pp 56-57.



(d) (i) What is the significance of the scroll?

(ii) What is significant about Ezekiel eating it (3:10–11)?

(e) How does Ezekiel feel about the role God has given him?

In Hebrew, the word for ‘**spirit**’ is also the word for ‘wind’ and ‘breath’. The Book of Ezekiel, which was originally written in Hebrew, makes continuous plays on this word. Essentially, the Hebrew word refers to something which cannot be seen, yet can still be perceived as it moves around of its own accord. It also moves and even animates other things.

Throughout the Book of Ezekiel, the wind/spirit/breath is a symbol of the absolute freedom and sovereignty of God. This opening vision begins with Ezekiel seeing a stormy wind coming from the north (1:4). The LORD’s presence comes from an unexpected direction. Yet, the wind and the spirit (1:12) are moving about freely, showing that the LORD is freely moving wherever he wills to go. He is not ‘house-bound’ to his temple at Jerusalem, as the people of Judah might think he is.

Moreover, when this vision confronts Ezekiel, he falls to the ground (1:28). Though the LORD tells him to stand, it takes the spirit to set him on his feet. In fact, Ezekiel cannot do anything without the prompting of the LORD and his spirit. This alerts us to the LORD’s absolute sovereignty—absolutely nothing occurs without his prior will and prompting.

So whenever we come across the words ‘spirit’, ‘wind’ or ‘breath’, we should remember that they are all conveying the same basic idea. This will help us appreciate the richness of what the Book of Ezekiel (and the rest of the Old Testament) is saying.

From City Views by George Athas p 24.

8. Read Ezekiel 3.16–27.

(a) What job does the LORD now give Ezekiel?

(b) What does this involve?

(c) How do you think this job is related to Ezekiel’s feelings in Eze 3:14?





### Study 3, Ezekiel chs 4-7 & 12, Judgement & prophetic signs

#### Getting started

1. Play BattleHymnRepublicMormonTchoir.mp3  
You have no doubt heard or sung this song before. Without reading the lyrics what did you think it was about?

Now read the lyrics:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword;  
His truth is marching on.  
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps  
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;  
I can read His righteous sentence in the dim and flaring lamps;  
His day is marching on.

Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.  
[originally ...His day is marching on]

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me:  
As He died to make men holy, let us live to make men free;  
[originally ...let us die to make men free]  
While God is marching on.  
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.  
[originally ...While God is marching on]



Julia Ward Howe modified the words of two songs, "Canaan's Happy Shore" and "John Brown's Body". The new song suggested that the soldiers she passed [during the American Civil War 1861-1865] were fighting to build God's Kingdom on earth. In the very first line she proclaimed that this was no common historical event unfolding before them; this war was being fought to bring about "the glory of the coming of the Lord." In other words, crushing the South was part of a much larger series of events—the Second Coming of Christ and the realization of God's kingdom on earth. In the second and third lines, Howe made it even clearer that God was striding alongside man in his resolution to wipe out the evil that plagued the nation. God was trampling things, shooting lightning, and swinging a terrible sword. And for those slow to get the point, Howe stressed again in the first lines of the second verse that God had sided with the North: "I have seen Him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps."

Nations and armies almost always manage to find God on their side, but "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" employed Biblical passages and quickly recognizable Christian phrases to make a very specific argument. God did not just favour the Union; He was marching alongside the Union soldiers as they paved the way for the Second Coming of His Son and the realization of His kingdom on earth.

From [www.shmoop.com](http://www.shmoop.com)

2. How do you feel about God's wrath?

## Bible

The LORD gets Ezekiel to perform a number of **oracles**, some of which are quite strange indeed. These performances are a bit like street theatre: unusual routines which are meant to attract attention. However, Ezekiel does not do them simply for entertainment value—he is discharging his prophetic call and delivering the Word of the LORD to the exiles in Babylon.

From City Views by George Athas p 35.

Like the ancient prophets of Israel Jesus conveyed a lot of his message through what we call **prophetic signs** or **enacted parables** [or **oracles**]. He offered pieces of public theatre to drive home the message. This is such a massive part of the Jewish background that I think modern Christians, and certainly the general public, don't spot.

Just to give you some examples:

Hosea, the prophet 700 years before Jesus, was told to marry a known prostitute [Hosea chs 1-3]. Why? It was a prophetic symbol. He actually did it but it was meant to be a prophetic symbol of the fact that God was married to Israel who had prostituted itself. . . .

Ezekiel. I think he probably got the rawest deal. He had to do a whole bunch of things: lie on his left side for months, lie on his right side for months [Eze 4:4-8]. But he also had to build a little model of Jerusalem in the public court. Then, everyone's watching the prophet and he had to attack it – play war games against this little model of Jerusalem without saying anything and everyone was saying he's playing war games against this little model of Jerusalem [Eze 4:1-3]. The point was clear: Jerusalem would fall. . . .

Into the New Testament period, John the Baptist called everyone out to actually go to the Jordan River. They *had* to go into the Jordan River. There were plenty of other rivers, streams and baths around Israel but you had to go into the Jordan. Why? Because that's where Israel had begun on their journey to get into the Promised Land. They had to go through the Jordan. It was a prophetic sign that Israel has to begin again, or it will end. . . .

This is such a huge part of the prophetic mindset and of Jewish culture that unless you look at the life of Jesus through this lens you really miss a lot of what Jesus was trying to do. He selected 12 apostles, not 11, not 13. Why? A symbol of the 12 tribes of Israel. These were the 12 new patriarchs. Israel begins again. He dined and wined with sinners not just because he was a leftie liberal. No, it was a prophetic enacted parable of the invitation God was making to sinners to join his table. He was acting out his message of preaching.

From a sermon by John Dickson on Mark ch 11 at St Andrews, Roseville, 15/3/2015.

3. Read the following prophetic signs.  
Explain what happened and what each means.

Probably he [Ezekiel] was silent throughout, relying on persistently repeated mime and gesture to get the message across . . . the whole show must have become utterly clear even before Ezekiel removed all doubt when his mouth was finally opened and the desperate, damning message flooded forth (5:5-17).

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright p 75.

(a) Ezekiel ch 4.

What happened?

What does it mean?

It is virtually certain that Ezekiel spent only a certain period of each day lying in this way on his side next to his model of the siege of Jerusalem. Apart from the fact that, had he lain on one side day and night for a year he would have become deformed or paralysed, if he had survived at all, the instructions of 4:9-17 show that he had other things to do each day as well.

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright p 77.

(b) Ezekiel ch 5.

What happened?

What does it mean?

(c) Ezekiel 12:1-20.

What happened?

What does it mean?

(d) In the next study we will look at Ezekiel's second vision (chs 8–11) where the LORD tells Ezekiel that the leaders in Jerusalem were smug with confidence about their future. They considered themselves to be like choice cuts of meat being preserved in a sturdy pot while the exiles were the unwanted off-cuts (11:2–3). Now this image comes back to haunt them. Read Ezekiel 12.21–28.

(i) What is the issue behind the proverb being quoted?

(ii) How does it reflect on Ezekiel?

(iii) How does it reflect on the LORD?

(e) Considering whom these oracles are about . . .

(i) why is Ezekiel performing them in front of the exiles in Babylon?

(ii) what message is the LORD conveying to them?

4. Read Deuteronomy 12.1–7.  
How did the LORD command Israel to treat the places of worship they found when they first entered the Promised Land?
  
5. Read Ezekiel ch 6.
  - (a) To whom is this prophecy addressed?
  
  - (b) What is the outcome of this prophecy (6:10)?
  
  - (c) How does this prophecy relate to the commands in Deuteronomy 12?
  
6. Read Ezekiel ch 7.
  - (a) What crimes are listed here? Who has committed them?
  
  - (b) What principles does the LORD employ in his judgement?
  
  - (c) What is the outcome of this prophecy?

#### **To finish**

7. (a) When something bad happens to you do you assume God is judging you for your sins? Why/why not?
  
- (b) What bearing does Jesus' death and resurrection have on the idea that you are judged for your sins?



## Study 4, Ezekiel chs 8-11, 2<sup>nd</sup> vision, idolatry, judgement & hope

### Getting started

1. What is your most valued possession and why is it of such great value to you?
2. Would you call this possession an idol?



3. What does it mean to “worship” something or someone?

### Bible

Ezekiel's first **vision** [Eze 1:1-28] (31 July, 593 BC) was of the ‘appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD’ coming to him while in exile in Babylon. It raised all sorts of questions as to how and why the glorious presence of the LORD has made its way to Babylon, and is no longer in the temple at Jerusalem.

We turn now to a vision [Eze chs 8-11] which Ezekiel experiences on 17 or 18 September, 592 BC. This vision takes Ezekiel on a flashback journey to answer some of the questions raised by the first vision. But before we look at Ezekiel's next vision, we need to take a look at some things which the LORD had said in the Law he gave to Israel via Moses.

From City Views by George Athas p 26.

Recording significant **dates** [see 1:1-2, 8:1, 24:1-2] was not simply a matter of keeping his own memoirs organised; it would be of great importance later when the final destruction of Jerusalem would confirm the validity of his claim to have truly spoken from Yahweh. Having the dates recorded meant that it could not be disputed that he had genuinely predicted these events in advance.

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright p 97.

A number of factors need to be taken into account **to convert the dates** quoted by Ezekiel into the dates according to the calendar we are familiar with. First, Ezekiel uses the date of the exile of King Jehoiachin as his base and writes about “the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin” (Eze 1:2), “In the sixth year” (Eze 8:1) and “In the seventh year” (Eze 20:1) for example. So experts need to work out the date of the exile of King Jehoiachin first. Second, the Hebrew calendar year was composed of 12 lunar months which consisted of 29 or 30 days each. This means that the lunar year was about 11 days less than a solar year so a thirteenth month had to be inserted occasionally. Third, the Hebrew year began in the northern hemisphere spring (Nisan) which is equivalent to our March/April.

See New Bible Dictionary 3<sup>rd</sup> edition pp 156-157..

4. Read the following passages from the Law. What commands and conditions are given to Israel?  
(a) Deuteronomy 5.6–10.

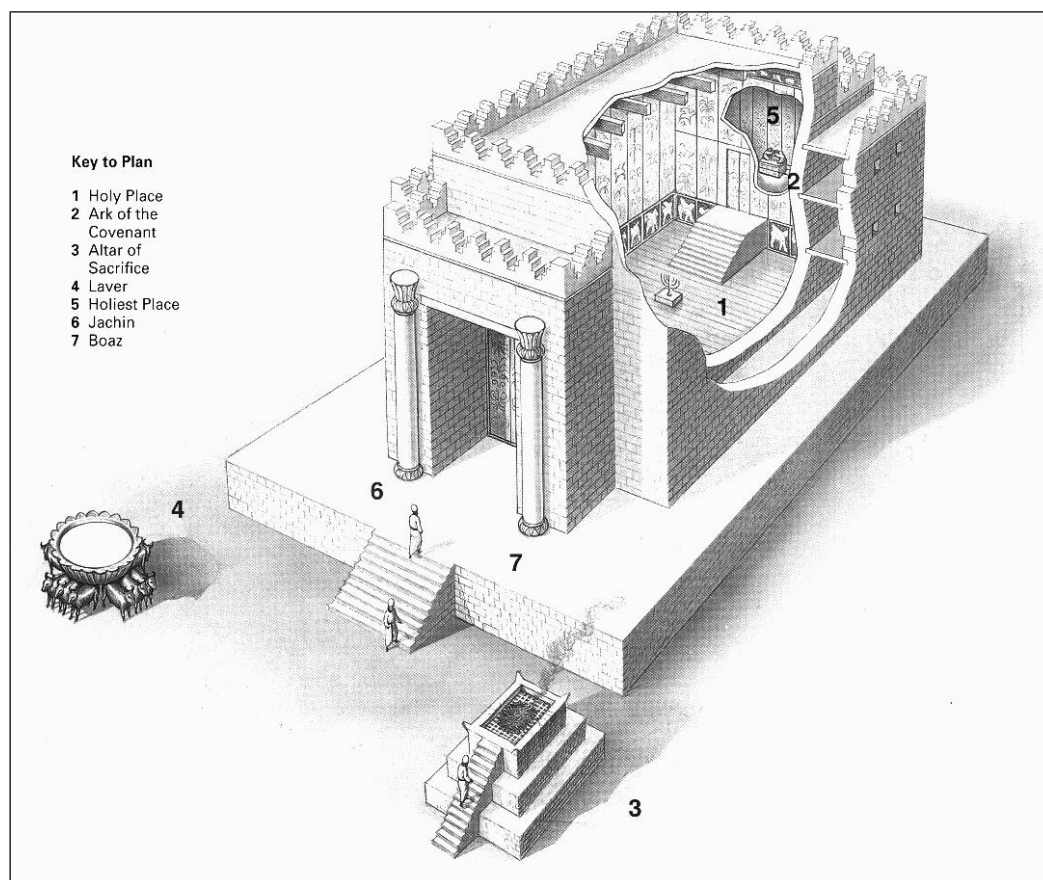
(b) Deuteronomy 13.6–11.

5. Read Ezekiel 8:1-4.

(a) Who or what appears to Ezekiel?

They may have tied him up, but they couldn't tie him down. From the opening of chapter 8 it seems that Ezekiel was still confined to his house, though the fact that the elders of Judah were sitting before him may show that he was treated with some respect, even if basically his message was still not being taken seriously.

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright p 97.



Artist's reconstruction of how the temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem would have looked.

From City Views by George Athas p 27.

(b) To where is Ezekiel taken?

(c) What is the first thing that Ezekiel sees in the LORD's temple at Jerusalem (8:3)?

(d) What is the second thing that Ezekiel sees in the Jerusalem temple (8:4)?

## 6. Read Ezekiel 8.5–18.

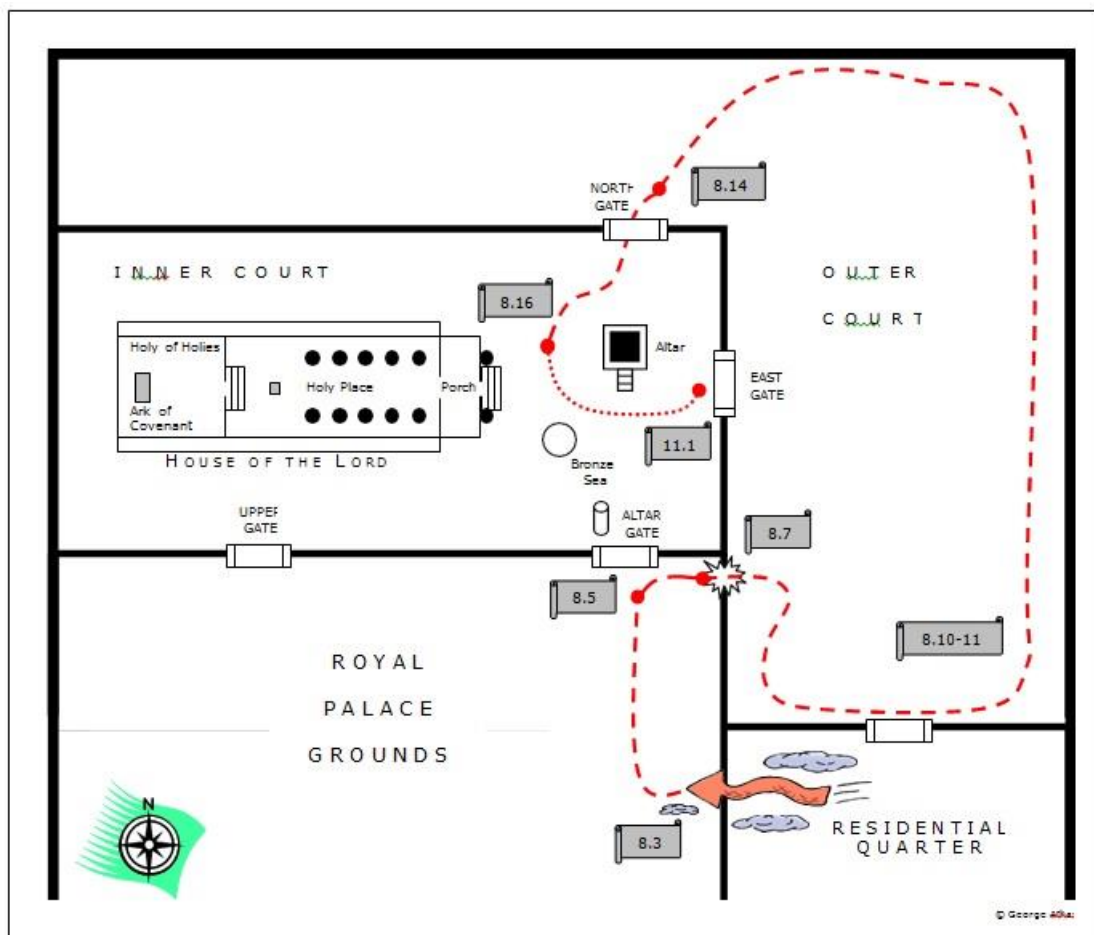
(a) What effect are the various idolatries in the temple having? (8:6, 17)

As Ezekiel is shown the various abominations within the temple courts, it becomes evident that the religious beliefs and rituals of the temple have been influenced by Babylonian religion. The engravings on the walls (8:10) are reminiscent of engravings that were on the walls along the main boulevard of Babylon. Similarly, the women at the north gate of the temple (8:14) are weeping for Tammuz - a Babylonian god depicted as a young man. His mythical premature death was commemorated in Babylon with mourning at the end of every summer (June-July), making him the Babylonian equivalent of the Greek god Adonis, and the Egyptian god Osiris. Sun-worship was common throughout the ancient world. Here in Ezekiel 8, it is unclear whether the men are worshiping the sun itself, or an image of the sun placed at the East Gate (see 2 Kings 23:11, Jeremiah 8:2). In any case, these seventy men are the seventy elders of Israel. According to Numbers 11:16–30, these men were to be full of the LORD's Spirit so as to govern the people of Israel. Yet Ezekiel sees them here revering the sun, rather than the LORD.

It is clear from these abominations which Ezekiel observes that Israel's commitment to the LORD was waning. They were worshiping other gods on the grounds of the LORD's own House. And it seems that the closer Ezekiel got to the actual temple building, the worse the idolatry became.

From City Views by George Athas p 28.

(b) At each stage of the vision thus far, Ezekiel is told that he will see 'still greater abominations'. How does each abomination get worse? (Use the diagram of Ezekiel's tour as an aid.)



Above: Ezekiel's tour of the LORD's Temple at Jerusalem (chs 8–11)

From City Views by George Athas p 29.

7. In light of the passages from Deuteronomy, what should we expect to happen now?

8. Read Ezekiel ch 9.

(a) Whom does the LORD call for (9:1)?

(b) To where does the glory of the LORD now move? What does this mean?

(c) What do the actions of the man clothed in linen achieve? Who is affected?

(d) What is the LORD's verdict for the House of Israel and Judah?

(e) What have the people been saying (9:9)? Are they right in any way?

In the Law, the LORD called upon the Israelites to purge evil from among them (Deut 13:5, 17:7). The worst of all evils was **idolatry**. Yet in this vision, Ezekiel sees nothing but idolatrous activity within the confines of the LORD's own temple!

The Book of the Law stated that if someone in Israel led other Israelites into idolatry, their fellow countrymen were to stone them to death: 'You shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him. But you shall kill him' (Deut 13:8–9). With the exception of a small few, it appears that the whole population of Jerusalem is engaged in idolatry. There appear to be no righteous Israelite leaders left who are able to carry out the death sentence. In response, the hammer of the LORD's justice falls and he calls for the execution of Jerusalem's population, from old men to babes in arms. Through his personal executioners, the LORD himself carries out the death sentence prescribed in his Law: 'My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity' (Ezek 9:10).

At the time Ezekiel receives this vision (592 BC), Jerusalem is still operating as a city. So we realise that the execution has not yet transpired in real time. Thus, while the first part of Ezekiel's vision looks back in time (ch 8), this second part looks forward (ch 9) to a time of slaughter. It also raises the question as to whom the LORD will use in real time to carry out the execution of Jerusalem's idolatrous population.

From City Views by George Athas p 30.

10. Read Ezekiel ch 10.

(a) What will be the result of the actions of the man clothed in linen?

(b) To where does the glory of the LORD now move? (10:18–19)

11. Read Ezekiel 11:1–13.

In Ezekiel 11:3, the LORD quotes the two princes, Jaazaniah and Pelatiah. English translations differ as to whether this is a plain sentence ('The time is not near to build houses' [cf. ESV, NKJV]) or a question ('Is not the time near to build houses?' [cf. NASB, NIV]). The Hebrew can be read both ways. So we have to look at the wider context to decide the issue.

It is clear that the two princes are being smug about their security within Jerusalem. They seem totally oblivious to the oncoming catastrophe. They claim that Jerusalem is keeping them safe and sound, just like choice cuts of meat being preserved in a sturdy pot (the same imagery is used in ch 24). The connotation is that those like Ezekiel who have been exiled to Babylon are like unwanted off-cuts that have been discarded.

Since the princes are boasting about their security, it seems apt that they would also talk about engaging in building houses. They are talking about construction, rather than destruction. It seems best, then, to take the quote as a question: 'Is not the time near to build houses?' The LORD, though, is talking destruction.

From City Views by George Athas p 31.

(a) How is the blessing of gathering revoked from the remnant population in Jerusalem?

(b) What problem can Ezekiel see resulting from the LORD's actions (11:13)?

(c) What is the phrase 'and you shall know that I am the LORD' (11.12) all about (think about what has occurred in the vision so far, and where it has occurred)?

12. Read Ezekiel 11:14–25.

(a) What is God going to do?

(b) (i) What are the people supposed to do?

(ii) What is their motivation?

(iii) Does this mean they will be "born again"? Why/why not?

(c) To where does the glory of the LORD now move (11:22–23)?

(d) What does the movement of the glory of the LORD throughout this vision suggest?

(e) What questions might this vision answer for Ezekiel?

(f) What further questions does it raise?

(g) How does hope fluctuate in the course of these 4 chapters (8-11)?





## Study 5, Ezekiel chs 13-16 & 23, Sin and judgement

### Getting started

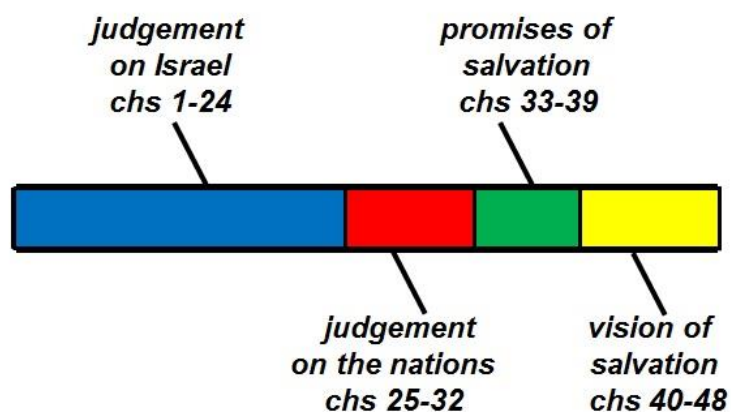
1. When you were at school how did you learn things?



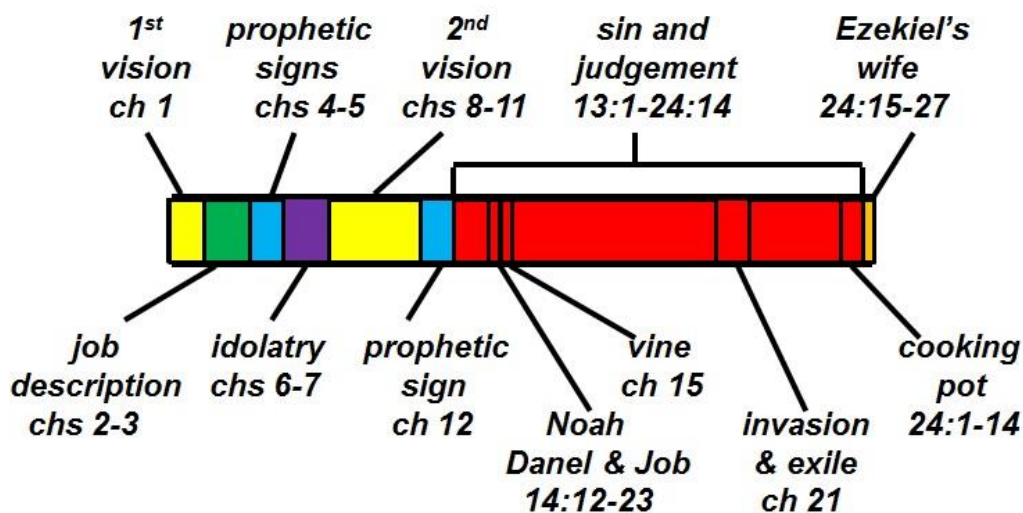
2. Was there a method of learning that worked particularly well for you (e.g. lectures, film, conversations, question and answer, reading or experiences)?

### Where are we in the book of Ezekiel?

Ezekiel can be divided into the following sections:



We are up to chapter 13 and the first 24 chapters can be subdivided like this:



## Bible

3. Read Ezekiel ch 13.

Notes: vv 6-7. Divination is the obtaining of an oracle by the reading of omens and drawing lots.

vv 10-17. False prophets merely whitewash the insecure walls of the state instead of strengthening it.

v 18. The false prophetesses sewed bands upon all wrists, a process of sympathetic magic which either fastened power upon the consulter or symbolised the power of the sorceress to bind her victims. The head coverings (veils) served a similar purpose.

From New Bible Commentary 3<sup>rd</sup> edition p 672.

(a) Why are the false prophets and prophetesses detrimental for the people?

(b) Why would these prophesies have made it harder for Ezekiel?

4. Read Ezekiel 14:1–11.

How is God's jealousy shown in this passage (see also Ex 20:5)?

5. Read Ezekiel 14:12–23.

(a) Divide this passage up into its five basic sections.

(b) Based on this structure, what is the essential argument that the LORD is employing?

**Noah, Daniel, and Job.** In Ezekiel 14:12–23, the LORD consistently refers to these three men as paragons of righteousness. Noah was the blameless wise man whom the LORD saved from the floods of judgement, along with his sons and their wives (Gen 6–9). Job was a righteous man from the land of Uz, who would regularly intercede for his children, in case they had cursed God in their hearts (Job 1:5). And despite terrible suffering, including the death of his children, he refused to curse the LORD. He remained loyal to God, even though he could not explain why he was suffering, and lived to father new children.

You might be surprised to learn that the figure of Daniel here is probably not the figure whom we know from the Book of Daniel. That Daniel was a younger contemporary of Ezekiel, whose Hebrew name was spelled differently to the name given here in Ezekiel. The Daniel (or Dan'el) mentioned here (Ezek 14:14, 20 also in 28:3) was probably an ancient king known from other ancient sources. He was characterised as a ruler who always defended the cause of the poor and needy, and who prayed for a son in order to have an heir. He was indeed given an heir, but only to see his son murdered. The rest of the story of this Daniel is fragmentary and reeks of legend, but the fragments suggest that he was given another son as his heir.

Despite the legendary nature of the story, it is likely that the Israelites knew the traditions about this Daniel well, and the LORD exploited them to make his point here. This being the case, all three of these righteous men were gentiles who were close to God and who, despite hardship, had offspring to survive them.

The point that the LORD is making here is that if these three wise men were living in Israel, then contrary to the traditions about them, none of their offspring would survive the coming calamity. Such is the resolve of the LORD

to bring his judgement on the land of Israel that nothing will sway him from it. Not even the beloved traditions of Israel, which might have given them cause for hope, can be invoked as a source of comfort. The future is resolutely bleak.

From City Views by George Athas p 38.

6. (a) What will happen to the survivors?

(b) What effect will this have on those already in exile with Ezekiel?

As well as prophetic signs or oracles (see p 16) Ezekiel also uses parables.

**A Parable** is a metaphor or simile which compares a religious truth with a common experience or circumstance in life. Jesus often used parables to teach the meaning of his own life and ministry, and the nature of the kingdom of God.

Parables are a punchy form of communication designed to creep up on you without your knowing it. They are like time bombs. They look innocuous and are therefore received quite readily, only to go off suddenly and shatter your way of looking at life.

From Postcard from Palestine by Andrew Reid p 48.

One of the images used throughout the Bible as a symbol of divine favour is the **vine**. The great picture of security and prosperity in the Old Testament is of the Israelite sitting under his own vine and fig tree (see 1 Kgs 4:25, Isa 36:16, Mic 4:4, Zech 3:10). The destruction of vines is an image portraying the loss of security (see Ps 78:47, 105:33, Joel 1:7, 12).

The nation of Israel is often described as a vine or vineyard which the LORD himself planted (see Ps 80:8, Isa 5:1–2, Hos 10:1, cf. 2 Sam 7:10). The image is intended to emphasise the LORD's election (his personal choice) of Israel, his painstaking care over it, as well as the security and prosperity which Israel enjoyed as a result. It is a fertile image of the divine favour experienced by the chosen nation of Israel.

From City Views by George Athas p 40.

3. Read Ezekiel ch 15.

(a) (i) What does the LORD say he will do?

(ii) What will be the result of this?

(c) In what ways does Ezekiel redevelop the popular biblical image of Israel as the vine?

(d) Is Ezekiel denying that the LORD has elected the nation of Israel (especially Jerusalem)? Explain.

4. Read John 15.1–8.

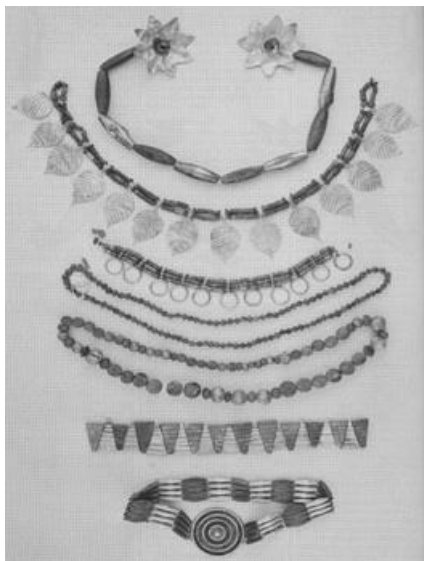
(a) (i) In what ways does Jesus develop the image of the vine?

(ii) What points is he making?

5. Read Eze chs 16 & 23 which each contain a parable within them. Divide each chapter into its progressive stages and logical units. Summarise each stage/unit in one or two sentences. Note who is addressed, and what tone of voice is being employed (e.g., neutral, gentle, loving, hurt, vindictive, etc.).

Eze ch 16 addressed to:

Stage	verses	summary	tone of voice
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Jewellery from the tomb of the Sumerian Queen Puabi (c.2500 BC), located amongst the ruins of Ur (Southern Iraq). These necklaces, bracelets and armlets are made of gold, lapis lazuli, and carnelian. In the parable of Ezekiel 16, the LORD describes how he adorned his young bride, Jerusalem, with bracelets and necklaces (16:11).

From The Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Part 2, p 782.

Eze ch 23 addressed to:

Stage

verses

summary

tone of voice

- (a) What are your first impressions of Eze 23?
- (b) (i) What is the function of these two parables?
- (ii) What do they achieve within their respective chapters?
- (c) What role does Samaria play in these parables?
- (d) Whom does the LORD use to enact his judgement?

(e) From these two chapters, how would you describe the relationship between the LORD and Jerusalem?

(f) How does the future of Jerusalem look?

6. Read Revelation 21.1–8.

(a) At what time is this passage set?

(b) How does the passage compare with the two parables in Ezekiel 16 and 23?

### **To finish**

8. What is the relationship between election (being chosen by God) and obedience?  
Consider Ephesians 1:3-6, Romans 6:16-18, 9:10-16.

9. Is being a Christian all about obedience?

If so, why so? If not, what else is being a Christian about?

## Study 6, Ezekiel chs 17-19, Leaders

### Getting started

1. (a) When something bad happens to you do you assume God is punishing you for your sins? Why/why not?



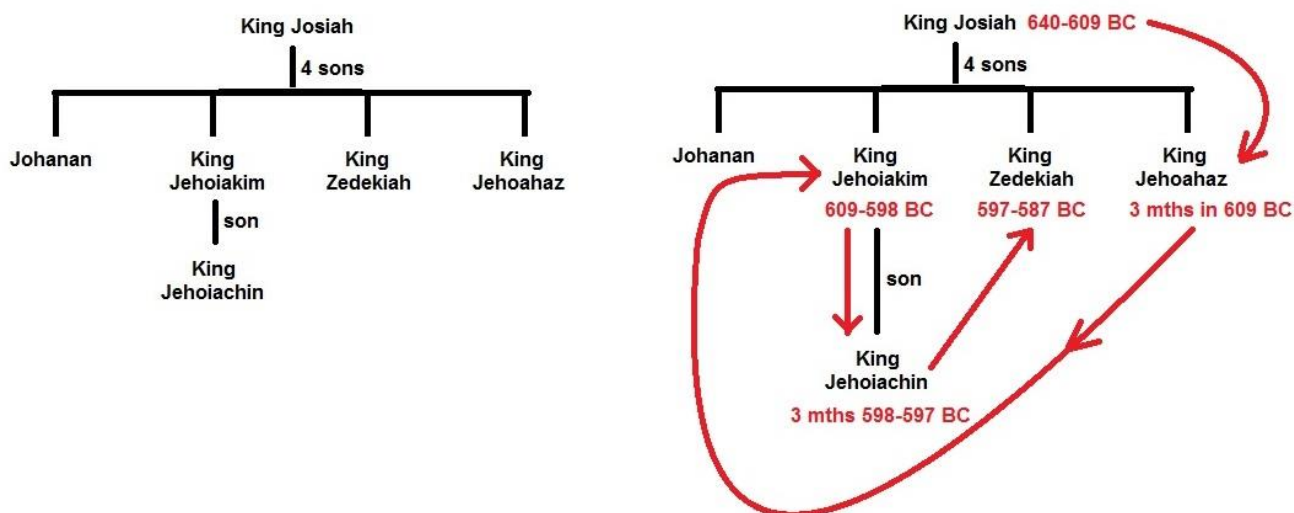
- (b) What bearing does Jesus' death and resurrection have on the idea that you are punished for your sins?

### Bible

At this stage of Ezekiel's ministry, the king in Jerusalem is **Zedekiah**. However, although he is of the line of David, he had been placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who had deposed the previous Davidic king, Jehoiachin. As such, Zedekiah was the Babylonians' puppet king.

Nevertheless, despite all the politics, Jerusalem still had a descendant of David on the throne. The LORD was being faithful to his promise made to David that he would always have one of his descendants sitting on the throne (see 2 Sam 7:11b-16). Zedekiah was still a 'king of promise', and therefore a source of security to the people of Judah.

From City Views by George Athas p 46.



2. Enter the prophet Ezekiel with a fable or allegory.

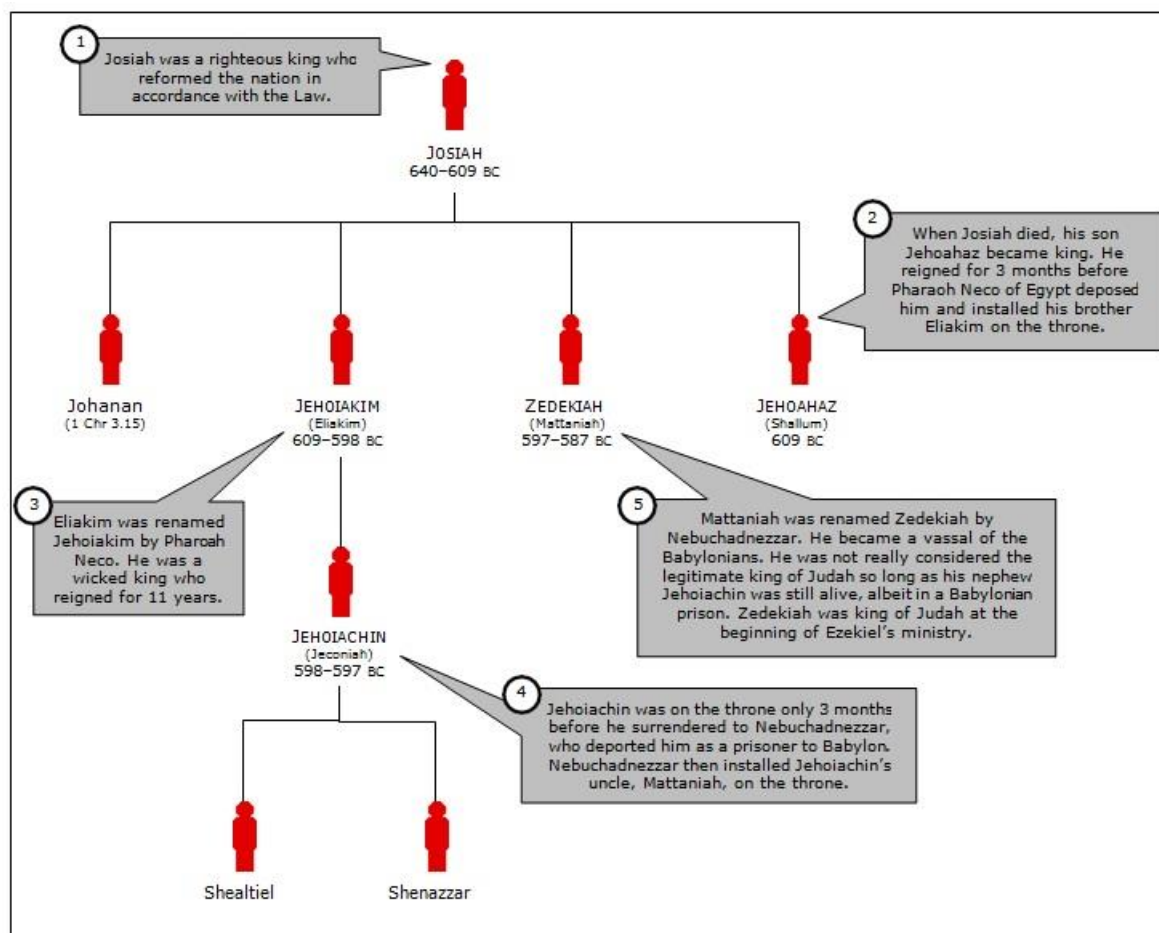
An **allegory** is a story in which the characters and/or events are symbols representing other events, ideas, or people. On face value the Song of Songs is about a man and a woman expressing their love for each other but if you look at it as an allegory then the man is Christ and the woman is the church and Christ is expressing his love for the church.



Read Ezekiel 17:1-21.

(a) Use the passage and the chart below to identify the following characters in the allegory:

The first great eagle, the second great eagle, the cedar, the topmost twig of the cedar, the seed of the land.



From City Views by George Athas p 47.

[T]he first great eagle is Nebuchadnezzar and the topmost shoot refers to Jehoiachin and the first exiles. The "seed of your land" refers to Zedekiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar planted in Jerusalem. Like a low, spreading vine Zedekiah professed loyalty to the king of Babylon but secretly spread his roots towards the second great eagle, namely Egypt. The result, however, was that the vine withered and eventually perished altogether. Such would ultimately be the fate of Zedekiah. The allegory this also becomes a prediction since it comes from the period before the final rebellion of Zedekiah and fall of Jerusalem.

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright p 170.

(b) Zedekiah tries to liberate himself and Judah from Babylonian mastery by looking to Egypt for supplies. Why should the LORD be so upset at this?



In ancient times, the **cedar of Lebanon** was prized for the quality of its wood, much as it is today. It was a symbol of grandeur and strength. In Ezekiel 17, the LORD likens Jehoiachin, the Davidic king whom Nebuchadnezzar deposed, to the topmost twig of the cedar which the eagle plucked and carried away. From City Views by George Athas p 48.

(c) (i) What is the role of the Babylonians throughout this passage?

(ii) What is the role of the LORD?

(d) What problems does this passage raise for the LORD's promise to David (2 Sam 7:11b-16)?

3. Read Ezekiel 17:22–24.

(a) How is this new 'sprig' characterised in the conclusion to the fable?

(b) What is 'the mountain height of Israel' (see also Ezekiel 20:40)?

(c) How does this conclusion to the fable relate to the LORD's promise to David?

The fable in Ezekiel 17 ends with the 'fabulous' picture of a cosmic tree which provides security to every type of bird. This final picture shows that the LORD is not abandoning his commitment to the Davidic family tree. However, it does show that the LORD is about to do something new. Through all the gloom that appears to be ahead for Jerusalem (and especially for King Zedekiah), there is a shaft of light which shines through. The Davidic dynasty will start afresh.

From City Views by George Athas p 49.

4. Read Romans 1:1–6.

(a) How does the opening to Paul's letter relate to Ezekiel 17?

(b) Where does the Apostle Paul stand in this relationship?

Ezekiel 17 shows us that the destiny of the LORD's chosen people is completely tied up with its leaders, especially its chosen Davidic king (see 17:21). This is how the biblical concept of election works: the destiny of the corporate body is inextricably tied to the destiny of the LORD's chosen one(s).

Chapters 17 and 19 of Ezekiel are both about the fate of Israel's leaders. Sandwiched between them is chapter 18—a discussion seemingly on individual responsibility. To get our bearings for this discussion, we first need to look at an important statement from the Law.

From City Views by George Athas p 50.

5. Read Exodus 34:5–7.  
How does the LORD deal with the guilty here in the Law?
  
6. Read Ezekiel 18:1–32.
  - (a) (i) What three things are the people saying (18:2, 19, 25)?

(ii) What does the first one (18:2) mean?

Probably there are two ways of understanding it. First of all, as a general expression of 'the way things are', it encapsulates an assumption about life based on observation. Children do suffer because of the sins or stupidity of their parents. One generation's wickedness affects the quality of life for the next. . . .

But, secondly, since Yahweh was believed to be in charge of 'the way things are', this particular outworking of his ways was being regarded as unjust. The present generation (the exiles) believed that they were being made to suffer on account of the sins of their parents and even earlier ancestors.

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright pp 181-182.

(b) Is the LORD's treatment of the guilty in this chapter different to that stated in Exodus?

(c) Consult the chart earlier in this study giving the generations of the kings of Judah.

(i) How is the discussion in ch 18 relevant to these kings?

(ii) Of what relevance would this be for the exiles in Babylon?

(iii) What does it say about successive generations and repentance?

(iv) What does the reference to a new heart and a new spirit (v 31) suggest (see also Eze 11:19)?

But was such change actually possible? Only if it was genuinely internal as well as external. It would require a whole new attitude and mindset, virtually a new 'person' within. In short, they would need to *get a new heart and a new spirit* (31). Later that expression will become the focus of some major reflection and rhetoric. In 36:24-27 (cf. 11:19) it is described as something that Yahweh will give to Israel in the process of restoration and regeneration that can be his work alone. Yet here it is something that Israel must do themselves. . . .

. . . the new heart and new spirit are something Israel must 'get' as part of the genuineness of their repentance, yet ultimately something that God alone can give them.

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright p 205.

Ezekiel 18 has often been considered a turning point in the historical development of biblical faith. It seems to move from seeing people corporately (as in Exodus) to seeing them individually. However, this view ignores the context of ch 18, which comes in the middle of a section discussing the leadership of Judah (chs 17–19). The LORD has not changed his standard from corporate responsibility to individual responsibility—both have always been there in the Bible. For example:

- After Israel defeated Jericho (Josh 6), Achan was guilty of hoarding some of the booty which had been devoted to the LORD for destruction. Yet, all Israel suffered defeat (Josh 7:4–5) and Achan's entire family was executed along with him (Josh 7:24–26). They were guilty by association.
- Eli, the priest at Shiloh, was guilty of not stopping his two sons' evil behaviour before the altar of the LORD. As a result, Eli and his two sons perished. Eli's descendants were thereby rejected from serving at the LORD's altar.
- Saul was guilty of not obeying the LORD on a number of occasions. As a result, the LORD anointed David as king in his place. Saul's punishment was to die at the hands of the Philistines, the very people he was meant to defeat. However, Saul's sons also died with him on the battlefield.

This notion of **corporate responsibility** does not sit well with us today. We have been sold on the notions of individual rights and self-rule to the harm of the biblical picture. In Genesis 1, God creates just one humanity (Gen 1:26). Thus, God views humans as a collective whole: what one part does affects the whole. Yet, God did not create a group of clones; he created a differentiated whole made up of male and female (Gen 1:27). So while God views humanity as a collective whole, he does not overlook individuals. The Apostle Paul uses the analogy of a body to communicate this idea to the Corinthians (1 Cor 12).

This view of humanity stems from the fact that God is **Trinity**. God is by nature other-person centred. Yet, because God is Trinity, he does not need anyone else to be other-person centred. God is in himself a communal being. The Father loves the Son (John 3:35, 5:20), and the Son loves the Father (John 14:31), and they are both united in the bond of the Holy Spirit (John 3:34, Rom 8:9–11). This is why John can affirm that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). As humans, however, we cannot be communal beings in and of ourselves. We need others to do that.

If we understand that other-person centeredness (a God-like characteristic) lies at the heart of human existence, we will begin to understand the problem which Ezekiel 18 deals with. The interconnection between people means that leaders will always affect the people under their care. Also, one generation will always affect the next. Unfortunately, the sinfulness of humanity means that this often results in harmful influence rather than good.

Yet, in spite of human sinfulness, God's offer of forgiveness stands for every single person and every single generation. This forgiveness is not merely a way of overcoming the failures of the past, but also the means by which to fix things up for the future. For the exiles with Ezekiel in Babylon, this means that the future was open to them. Although they were guilty of sin before God and were suffering the consequences of this in exile, the sins of their leaders and their forefathers did not prevent them from taking up God's gracious offer of forgiveness. The LORD was presenting them with the opportunity not only to come into right relationship with him, but also to affect the next generation for good.

Therefore, the concern of Ezekiel 18 is not to see whether one generation suffers because of the sins of the previous generation, but to confirm that the LORD gives every single generation the opportunity to repent.

From City Views by George Athas pp 51-52.

## To finish

7. How do we see the connection between the individual and the corporate today in the following areas?  
What does this tell us about leadership in these areas?

(a) Marriage/Home

(b) Government

(c) Church

8. What does Ezekiel 18 have to say about:

(a) Democracy

(b) Dictatorship

(c) Monarchy

9. 'In Christ' is an important concept in the New Testament.

Read the following passages and consider what light Ezekiel 18 sheds on them.

(a) John 15:1–8

(b) 1 Corinthians 15:22

(c) Colossians 1:13–15

(d) 2 John 7–11

## Study 7, Ezekiel chs 20-32, Sin, judgement and hope

### Getting started

1. Have you ever felt it would be easier if you were not a Christian?

Why/why not?



### Bible

2. Read Ezekiel 20.1–32. (Date in 20:1 see pp 41-42.)

(a) When did Israel's unfaithfulness begin?

(b) What motivates the LORD to hold back so many times from destroying Israel?

(c) Is the LORD's motivation for holding back self-centred?

(d) What is the relationship between the LORD, Israel and the nations (v 32)?

3. Read Ezekiel 20:33-49.

(a) How is God's grace evident in this second section of ch 20?

(b) What does 20:3 and 20:49 suggest about the elders of Israel (20:1)?

(c) The question arises for us now, how do we apply this to us? The most obvious application is "Don't commit idolatry" but is this all we can take from Ezekiel ch 20? Ezekiel spoke to the national Israel, the people of God, in exile. They were in exile because of their unfaithfulness to the covenant. Jesus was a future promise, the church unimagined. What does this mean for us?

4. Read Ezekiel ch 21.

(a) (i) What is the prophetic sign (see p 16) in this passage?

(ii) What does it mean?

(b) What is different about this chapter on God's judgement?

5. Read Ezekiel ch 22.

(a) What city is this about (v 1)?

(b) What has happened to the Law?

(c) What metaphor is used to describe what God is going to do?

(d) How does this relate to a common metaphor for hell in our time?

6. We have already looked at ch 23 in study 5.

7. Read Ezekiel 24:1–14.

(a) What day does the LORD tell Ezekiel to mark?

(b) What image does the LORD use to portray this day?

Not only were the inhabitants of Jerusalem to be cast out or cremated with no regard for rank or status; the city itself was so corrupt that the only fate that was now appropriate for it was the all-consuming meltdown of final destruction. And the fire has been lit, said Ezekiel, this very day. The 'wood' of Nebuchadnezzar's siege engines is already being stacked around Jerusalem.

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright p 214.

8. Read Eze 24:15–27.

What does this harsh episode tell us about how the exiles in Babylon viewed Jerusalem?

The very thing which the LORD had threatened through the prophet Ezekiel had now begun: **Jerusalem was under siege**. On 5 January, 587 BC, the Babylonian army of King Nebuchadnezzar set up a blockade around Jerusalem, cutting it off from the outside world. The confidence of the people still in Jerusalem was being put to the test, while the exiles in Babylon waited for news about Jerusalem's fate.

The enormity of this situation cannot be underestimated. As the Babylonian siege tightened, Jerusalem experienced horrific human tragedy. The Book of Lamentations recalls just some of the horrors. Ezekiel himself had prophesied some of these atrocities: as the city's food supply was cut off and used up, cannibalism set in amongst

the remaining population (Ezek 5:10). The blessing of gathering as the LORD's chosen people at the LORD's chosen site with the LORD's chosen laws under the LORD's chosen leader had now become a monstrous curse. The House of Israel was caving in.

The spiritual tragedy cannot be underestimated either. It presented an enormous dilemma. The LORD had made committed promises to Israel and, in the past, had come to Jerusalem's aid. He had even turned away the ferocious military of the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 BC when all of Judah's other cities had been overrun. Had the LORD now changed his mind? With the desperate plight of Jerusalem's population and the presence of the mighty Babylonian army outside the city walls, two possible explanations arose: either the gods of Babylon were more powerful than the LORD, or the LORD was turning his back on Jerusalem.

Ezekiel's second vision (chs 8–11) showed the exiles in Babylon that the LORD was voluntarily removing his presence from Jerusalem. He was leaving his holy temple open for destruction because his holy name had been defamed by the very people supposed to cherish it. The LORD was so offended that he himself lay behind the Babylonian army laying siege to the city. The question now was whether the LORD would reject the nation of Israel altogether and choose another nation to be his own.

With this question hanging in the air, the LORD now addresses the nations around Jerusalem.

From City Views by George Athas p 56.

9. Read Ezekiel 25:1-26:6.

(a) What is the common structure of the oracles against these five nations?

(b) What is the result of the judgements which the LORD will execute upon these nations?



**Tyre** is an ancient Phoenician port city which, in myth, is known as the birthplace of Europa (who gave Europe its name) and Dido of Carthage (who gave aid to, and fell in love with, Aeneas of Troy). The name means 'rock' and the city consisted of two parts, the main trade centre on an island, and 'old Tyre', about a half mile opposite on the mainland. The old city, known as Ushu, was founded c. 2750 BCE and the trade centre grew up shortly after. In time, the island complex became more prosperous and populated than Ushu and was heavily fortified. The prosperity of Tyre attracted the attention of King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon who lay siege to the city for thirteen years in the 6th century BCE without breaking their defenses. During this siege most of the inhabitants of the mainland city abandoned it for the relative safety of the island city. Ushu became a suburb of Tyre on the mainland and remained so until the coming of Alexander the Great. The Tyrians were known as workers in dye from the shells of the Murex shellfish. This purple dye was highly valued and held royal connotations in the ancient world. It also gave



the Phoenicians their name from the Greeks - *Phoinikes* - which means "purple people". The city-state was the most powerful in all of Phoenicia after surpassing its sister state Sidon. . . .

Tyre was in its golden age around the 10th century BCE and, in the 8th, was colonizing other sites in the area and enjoying great wealth and prosperity owing primarily to an alliance with Israel. The Tyrian alliance and trade agreement with David, King of Israel, was initiated by the King of Tyre, Abibaal who sent the new king timber from the fabled cedars of Lebanon (as Abibaal's son, Hiram, is said to have done for David's son Solomon). This alliance resulted in a very lucrative partnership which benefited both parties.

From [www.ancient.eu/Tyre/](http://www.ancient.eu/Tyre/) by Joshua J. Mark published on 02 September 2009

10. Read Ezekiel 26:7-28:19.  
Why does Ezekiel devote so much attention to Tyre?



Current Google maps of Tyre

As it turned out, Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre lasted for thirteen years until everybody was absolutely worn out by it – including the hapless Babylonian soldiers, who seem to have found it almost as much of a burden as the inhabitants of Tyre. . . . Although Nebuchadnezzar did not actually capture and destroy Tyre, there seems to have been a negotiated settlement in which the city came into submission to Babylon for some time. The eventual conqueror of Tyre was Alexander the Great. In 332 BC he built a massive causeway [Alexander's causeway remains beneath the peninsula that has silted up over it in the centuries since] out from the coast to the island in order to press

his siege and attack. The pictures of complete destruction and abandonment in the oracles of this chapter [Eze ch 26] more appropriately describe the fate of the city at the hand of Alexander.

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright p 240.

11. Read Ezekiel 28:20–23, 29:1–32:32.

What is the result of the judgements which the LORD will execute upon Sidon and Egypt?

Through Ezekiel, the LORD passes sentence over seven nations situated around Israel and Judah. There is nothing of merit to be found in these nations. Like the city of Jerusalem, they are full of treachery and wickedness. The most powerful of these surrounding nations - Egypt and the prosperous city of Tyre - each receive extended treatment.

Interestingly, Babylon is missing from the list of nations condemned here. This demonstrates that the LORD is using the Babylonians at this time to execute his judgement on these other wicked nations (see Ezek 29:19–20). It is not that Babylon was any more righteous than the seven nations mentioned here; it's just that they are the LORD's chosen weapon to bring judgement and to vindicate his holy name.

Even more interesting is the fact that these oracles of judgement in chs 25–32 fall into two even halves. Each half (25:1-28:23 and 29:1-32:32) is 97 verses long. Right in the middle of it all stand three verses (28:24–26). They are in stark contrast to the verses that bracket them.

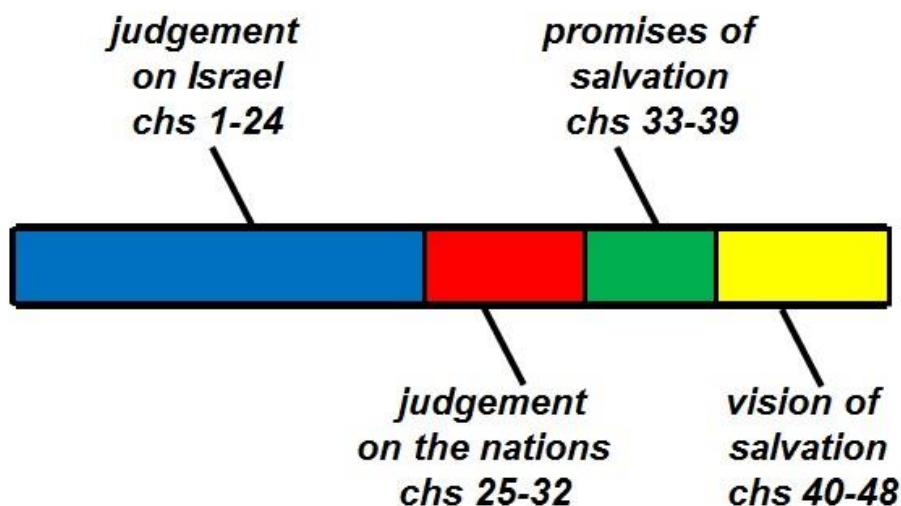
From City Views by George Athas p 57.

12. Read Ezekiel 28:24–26.

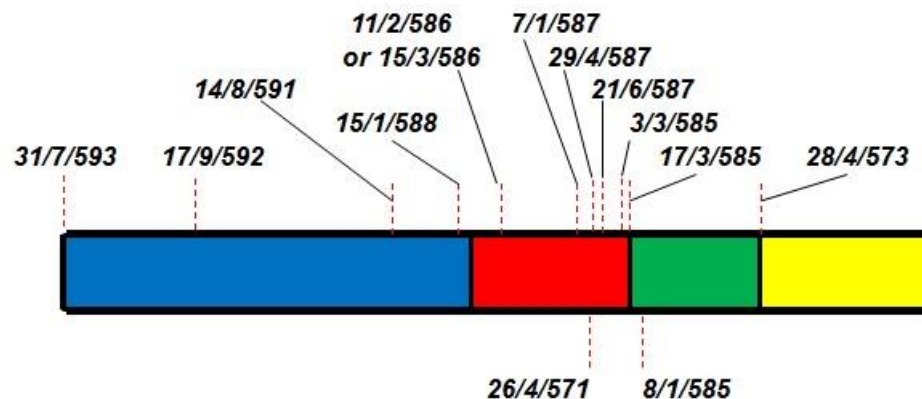
(a) What does the future hold for the House of Israel?

(b) What do these verses say about the LORD's judgement upon the nations surrounding Israel/Judah?

As mentioned earlier Ezekiel can be divided into the following sections:



Ezekiel's book is unique among the prophetic books of the Bible by being arranged in almost perfect chronological order.



First, there are those [dates] which come in the first five years of his ministry, between his call in 593 BC and the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem [588 BC].

Second, there are those connected with his oracles against foreign nations, all coming in the central section: chapters 25-32.

Thirdly, there are two final dates: the date of the news of the fall of Jerusalem [8/1/585] and the date of his great vision of the restored temple, land and city [28/4/573].

Of these, only one comes chronologically later than the last date recorded in the book, and that is 29:17 [26/4/571], relating to the collapse of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre and his redirection to Egypt in 571 BC. . . .

There could be no accusation later that Ezekiel had merely interpreted history after the event. The word of God through him had come well in advance and Ezekiel's carefully dated file of messages could prove it. Thus, not only was he eventually vindicated as a true prophet, according to fulfilment criteria, but also the sovereign power of Yahweh to predict, control and interpret events was demonstrated.

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright pp 40-41.

## To finish

13. Many people question the goodness of God in Ezekiel, claiming that his words and actions show him to be cold-hearted, loveless, and cruel. In an attempt to justify God's actions, some people have proposed that something must be right simply because it is God who does it. Others object to this, claiming that God acts a particular way because it is right.

(a) What problems are there with both these lines of reasoning?

(b) Is there a solution to the problem? Consider Romans 3:21–26 and 1 Peter 1:14–19 in your thinking.

## Study 8, Ezekiel chs 33-39, Promises of salvation

### Getting started

1. What characteristics do you want in your leaders? - I mean political, military or business leaders.



2. What characteristics would we add to that list if we were to include Christian leaders?

### Bible

While Ezekiel awaits news of Jerusalem's fate, the oracles against the nations present some kind of hope for the exiles in Babylon. The judgement to be inflicted on the surrounding nations will actually benefit them. The LORD is not abandoning his commitment to the House of Israel. Through the smoke of judgement, a secure future can be made out.

We should realise just how strange this might have sounded to the exiles in Babylon. Ezekiel had been prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the nation. Yet, here he prophesies that there is a future ahead. It was probably very confusing to his fellow countrymen waiting for news about Jerusalem.

From City Views by George Athas p 59.

3. Read Eze 33:1-20 (vv 1-9 are similar to Eze 3:17-21 and vv 10-20 are similar to Eze ch 18).
4. Read Eze 33:21-33.
  - (a) What news reaches Ezekiel?
  - (b) (i) What had the people who were left in Jerusalem after the first wave of exiles in 597 BC (twelve years earlier) been saying (33:24)?  
  
(ii) What did they mean by this?
  - (c) What newspaper headline would you give to the fugitive's news? What would you include in your report?
  - (d) What issues do the exiles in Babylon now face?

On 18 July, 586 BC, after an eighteen month siege, the Babylonian armies broke through the walls of Jerusalem. From the prophecies of Jeremiah we know that the Babylonians ruthlessly slaughtered people. King Zedekiah tried to beat the blockade by escaping with some of his men through a secret passageway at night. However, the Babylonians captured him the next morning near Jericho, some fifteen miles away. Jeremiah tells us that Zedekiah was then taken to Nebuchadnezzar who forced him to watch the slaughter of his own sons, as well as

the slaughter of many noble Judeans. After this gruesome show, Nebuchadnezzar had Zedekiah's eyes plucked out, and then taken to rot in a Babylonian prison. Ezekiel's prophecies concerning him came true (Ezek 17:16–21).

On 15 August, 586 BC, the Babylonians pillaged the temple of the LORD and set it on fire. The chief priests were also taken to Nebuchadnezzar and executed. The leading citizens who remained were deported to Babylonia. Presumably it was one of these survivors who reported the city's fall some five months later (19 January, 585 BC). . . .

In 722 the capture of Samaria signalled the fall of the northern kingdom. From a Jerusalem point of view, this was not surprising: the north had been an apostate kingdom. But now Jerusalem had fallen, and everything was lost.

From City Views by George Athas p 60.

Ezekiel had been prophesying amongst the exiles who had been deported to Babylon in 597 BC. Now, twelve years later, another wave of exiles came to Babylon. These were the people who managed to survive the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem. They must have been depressed and disillusioned: they had lived through famine caused by war, the slaughter of their families and neighbours, the capture of their beloved royal family, the destruction of their prized temple, the collapse of their once invincible country, and their own deportation to a foreign land. . . .

The first wave of exiles (from 597 BC) who had heard Ezekiel must have now realised that everything he prophesied concerning Jerusalem had come true—the new wave of exiles (586 BC) was living proof of it. In chapter 34, the LORD seems to announce the findings of an 'inquest' into the fall of Jerusalem, presumably more for the benefit of the new exiles than the old. Yet what the LORD has to say would be of interest for the old exiles as well as the new.

The Bible often portrays national leaders like kings, priests and prophets, as '**shepherds**'. In this regards, the people are called 'sheep'. The image is simple, but quite effective: leaders should lead through protective care because people will follow wherever they are led. In chapter 34, the LORD uses this familiar picture to present the findings of his 'inquest'.

From City Views by George Athas p 62.

5. Read Ezekiel 34:1–10.

(a) What are the LORD's findings against the 'shepherds of Israel'?

(b) To whom do the sheep belong?

(c) What future do the 'shepherds of Israel' have?

(d) What does the LORD promise to do?

6. Read Ezekiel 34:11–31.

Do the LORD's words here seem believable or unbelievable? Give reasons.

7. Read John 10:11–16.

How do the LORD's words in Ezekiel help us to understand what Jesus is saying here?

8. Read Eze ch 35.  
Why is God going to punish Edom (= Mt Seir see v 15)?

9. Read Eze 36:1-15.  
How does this passage give hope to the exiles?

10. Read Eze 36:16-23.  
Why is God giving this hope to his people?

Throughout the Old Testament, the LORD gives his **Spirit** to specially chosen people to enable them to perform an important task. For example, Bezalel was given the Spirit for the purpose of manufacturing the Tabernacle in the desert (Exod 35:2–3). Moses and seventy Israelite elders were given the Spirit for the purpose of governing the people of Israel (Num 11:17–30). Also, the Spirit was given to Gideon to fight the Midianites who were oppressing Israel. There are numerous other examples, too.

However, the Spirit was not given to these people as a permanent gift. For example, the LORD revoked his Spirit from King Saul and sent an evil spirit to torment him instead (1 Sam 16:14). After King David committed adultery and murder, he begged the LORD not to take back his Holy Spirit (Ps 51:12), presumably because he knew from Saul's example that the LORD could indeed revoke his Spirit.

The Old Testament, therefore, shows that God's Spirit was not given to everyone, and it certainly was not given in any permanent way. This understanding is typified by Moses' cry in Numbers 11:29: "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

From City Views by George Athas p 64.

11. Read Eze 36:24–38.  
(a) (i) What is the role of water and the Spirit here (36:25–27)?

(ii) How does this help understand John 3:5?

(b) How do the LORD's words here in Ezekiel help us to understand the Lord's Prayer (see Matt 6:9-13)?

12. Read Eze 37:1–14.  
(a) (i) Where does this vision take place (37:1)?

(ii) What significance does this have (see Eze 3:22–23)?

(b) (i) What does this vision reveal about the exile's state of mind at this time?

(ii) What is motivating their comment in 37:11?

(c) What is the role of Spirit in the vision?

(d) (i) What backing does the LORD give that he will actually do what the vision suggests?

(ii) Why should this be sufficient guarantee for the exiles?

(e) Is this vision talking about physical resurrection?

13. Read Eze 37:15–28.

(a) What is the significance of the 2 sticks?

Solomon had been king of Israel at the height of Israel's golden era. However, Solomon's apostasy led to the split in the kingdom. Now, however, the LORD was promising to reunite the nation once again under one king. This was no small promise, for the northern kingdom of Israel (also known as 'Ephraim') had been destroyed some 140 years earlier in 722 BC and its people dispersed amongst many nations with the remaining population mixed with other ethnic groups. The southern kingdom of Judah had met its end too, and its Davidic king was a prisoner in Babylon.

Then, the unthinkable happened. In 561 BC, some years after Ezekiel made this prophecy, the new king of Babylon, Amel-Marduk (called 'Evil-Merodach' in the Bible), released Jehoiachin, king of Judah, from prison. Jehoiachin was still dependent on the Babylonian king, but he was once again a dignitary who was treated with respect.

From City Views by George Athas p 66.

(b) If the first House of Israel failed and ultimately collapsed, why should anyone in Ezekiel's day think that a new House of Israel would succeed and endure?



The 'Cyrus Cylinder' (536 BC) retells how King Cyrus of Persia captured the city of Babylon without a struggle. It also recalls his decree of 538 BC allowing previously conquered peoples to return to their homelands and rebuild their temples. The people of Judah were one such people group who benefited from this decree.

From The Illustrated Bible Dictionary part 1, p 353.

In stark contrast to the first part of Ezekiel's ministry, the LORD now delivers a message of **hope and restoration**. The nation of Israel was dead, but the LORD now promised to resurrect it. Thoughts of a return to the land, the restoration of the Davidic monarchy, the institution of the Law and the rebuilding of the temple were all spoken of.

The Babylonian Empire lasted little more than 70 years. In 539 BC, the city of Babylon fell to the Persians, who were led by King Cyrus. The year after he took Babylon, Cyrus issued a decree of repatriation which allowed all the peoples whom the Babylonians had deported to return to their homelands and rebuild their national temples. So, many Israelites returned to Jerusalem and began to do just that. It was the dawn of a new era.

However, not everything seemed to go according to plan. The Israelites could not set up the Davidic monarchy because the Persian king was the ruler of the land. The heirs of the Davidic king Jehoiachin only became 'governors' under the Persian king. As such, the once divided nation of Israel could not be united again. In fact, the descendants of the northern kingdom in Samaria, who were by now mixed with other ethnic groups, tried to undermine the efforts of the people of Judah. Also, the area which the people of Judah were allowed to govern under the Persians was much smaller than the land which the LORD had promised and given to their forefathers in centuries gone by. The people of Judah were, however, permitted to rebuild the LORD's temple (c.516 BC) and, under the leadership of Ezra the Scribe, the Law once again became the law of the land (458 BC). In all of this, though, the Persians retained their overall supremacy.

This raises an important question: Did the LORD's promises of restoration here in Ezekiel ultimately fail? The key lies in the role of the LORD's Spirit. The resurrection of the dry bones was seen as the result of the Spirit's regenerating work. The vision of the dry bones did foreshadow the revival of the nation and a return to Jerusalem. But it did more than that. When the exiles did return to Jerusalem in 538 BC, we are never told that the LORD put his Spirit into the whole nation. The fact that the Israelites were unable to rebuild the nation in all its glory shows us that the Spirit had not yet done its work of ultimate regeneration. So while we may discern the LORD's hand behind Cyrus' decree allowing the people of Judah to return home, Ezekiel's vision of restoration was far grander than anything Cyrus could have permitted. In other words, the promise of ultimate restoration had not yet been fulfilled.

From City Views by George Athas p 67.

14. Read the following passages. How do Ezekiel's prophecies of restoration find their fulfilment?

(a) Luke 2:22–38

(b) John 14:14–19

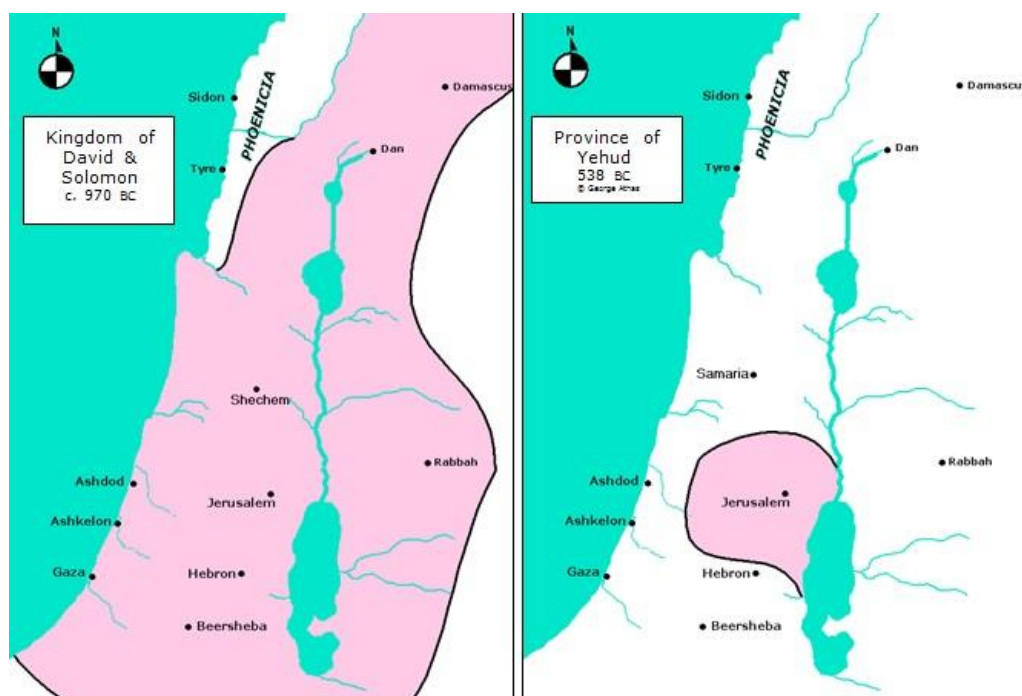
(c) Acts 2:1–12

(d) Acts 2:29–33

(e) Acts 8:14–17



(f) Colossians 2:11–15



**Left:** The extent of David and Solomon's kingdom (c.970 BC) took in land on both sides of the Jordan River. Their influence even extended to the north beyond Damascus. **Right:** When King Cyrus the Persian allowed the people of Judah to return to their homeland in 538 BC, the area of their land consisted only in a small area of the central highlands. Their land was known as the Persian province of 'Yehud'. The descendants of the Davidic royal family only attained the rank of 'governor' under the Persian king, and this lasted only a few generations.

From City Views by George Athas p 68.

15. Read Eze chs 38 and 39.  
What do you think is the point of these 2 chapters?

[W]e have an undated collection of oracles against an enemy whose identity is deliberately vague and mysterious – Gog, of the land of Magog. We don't know when they were spoken or who the target was. . . .

The destruction of Gog as the final great enemy of Israel and Yahweh thus stands as ultimate reassurance to God's people that their future is secure. No enemy will disturb the peace of God's people in God's earth ever again. In the same way the book of Revelation, making rich use of the resources provided by Ezekiel, describes the final defeat of the hosts of evil (including God and Magog [Rev 20:7-10]), before climaxing with the vision of God dwelling in the midst of his redeemed people in the new creation [Rev chs 21-22].

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright pp 316-317.

## To finish

16. How would you respond to Christians who suggest that the rise of the modern State of Israel in 1948 was a fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones?

## Study 9, Ezekiel chs 40-48, Vision of salvation

### Getting started

1. (a) Have you ever “fallen out” with someone?

(b) If so, did you or the other person try to restore the relationship? How did it go?



### Bible

We have seen how after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, the tone of Ezekiel's ministry changed dramatically. No longer were his prophecies all about disaster and judgement— they were now about hope and restoration. We also saw how the nation was restored after 538 BC under King Cyrus the Persian. Yet, the prophecy of restoration still awaited a grander fulfilment in the Lord Jesus Christ. But we need to take a step back in time again for the last instalment of Ezekiel's prophecies.

Back in 592 BC, Ezekiel had seen the vision of the glory of the LORD departing from the old temple in Jerusalem (chs 8–11). In that vision, the apostasy of the leaders forced the LORD to abandon his holy temple. His glory was pictured as riding a heavenly chariot out of the temple grounds, and coming to rest on the mountain east of the city. The LORD left his temple open to destruction. Six years later, it was no longer standing as the Babylonians destroyed it along with the rest of Jerusalem.

Now, nineteen years after that vision, Ezekiel receives another vision (28 April, 573 BC). The return to Jerusalem (538 BC) was still a far off dream. Yet, in this new vision, Ezekiel was shown a fabulous new temple.

From City Views by George Athas p 70.

2. Read Ezekiel 40:1–4.

(a) (i) To where is Ezekiel brought?

(ii) What is the name of the city?

3. Scan Ezekiel chs 40–48.

(a) What indication is given as to who built this new temple?

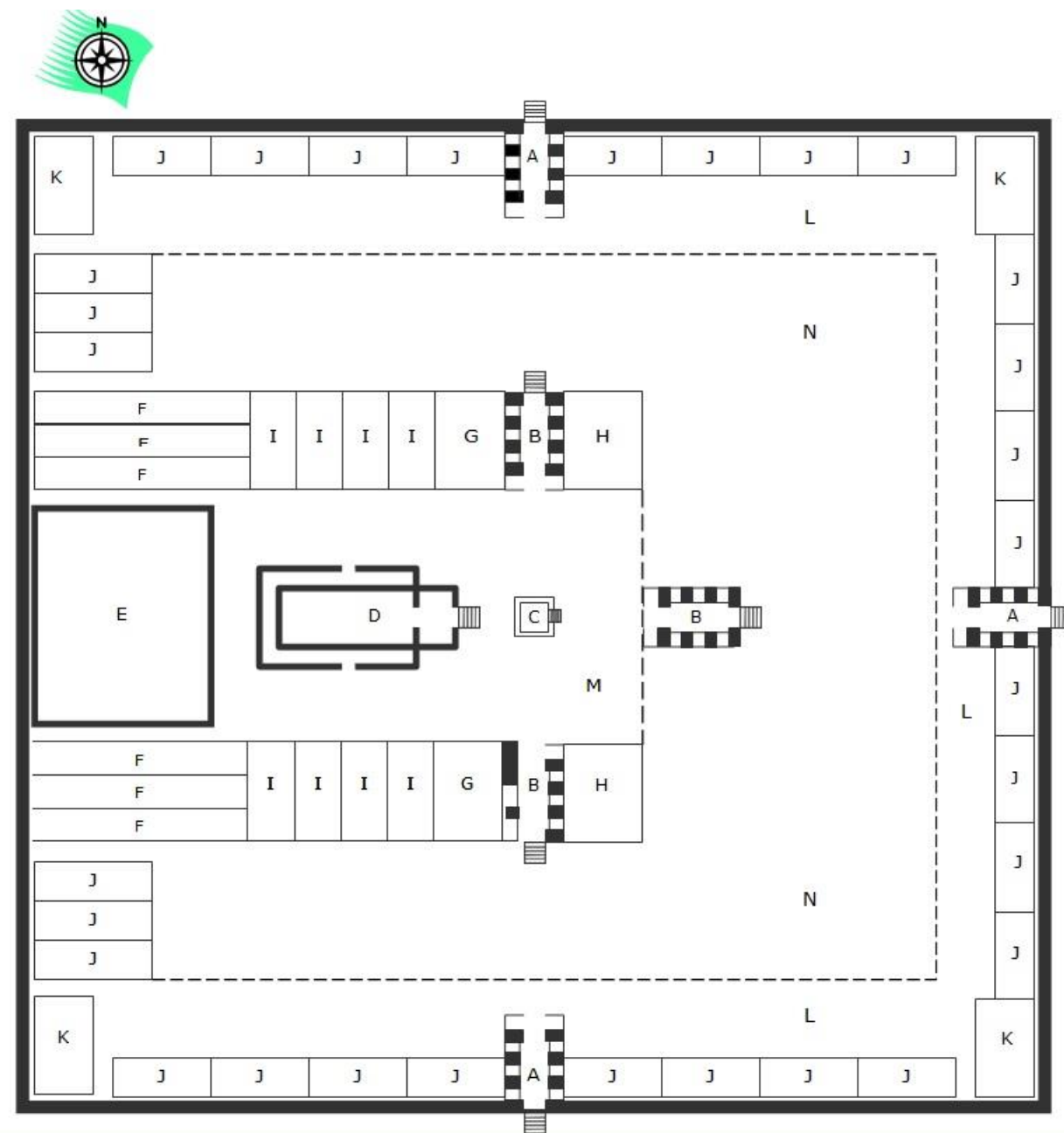
(b) How many times do you see the name ‘Jerusalem’?

4. Read Ezekiel 43:1–12.

(a) How does the LORD describe this new temple?

(b) How does this vision compare to that in 10:18–19 and 11:22–23?

(c) What is the LORD concerned for in these verses?



#### KEY

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| A Outer gates (40.5–16, 20–27)             | H Chamber of offerings (40.38)           |
| B Inner gates (40.28–37)                   | I Outer chambers (41.9 <sup>b</sup> –10) |
| C Altar (43.13–17)                         | J Thirty perimeter chambers (40.17)      |
| D Temple (40.48 – 41.11, 15–26)            | K Kitchens (46.19–24)                    |
| E Back building (41.12–14)                 | L Lower pavement (40.18)                 |
| F Priests' sacred quarters (42.1–14)       | M Inner court (40.44)                    |
| G Priests' maintenance chambers (40.44–46) | N Outer court (40.17–19)                 |

Plan of the new temple as seen in Ezekiel's vision.

Adapted from The Book of Ezekiel: Chapter 25–48 by Daniel I. Block.

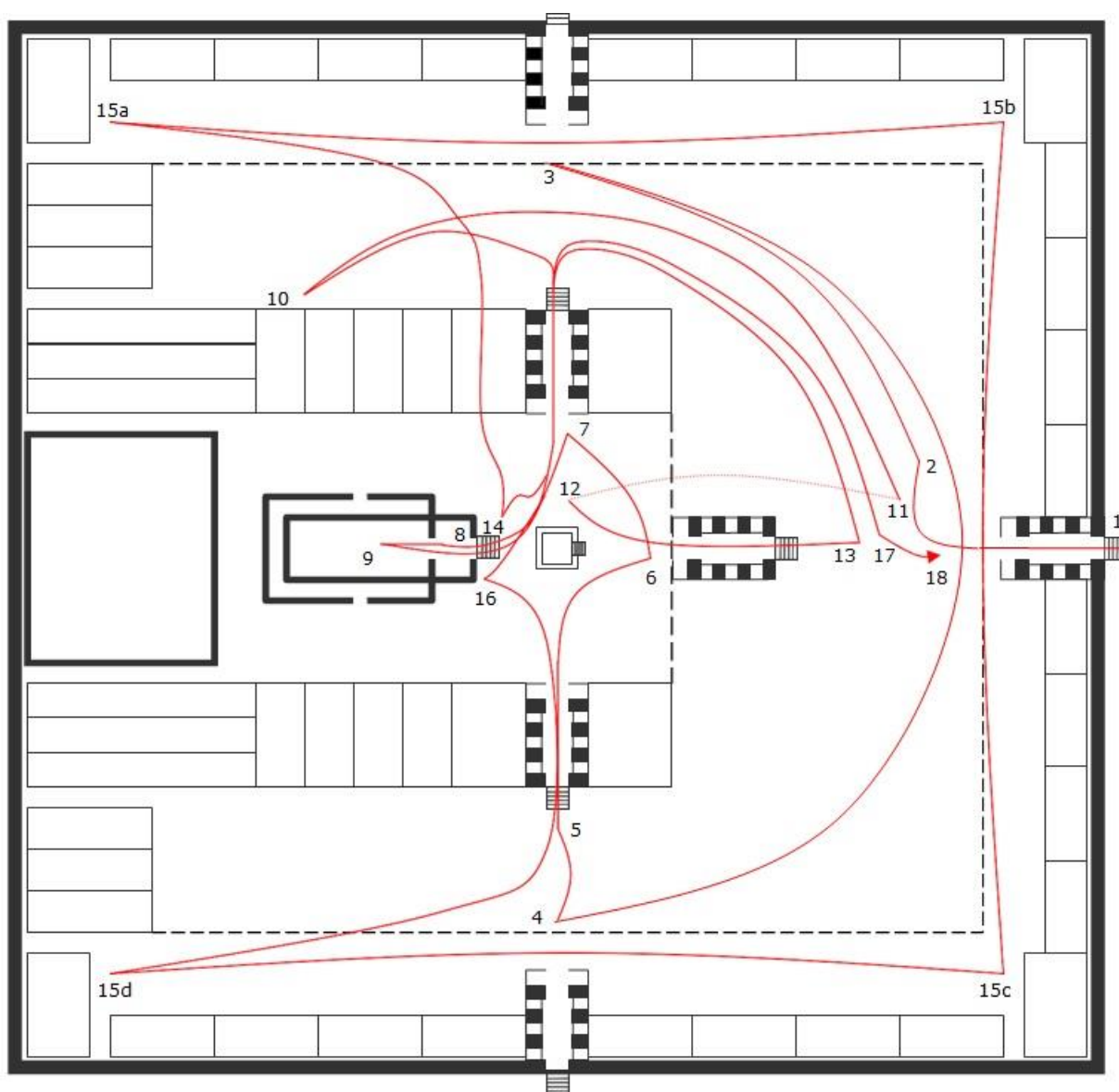
(d) (i) What lies at the very centre of this temple compound (see diagrams in this study)?

(ii) What does this reveal about the holiness of the LORD?

5. Read Ezekiel 44:1–3, 46:1–2, 9–12.

(a) Why is the eastern gate now permanently closed?

(b) What is the significance of calling the king by the title of 'prince' (cf. 43:7)?



The route and stages of Ezekiel's visionary tour of the new temple.

(c) How far into the temple compound is the 'prince' allowed to go?

6. Read Ezekiel 44:15–16.  
(a) How far into the temple compound are the priests allowed to go?

(b) What does this reveal?

7. Read Ezekiel 44:23–27.  
What are the priests to do?

Just when it seems that Ezekiel has taken in all there is to see about this new temple, something else catches his eye (47.1–12). On the southern side of the temple he sees the **source of a river**. In the first temple built by Solomon, this was the area where the bronze sea stood. This was a large water basin situated atop the statues of twelve bulls and was there for the priests to wash and purify themselves for the LORD's service (1 Kgs 7:23–26, 39). Now Ezekiel sees a river gushing forth and heading east out of the temple compounds. The river gets deeper and deeper as it runs eastward until it meets the Sea of the Arabah. Today, we know this as the Dead Sea, and it is surrounded by barren, rocky desert. The river, however, causes life to thrive on its banks and it miraculously turns the dead, salty waters of the sea into a freshwater wonderland.

This description reminds us of the river which flowed through the **Garden of Eden** (Gen 2:10–14) and provided the earth with its fertility and resources. The significance of the river in Ezekiel is not just that it provides fertility and resources, but that it transforms the dead landscape into a living paradise. The fact that it flows from the LORD's temple is also important. The temple compounds are designed to preserve and promote the holiness of the LORD among his people. When this is achieved, blessing spills over to the rest of the earth. So then, not only will the LORD resurrect the fortunes of his people (Ezek 37:1–14), he will also resurrect the earth to become a source of blessing rather than frustration. The key to all this is the holiness of the LORD among his people.

From City Views by George Athas p 75.

8. Read the following New Testament passages. How do they help us understand Ezekiel's vision of the river?  
(a) John 4:13–14

(b) John 7:37–39



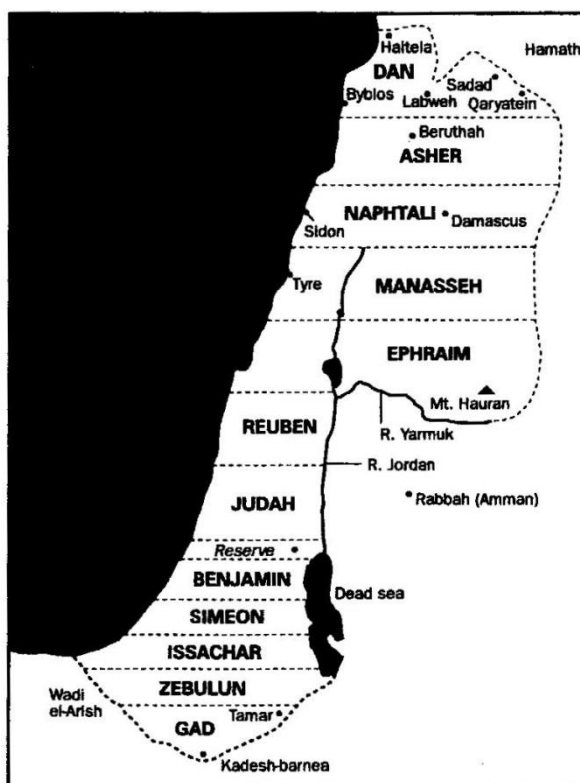
The view westward to the Dead Sea from the ruins of Machaerus in modern day Jordan.



The view eastward across the barren Judean desert near the shore of the Dead Sea. This is the area which Ezekiel envisioned as coming to life through the river that flowed from the LORD's temple.

From City Views by George Athas p 76.

The last part of Ezekiel's vision (47:13-48:35) involves a new division of the Promised Land (see below). Back in the days of Joshua, when Israel fought to conquer the Promised Land, the tribes of Israel were each given an allotment of land following the naturally occurring boundaries within the terrain. Ezekiel's vision of the allotment, though, is totally different. Each tribe is given a neat strip of land running from west to east. In the middle of the land is a sacred strip of land which is reserved for the temple, the priests and the prince.



From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright p 361.

The neat and orderly nature of this division highlights that the LORD is a God of order, not of chaos. For the exiles in Babylon, this would have meant two things. Firstly, it demonstrated the LORD's commitment to bringing them back to their homeland. Secondly, though, it showed them that since God was a God of order, he would one day rectify the chaos that the House of Israel experienced throughout its history. Once again, the key concept is the holiness of the LORD. When the LORD is rightly sanctified, blessing follows.

When the people returned to the land in 538 BC, they did not receive an allotment of land in the way envisioned here by Ezekiel. Nor was the landscape miraculously transformed into a fertile paradise with a high mountain at its epicentre. If you visit the land today, you will see the terrain as it is described in the Book of Joshua, not as it is described in Ezekiel. This highlights the fact that Ezekiel's vision was not to be understood in a literal way, but in a figurative way. The LORD was providing vivid pictures to help his people understand the regenerative work that he would accomplish through his holiness. He was guaranteeing them a slice of heaven and the opportunity to participate in his holiness. Thus, we do not see the ultimate fulfilment of this vision with the people returning to the land of Palestine (either in 538 BC or in AD 1948). Instead, we are driven to look for the fulfilment elsewhere.

From City Views by George Athas p 77.

9. Read Ezekiel 48:30–35.  
(a) What is the name given to the city?  
  
(b) Considering the number of times that Jerusalem is mentioned in chs 40-48 what is the significance of this name?
10. Read Ephesians 2:11–22.  
The altar was the centre of the temple compound in Ezekiel's vision. While the word 'altar' is not mentioned in Ephesians 2:11-22, where do we see the 'altar' concept in these verses?
11. Read Philippians 2:5–11.  
Throughout Ezekiel, the LORD acts for the sake of his holy name. How does this help us understand Philippians 2:5–11?
12. Read Revelation chs 21–22.  
(a) How do we explain the apparent discrepancy between the presence of a temple in Ezekiel's vision and John's observation in Revelation 21:22?

### To finish

13. From what you have learned through these studies, assess the following statements.  
(a) On a plaque outside a church building: "This is the House of God. Please conduct yourself in a reverent manner."

(b) "I've just gotten back from a tour of the Holy Land."

(c) "We look forward to the time when the temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt."

(d) "Going to church doesn't make you a Christian."

(e) "You don't need to go to church in order to be a Christian."

(f) "I really felt the Spirit moving during my quiet time this morning."

Ezekiel finishes on a triumphant note with the LORD dwelling amongst his people. We have seen how through Ezekiel's ministry, the LORD corrected the mistaken notions of his people. They had thought that the LORD was obliged to defend Jerusalem at all cost, but the LORD showed that he is holy and could not associate with the sin and idolatry that was prevalent in the city. Moreover, the LORD is supremely free to act as he sees fit, and yet he is not a fickle God who acts on a whim, but always acts in accordance with his holiness. Thus, he did not abandon his promises to the nation of Israel. Furthermore, the LORD showed that there was nothing inherently special about Jerusalem. Rather, Jerusalem's privileged status was derived from the LORD's presence.

It was these notions that led to an anticipation of Jerusalem's fall and a proper understanding of why it occurred. Yet, the last part of Ezekiel's ministry shows that the LORD's purposes were far in excess of anything the House of Israel could ever imagine. In his holiness, the LORD chooses not to distance himself from people altogether, but rather to resurrect them with his life-giving Holy Spirit. Ezekiel foresees the LORD's great regenerating work which we see finally accomplished in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and his pouring out of the Holy Spirit to all who believe in him. For every believer, Ezekiel is a reminder of the LORD's holiness and also of his presence in the Church through his Holy Spirit. Living as we do after the death and resurrection of Jesus, we see that the true temple of God is the Lord Jesus Christ himself and those who participate in him through faith.

The House of Israel did rebuild the temple in Jerusalem when they returned to their land. It was dedicated in 516 BC. However, in accordance with Jesus' own words (Mark 13), the temple was once again destroyed in AD 70, this time at the hands of the Romans. Today, we see the notion of the LORD's temple not in a physical building. In fact, there is no longer any need for a physical temple building, for the LORD is present in his church: the community of men, women and children who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (the one final sacrifice for sin), and who await their final redemption on the last day when Jesus returns.

From City Views by George Athas p 80.